GENDER, MODERNITY & INDIAN DELIGHTS

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THE WOMEN'S CULTURAL GROUP OF DURBAN, 1954–2010

Goolam Vahed & Thembisa Waetjen

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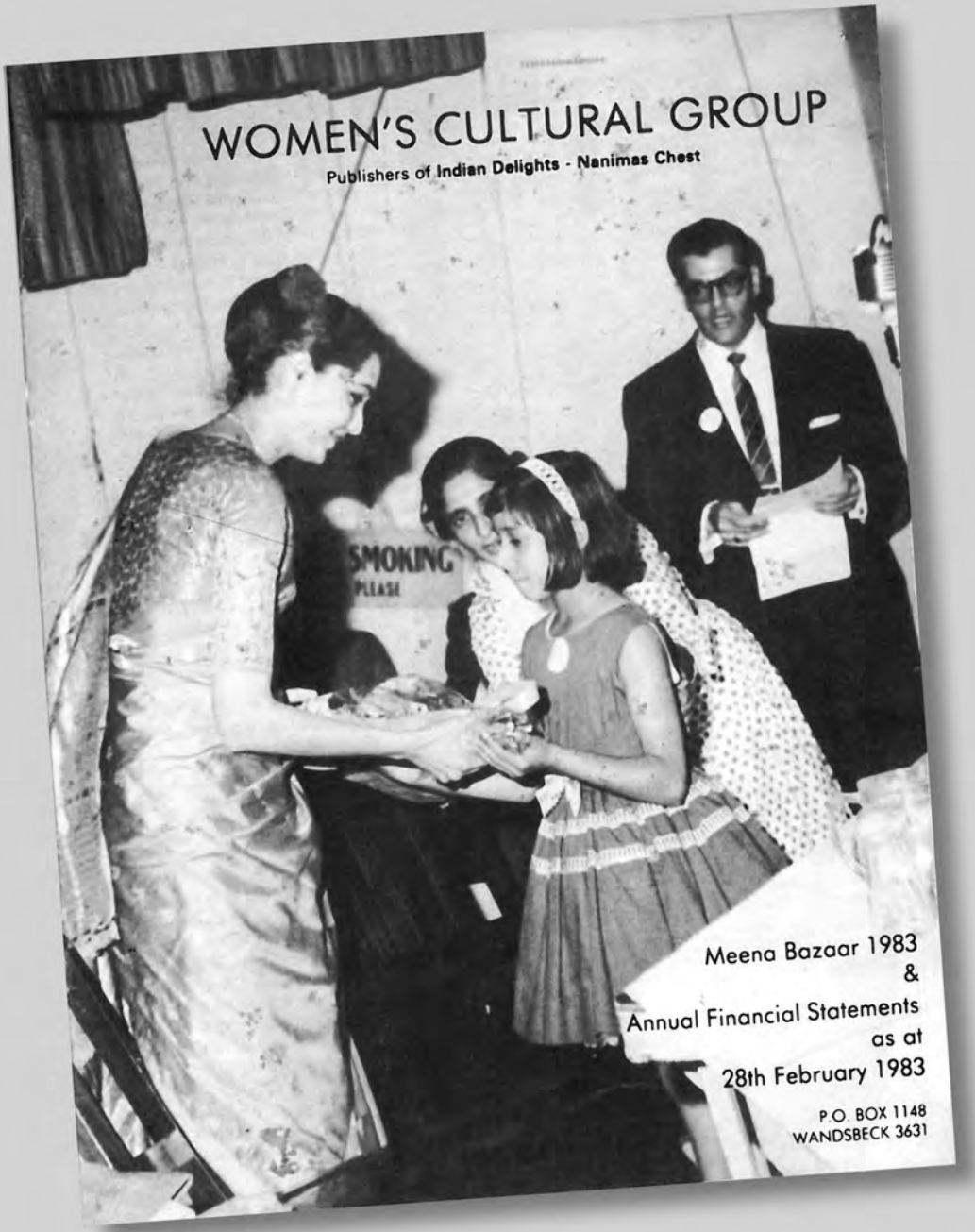

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There are many ways of telling the story of the Women's Cultural Group. Over more than five decades and to mark various anniversaries, the Group has produced several pamphlets publicising its organisational life and its many achievements. Its founding leader, Zuleikha Mayat, is the author of most of these texts and an accomplished chronicler of the past.[1] So when, as academic historians, we were approached to write the Group's story, we interpreted this as a request to bring our critical and analytical capacities into the mix. A scholarly approach requires that we locate the Group within a broad social and theoretical framework, steer clear of hagiography and interrogate concepts that 'insiders' might take for granted.

It was 2007 and Shamil Jeppie's fine book *Language, Identity, Modernity: The Arabic Study Circle of Durban* had just been published. At the Durban launch, with characteristic directness, Zuleikha Mayat commented on a glaring absence: women had been left almost entirely out of the account! The Women's Cultural Group, she explained, had

> coursed through the same terrain as the Circle, suffering public attitudes, criticisms…We worked closely with the Circle in those programmes that interested us. We publicised their functions, participating in the events as far as was allowed, helping behind the scenes, mutually allowing lecturers in our houses. In retrospect, I find that the outreach from the Circle's

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> side was not far reaching. This conclusion is endorsed as I read through *Language, Identity, Modernity*. We seem to have been airbrushed from the Circle's minutes and deleted from the memories of the officials that had been interviewed by the author.[2]

The 'airbrush' treatment was not simply applied to the wives who hosted Circle members at house meetings or who were the invisible hands and organisational prowess behind public dinners, fundraisers and other major events. Zubeida Barmania, another founding member of the Women's Cultural Group, informed us that she had been part of the Circle in its early years:

> I used to go to the Arabic Study Circle – they've never mentioned it but I was there as well. Nobody's ever mentioned it…I was the only woman in the Arabic Study Circle when it started…and if anybody's alive that was there they'll tell you, no, that's true!

Also missing from Jeppie's book was an acknowledgement of the Women's Cultural Group itself, which – if the gender identity of Arabic Study Circle membership had been approached as a field of inquiry rather than as a given trait – could certainly have been a fruitful focus within that work. And these women were often the fundraisers for educational bursaries that Jeppie credited to the Circle.

Our interest in writing this history of the Women's Cultural Group may at first appear to be an attempt to 'balance out' Jeppie's scholarship, or to provide a 'companion piece' that parallels in text the gender partitioning commonly attributed to things Islamic. Such a disservice to both works is emphatically not our intention. The Women's Cultural Group suggests its own themes and categories for historical inquiry. However, in important ways the studies may indeed be considered complementary, as suggested by the linkages between the two organisations. More pertinently, the early- to mid-20th century rise of civic associations and cultural societies in segregated Durban, as spaces in which residents crafted modern forms of self and collective identity, brings these two studies into a similar analytical frame, as does their concern with Islam as a foundation for social and intellectual engagement.

This story also – we think, inevitably – brings into focus the individual figure of Zuleikha Mayat, her role as the Group's founding leader and – to the

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extent that the trajectory of the Group is bound up with it – her biography. Yet we are also aware that a special focus on any individual seems to go against the grain of the Group's own ideal of a collective spirit. This ethic so impressed itself on historian Joan Wardorp, who interviewed members about *Indian Delights* in 2005, that she did not name the women she interviewed, choosing rather to 'intertwine and complicate the boundaries of the individual and the collective'.[3] We have chosen to identify individual women and to draw upon the personal narratives that they shared with us. Zuleikha Mayat's biographical details and her connections with other social circles and political networks help explain some of the Group's early aims and the directions they took. Her story, and those of other members, also help to deepen the collective portrait and to bring alive social patterns and historical trends that we believe to be thematic. Detailed accounts of the lives of ordinary individuals reveal not only the complexity of the national and local structures at play, but also acquaint the reader with the diversity of personal experience and family background represented among the Group's protagonists.

In writing this history we relied on three sources of information. Many a file, folder and box laden with documents and memorabilia came from the Women's Cultural Group's archives. A second source was the personal records of Zuleikha Mayat, including relevant correspondence, clippings from her newspaper column 'Fahmida's World', radio essays she recorded for the South African Broadcasting Corporation and a variety of materials pertaining to dinners, lectures, celebrations and events sponsored by the Group. A third, very rich well of information comes from the memories of current and one-time Group members and affiliates who spoke to us in formal interviews.[4]

In keeping with her request for an objective account, Zuleikha Mayat encouraged us to pursue as many perspectives as possible and took special trouble to point out those documents that revealed mistakes and disagreements related to her own leadership and within the Group as a whole. Considering that voluntary work so often depends upon close inter-personal ties and hierarchies that are mediated as much through strong personalities as through friendship, it would be extraordinary for any organisation to exist for fifty years without fallouts and setbacks! We have not tried to avoid documenting internal conflicts. However, what can appear to be a crisis between insiders can seem far less consequential in the broader lens of historical

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perspective. From an analytical angle, it is not inter-personal tensions but structural realities that demand greater focus. For example, the inter-generational composition of the Group – one of its crucial strengths – also signals the complexities of a changing world with changing views about family, public life, community, work, marriage and society. Additionally, the Group's positioning relative to the social and economic landscape of Durban has ensured that the themes of class, gender, ethnicity, language and race thread their way through this book.

This research has been a particularly engaging experience for us as co-authors because it so frequently invited floods of our own memories: recollections of family, the role of food, and the many women (mothers, aunts, grandmothers) whose activities make fluid the spaces between home and community, between domestic and civic life. Our processes of thinking and writing also benefited greatly from continuous dialogue with one another, exchanges in which flashes of deeply rooted personal reflection sometimes guided our thinking about gendered labour, social networks and economic class. For example, Goolam wrote:

> the morning e-mail got me thinking (nostalgically).
>
> my mother was a fabulous cook and i still keep hearing 'she was a…'.
>
> she did a lot of cooking. we had table boarders (all the transvaal students) who came home for breakfast, then took lunch that my mother prepared for each one, then came for supper. it was lunch and supper on the weekends. the present minister of justice, enver surtee, was one of them.
>
> she also cooked a pot lunch for a storeowner and his family from monday to friday.
>
> she made rotis daily for khyber restaurants.
>
> on saturdays she made kebab/rotis which my father sold at the indian market.
>
> almost every day of the week we had one or other visitor from out of town who would come for their shopping. they would use our house as the base as we lived in pine street; and have lunch, of course.
>
> on friday, a number of staff from the shop where my dad worked would come for lunch.

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and she was a dressmaker for a number of people.
all this because my father was an underpaid retail assistant in grey street.
and they said that our mothers were 'housewives'.
my mother never used a cookbook.

These reflexive moments in our own research process contribute to our hope that this story will engage the imaginations of many different kinds of readings and readers. We have endeavoured to write an account that will capture both scholarly and local interest, one that will provoke debate as well as celebrate achievements. We are aware that some readers will wish for more detail precisely where others would prefer a more rounded summary, and we take responsibility for our own choices of emphases, angles of analysis and any inadvertent omissions.

We would like to express our gratitude to all the members and affiliates, past and present, of the Women's Cultural Group. We are particularly indebted to those who shared their experiences and perspectives in interviews: Laila Ally, Sayedah Ansari, Zubeida Barmania, Virginia Gcabashe, Mary Grice, Mariam Jeewa, Nafisa Jeewa, Shairbanu Lockhat, Fatima Mayat, Shameema Mayat, Zuleikha Mayat, Fatima Mayet, Fatima Meer, Siko Mji, Safoura Mohammed, Zarina Moolla, Zohra Moosa, Mariam Motala, Yusuf Motala, Hajira Omar, Fatima Patel, Gori Patel, Zubeida Patel, Mariam Rajah, Fatima Randeree, Zarina Rawat, Zubeida Seedat, Sara Simjee, Khatija Vawda and Ayesha Vorajee. Thembisa was invited to experience work behind the scenes during meetings and fundraising events and so witnessed the Group ethos in practice – an ethos that combines hard work, laughter, resourcefulness, friendship and a roll-up-the-sleeves efficiency, honed through decades of working as a team.

We are grateful to our colleagues in the History Department at the University of KwaZulu-Natal who, in seminars and through dialogue, expressed enthusiasm for this local 'hidden' history and the broader questions it evokes. At the HSRC Press, Roshan Cader and freelancers Mary Ralphs and Jenny Young have exercised creativity and vision in producing this book. Finally, our special thanks to Zuleikha Mayat, for whom the Women's Cultural Group has been a life's work and whose deep faith in its membership shines through every one of the many interview hours she gave to us.

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Sayedah Ansari with the trophy she won at the speech contest in 1954, the event that sparked the formation of the Women's Cultural Group.

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INTRODUCTION

In 1972, the *Leader*, then the most widely read South African Indian newspaper, carried a review praising the latest edition of *Indian Delights*, a cookbook published by the Women's Cultural Group of Durban. The reviewer, Ranji Nowbath, who wrote under the pen name of 'The Fakir', was a regular columnist with a signature irreverence. So he might have been intending irony along with a bald flourish of male chauvinism when he expressed his paternalistic enthusiasm for the Women's Cultural Group, rounding off with:

> I think it jolly good that our women should be getting down to doing some solid work for the community and a movement such as this obviously caters for the need for women to get together now and then and have a good natter, while at the same time doing constructive work.[1]

Tea parties, gossip and a bit of charity on the side – the Women's Cultural Group has certainly not been the only women's organisation to be met with stereotypes that conceal the nature and magnitude of its labour, struggles and achievements. Yet an account of the Group that sets out only to catalogue its impressive triumphs would also miss much, most importantly the social complexities that make its story a rich account of historical change.

This book is about how the members of the Women's Cultural Group, women with limited formal power in the spaces both of politics and custom,

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redefined their citizenship through belonging to a voluntary association that they themselves created. It is also about that very practice of 'getting down to doing some solid work for the community', and the meaning this work has had over time, both for the women themselves and for the communities they have served. Over the decades, their efforts have raised millions of rand for educational bursaries and charity organisations, produced a best-selling and internationally acclaimed series of cookbooks, organised hundreds of cultural and scholarly public events and contributed untold hours of time, talent and labour to social upliftment and development. Through these engagements, members of the Women's Cultural Group crafted legitimate spaces in which they could publicly assert their creative power and their socio-political ideals. They drew upon informal and customary roles to rework formal conceptions of civic agency and identity during a period when apartheid policies were assigning racialised significance to these roles. Their activities also engaged them deeply in the work of cultural production, contributing to the creolisation of Durban's diverse Indian population and to its diasporic self-understanding. Over its fifty-year history, the Group has reflected changes in national and religious politics, local family structures and educational opportunities – and has also influenced these changes.

In 1954, a group of young, mainly Muslim women in Durban, South Africa, took part in the first of a series of annual speech contests sponsored by the Arabic Study Circle. Stimulated, inspired and surprised by their own outspoken participation, they left the meeting with the idea of forming a circle of their own – an organisation where they could channel their creative and civic energies, cultivate their friendships and their intellects, and make modern women of themselves. They created the Women's Cultural Group.

The Group's constitution provides for a secular membership, with gender and age being the only limiting variables: membership is open to 'all women over the age of sixteen' and has historically included women from diverse cultural and religious backgrounds. The Group's overall membership profile places it within a specific social milieu, however. The majority of members have been devout Muslims, who identify themselves as 'housewives', and who are from middle- or upper-class families. Most have been of Gujarati ancestry, identifying ethnically as Surti or Memon, and most have been the daughters, granddaughters or great-granddaughters of Indian traders and entrepreneurs who

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immigrated to South Africa in the late 19th century. A significant proportion of members have kinship or social ties to the dynastic economic power of an elite Gujarati merchant diaspora – a wide network of religious and business affiliations that has constituted an important resource base for the Group.

Yet identity is claimed in ways both multiple and fluid and members also express a strong sense of South African Indianness, as well as transnational identifications with clan and village communities in South Asia. For the Group, national, urban, religious, cultural and gendered designations have all operated as both constraints and resources in conceptualising an authoritative civic autonomy. Negotiating decades of apartheid law-making that attempted to arrest racial identity, map out Group Areas, ensure unequal education, divide public amenities, preclude protest and offer subordinate and racialised power-sharing deals, the self-described 'non-political' Women's Cultural Group laboured to bring about its own vision of the social good. The story of the Group, therefore, reveals the dynamic meanings of community, culture, identity and space during a time when apartheid legislation was attempting to make these fixed and synonymous.

Although seemingly generic, the name 'Women's Cultural Group' signals some of the complexities that have been a part of the Group's fifty-year existence. The organisation was to be composed of, and run by, women; a culture-based ontology would provide a platform for its activities, educational endeavours and social exchanges; it was to be a formal society with a regular membership. Each of these constitutive elements raises questions that help to situate the history of the Group in a broader social and theoretical context.

The concept 'group' is deceptively straightforward. In this study, we conceptualise the Women's Cultural Group as a voluntary association, a specific cultural form considered to be a corollary of civil society within the broader modernist construct of the nation-state. Voluntary associations are formally constituted organisations established for the purpose of social improvement or a community good, are independent of government and are typically run through a board, with specific office bearers and democratic decision-making procedures.[2] Non-profit in principle, they reinvest funds and monetary gains

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back into the organisation and its projects. Voluntary societies are frequently, though not necessarily, gendered. They can be organised around sets of occupational or responsibility interests, business groups or parent groups, which importantly may operate, de facto, as men's lodges or mothers' unions. Globally, many women's associations have worked towards similar humanistic aims and visions of the 'good society', as revealed in the narratives they employ in telling their stories.[3] The particular case of the Women's Cultural Group may be considered in relation to the substantial scholarly literature that examines the social and political positioning of women's voluntary associations.

Research on the global rise of women's leagues, clubs, organisations and voluntary associations in the late 19th and early 20th centuries indicates that they have played an historically transformative role in both national and gender politics. Elizabeth Clemens, for example, has argued that voluntary associations emerged out of conditions of inequality, to enable 'those who are relatively weak and disadvantaged by a particular set of political rules to change those rules'.[4] Women, who in many different cultural contexts have been ideologically and materially positioned within the customary domains of household and private-sphere relationships, have been amongst the categories of people historically excluded from expressing themselves through official vehicles of citizenship, such as the franchise. As 'non-political models of organisation' that may be used for political purposes, voluntary associations represent a cultural innovation that potentially shifts the locus of influence from formal, state-sanctioned structures of civic participation to sites of popular mobilisation and interest groups. They can, therefore, on the one hand, be conceived of instrumentally, as tools through which actors 'reject the established conventions for political organization…and mobilize in ways that are not anticipated or constrained by the dominant rules'.[5] Yet, on the other hand, given that such models of organisation can be adopted for a variety of uses, they occasion a range of interpretations and political meanings, both for their participants as well as for scholars.

Many writers have highlighted how voluntary organisations have enabled large numbers of women to redefine their roles in society by expanding the legitimate structures and spaces for civic participation and public presence. Through associations, women's 'shared experiences and co-operation…[have] increased their collective sense of sisterhood as well as their individual feelings

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Friendship and community work are complementary benefits for members of women's groups.

of self-esteem and self-confidence.'[6] The cultivation of leadership talents and other skills, developed through experiences of planning, fundraising and campaigning, has been a clear benefit of membership for women, especially for those not situated within formal or informal wage economies. Extended social networks and meaningful friendships are another advantage. Such benefits are an important form of social capital that women may accumulate through 'shared norms and values of reciprocity and trust',[7] which can also advance their standing – and sometimes that of their families – in their own communities and beyond. For some feminist scholars, the idea of sisterhood contains the seeds of an 'awakening' to a particular kind of political consciousness – one that anticipates a liberal formulation of gender equality. For example, Karen J Blair, in her foundational book *The Clubwoman as Feminist*, theorised that early American women's clubs, which eschewed overt political involvements, were nevertheless proto-feminist in their effect of normalising women's influence in schools and other public institutions. Unlike suffragists

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seeking equality and the vote, these women sought the more 'moderate' aim of broadcasting an ideal of 'ladydom and the myth of women's instinctive domestic and moral traits'. Yet, argues Blair, the very moderation of this objective 'made it attractive to millions of women who were able to enrich the quality of their own lives while transforming the worlds of culture and reform'.[8]

Some studies have been more tentative in assigning overt political meaning to women's collective action, acknowledging the problematic nature of conceptualising 'women's interests' when differences in economic status, cultural background, religion, race, sexuality and age are so clearly manifest in the divergent experiences of lived womanhood. Margit Misangyi Watts has noted that 'clubs and associations have been viewed by historians as constructive segments of society; however, they have been observed also to be forms of organised social control through which upper-middle-class men and women have sought to promote and ensure the acceptance of a particular set of morals and standards'.[9] The regulatory power of women's social organisations, specifically in enforcing class and racial privileges, was explored by Diana Kendall in her case study of a philanthropic organisation run by affluent 'white' women in the southern United States. Kendall concludes that, whether intentionally or unintentionally, the 'power of good deeds' is neither straightforward nor benign.[10] Similarly, writing about an earlier period of women's organising in New York, Anne Boylan cautions readers 'to think hard about the interests that specific voluntary associations serve, the exclusions they practice, and the mechanisms whereby they claim to speak for the commonweal.'[11] Her findings indicate that the political and economic power that women wield in these organisations can deepen the 'chasms of religion, race, class and legal status that separate them from each other'.

The category 'womanhood' is insufficient grounds for generalising about the motives and effects of women's organising, which defy a unitary political trajectory or sensibility. However, the widespread prevalence of women's associations, and the distance which benevolent and reformist groups have frequently maintained from feminist politics and activism,[12] require a theory of gender that is historically grounded. One convincing account focuses on the relationship of gender subjectivity to the modern state. Sonia Alvarez has observed that formal liberal politics poses specific dilemmas for women. While

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women may organise alongside men for causes that fall within a national or civil rights rubric, they may find it difficult to 'advance claims that are considered to be, by definition, outside the legitimate reach of state intervention – for example, claims concerning women's rights in marriage and the patriarchal family'.[13] In other cases, from subject positions within household and marital relations, which typically fall (ideologically and often legally) within 'customary' jurisdiction, rights-based claim making is not viable. Moral discourses, emphasising cultural and religious principles, can be brought more powerfully to bear on matters that impact on life in the community and in the private sphere. As Catherine Lloyd has shown in the case of Algerian women's organisations, 'many associations have accepted [a] controlled modernity as offering a civic option for women who are defined as guardians of tradition rather than [as] citizens.'[14]

Members of women's groups can view humanistic or religious concerns as central and driving motives, and do not necessarily conceptualise their work as having either political impetus or impact. Perhaps particularly when women's groups self-identify as religious organisations, religious motives are sometimes taken – by members and by others – as face-value explanations for why women have organised. Piety and religious principles are sometimes viewed as synonymous with doing good works. Yet, as Patricia Wittberg contends, this is an ahistorical reading:

> Most [people] probably assume that the involvement of [religious] groups in such organizational activities [as soup kitchens, schools and mission fundraising] was natural and normative. It is not. While most if not all religious traditions require their individual adherents to perform private acts of charity, for a religious group to construct and operate formal organizations – which are specifically dedicated to education, health care and social services – [is] far less common.[15]

Religious welfare structures and acts of social charity certainly pre-date modernity. Yet the modern voluntary association is a recent organisational template belonging to forms of national citizenship and has its roots in secular 'ideals of liberty, equality and fraternity which influenced European revolutionary movements' in the 19th century.[16] Nevertheless, religion is not easily distinguished from these processes, and voluntary associations have sometimes

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pioneered or given formal structure to new expressions of religious compassion and cultural communalism. The way religion informs women's organisations is, of course, variable, just as the impact of religion on gender cannot be generalised. Ghada Hashem Talhami, examining women's groups in Palestine and Egypt, cautions that 'although it has been customary to emphasise the role of religion in shaping women's roles in the Arab Middle East…the impact of Islam varies greatly from one country to another due to the succession of contrasting political ideologies such as liberalism, authoritarianism, socialism and Islamic fundamentalism.'[17]

In thinking about women's religious organisations, some scholars appear to imply that religious motivations are merely a strategic and politically expedient means of smuggling in secular, feminist ideals and empowerment through the 'acceptable' language and discourses of traditional gender roles. This does not ring true with the way many religious women's organisations understand themselves, and such a reading of human agency would appear to emerge from within the contradictions of liberal citizenship itself – with its conception of the political as a disenchanted and rationalised space. Such a reading cannot account for action that both constructs and derives from simultaneous and integrated subjectivities. Filomina Chioma Steady shows that women have been organising to set up Islamic schools in Freetown, Sierra Leone, since 1932. The Muslim Association was founded there in 1942 with the 'main objective of setting up educational institutes' based on a 'Western' model, since education had become valued as one of the main avenues for social mobility.[18] A certain degree of female emancipation was thought possible through trade, and girls were taught these skills from an early age in order to be economically self-sufficient by the time they were married. This work was considered an extension of one's identity as a 'good Muslim'.[19]

Such cases confirm Schwabenland's assertion that women's associations often sit at the boundaries of political/non-political, public/private and secular/religious social fields. This, it would seem, has been a source of strength and success for many groups, and it seems both presumptuous and empirically problematic to insist that only one side of these binary constructs represents a valid consciousness.

Through this brief summary, it is hopefully evident that the objective of scholarship on women's societies and associations has not only been to assess

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Fêtes and fairs generate community as much as funds.

their impact on the social environments in which they labour, nor merely to chronicle their achievements as expressions of specific kinds of religious or political commitment. Research has also sought to understand the way these groups have both signified and shaped the transformation of larger ideological norms and social relations of power pertaining to gender, class, culture and nation. So, while it is clear that women's collaborative efforts have reformed urban environments,[20] advanced the wellbeing of specific cultural or religious communities,[21] and promoted educational causes at a national level, such achievements themselves reveal the historical changes in which the public meanings of womanhood are reinvented.

Another critical question raised by the designation 'Women's Cultural Group' relates to culture and communal belonging. Schwabenland analyses how voluntary associations convey their vision of the good society through narrative as well as through practice.[22] In its vision of the social good, as explored and advanced by the Women's Cultural Group over fifty years, the concept of 'culture' has been central. Culture, however, is a term that is difficult to pin down. The Group was started in the context of a state regime which had an even more aggressive programme of segregation and identity management than had existed under the colonial governments; the meaning

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of culture carried great ideological weight and was deployed in politically instrumental ways. The Group's identification of itself as a cultural society reflects some conceptual ambiguities, but also indicates how those ambiguities could be cultivated to suit its own purposes. Did 'Cultural' denote a *particular* heritage and tradition or was it rather a synonym for 'inter-cultural'? Both interpretations appear to have been embraced. 'Cultural' described Group-sponsored activities and events that showcased, by turns, Indian or Muslim identity (or both in combination). But 'Cultural' also identified a field of human diversity that was to be a basis for interaction between women from beyond Muslim Indian circles: a grounding of difference that, itself, could be shared and become a source of pleasurable exchange; a basis to come together as women. Zuleikha Mayat sometimes articulated this functional ambiguity directly. For example, on the occasion of a Group-sponsored public lecture by Scottish Muslim convert and scholar Dr Yaqub Zaki in 1977, Mayat explained to guests that

> living in a country where so many cultures exist side by side our organisation aims to promote understanding between the communities by learning of each other's cultures. Though membership has, right from the beginning, been open to all women irrespective of class, colour or community, the fact remains that it has always been predominantly Muslim. And as in all democratic institutions the will of the majority prevails and therefore our activities tend to be more Islamic than otherwise.[23]

Open signification as a 'cultural group' maximised the organisation's manoeuvrability and space for civic expression. So, at an 'Islamic' event (such as the lecture by Dr Zaki) the Group's standing as a predominantly Muslim organisation could be readily advanced. Other circumstances occasioned more emphasis of the Group's broader 'Indian' orientation – when describing the compilation of recipes in *Indian Delights*, for example. Still other contexts promoted a definition of 'cultural' as plural or interactive – for example, in the Group's associations with the Zamokuhle women's group projects[24] or in relation to its motives for offering Indian cookery classes.

To the extent that this multifaceted definition of 'cultural' was, at times, contradictory, it is fair to say that tensions emerged not only from the South

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African political context but also from factors internal to the group. A membership comprising mostly Muslim women of Gujarati heritage could not but render as 'token' those women who hailed from Parsee, Hindu, Zulu, English or other religious or linguistic backgrounds. While in the early days the Group resisted suggestions that they call themselves the Muslim Women's Group in favour of a civic, secular and open identity, it is evident that protocols in meetings and other events have over the decades increasingly reflected Muslim religious values and practices. Moreover, cultural and class mixing appears to have had varied meaning within the Group. For some members, the exchanges that the Group provided offered a unique forum of contact outside of narrow social circles. Other members were raised in more cosmopolitan environments, a few hailing from families that regularly challenged conventional notions of class or religious proprieties. As a whole, however, the Group's public reputation for being a 'multiracial body' that 'packs a mighty punch'[25] was well established, as was its record of support and charitable giving to Durban's spectrum of local disadvantaged communities.

The Group was 'cultural' in another sense. Members were not merely practitioners, ambassadors and connoisseurs of culture. They were also producers, agents and brokers of culture. This is best observed both in their creation of the cookbook *Indian Delights*, the lodestar of their public existence, and through *Nanima's Chest*, a volume that photographically documents the beautiful textile arts belonging to the era of their grandmothers. Although individuals in the Group may understand themselves somewhat passively as *belonging* to a community, *reflecting* its values and *enjoying* its traditions and heritage, they of course have also been active in its production and reproduction. Within South Africa's contemporary politics of ethnic divide and rule (and its attendant cultural brokerage), the Group's cultural productions could not be politically neutral, even though they emerged from ethics and circumstances that were remote from state sponsorship.

This seems to be what Ahmed Kathrada – a political prisoner who corresponded with Zuleikha Mayat from 1979 until his release ten years later – was gently hinting at in a letter that conveyed his praise (and that of his fellow Robben Island inmates) for *Nanima's Chest*. From his position as a secular, nationally oriented activist (from a Muslim family) who nevertheless admired many cultural and religious traditions, it is not surprising that he raised the

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question of culture's political utility as an axis of social conflict and partition. 'My own views,' he wrote,

> are best expressed in a passage I read by Gandhi where he says: I want the culture of all lands to be blown about my house as freely as possible. But I refuse to be blown off my feet by any. I think that more or less accords with your views. My main criterion for judging questions of this nature is whether they promote sectionalism. *Nanima's Chest* should give no cause whatsoever for any anxiety on this score.

Still, Kathrada clearly believed there was more to be said on the matter and expressed the wish that he and Mayat could 'discuss this in greater detail with the pros and cons adequately slated'.[26]

Kathrada's worries were related, in part, to his own experience of the world – his choice to embrace political activism as an avenue for expressing his ethical convictions, which (despite his secular vision of society) were certainly not unrelated to the religious values of the upbringing he shared with Zuleikha Mayat. In an encounter that deeply affected him, he had visited Auschwitz, with its walkways of incinerated bone, and when he wrote this particular letter to Mayat, he had already endured twenty years as a political prisoner for challenging apartheid's racialised and ethnic policies.

In South Africa in those decades, the 'winds of culture' were the veritable spirit of the times, blowing with gale force and inspiring an ideal of a volk as divinely ordained to rule. But the idea of nationhood itself – the basis of most conceptions of democracy – which was emerging as a normative modernist concept, was premised on a correlation between sovereignty of state and a unitary sense of 'peoplehood'. In the late 20th century, nationalism was sweeping through African colonies: movements organised towards independent rule were compelled to create new conceptions of a national people's culture within these colonially defined territories, often based thinly on a shared experience of subjugation.[27] In the theatres of anti-colonial warfare worldwide, as well as in South African resistance to apartheid, ethnic cultural difference was denounced as 'reactionary', a tool of the divide-and rule strategy, and a danger to national cohesion. Yet, in Natal at that time, the widespread popularity of Mangosuthu Buthelezi's Inkatha movement revealed that conceptions of cultural identity informed the political thinking of many at the 'grassroots', while Inkatha's

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Womanhood and diaspora: Zuleikha Mayat presents a garland to Indira Gandhi during a visit to India.

violent clashes with other liberation organisations underscored the divisiveness of such thinking. Many argued that the best way to combat colonialism and its latent divisions was a strategy of cohesion and national unification.

The political dangers of a nation-building process that refuses to accomodate diasporic, ethnic and transnational identifications have became evident with the weakening of the Soviet Union and the emergence of new national configurations. In the last two decades, scholars have expressed fears about nationalisms that have denied basic rights (and even life, in cases of xenophobic attacks, civil war or genocide) to 'minorities', 'foreigners' and other 'others'.[28]

By invoking Gandhi's words, Kathrada was conceding the importance of pluralism and of an openness and 'flow' of identifications and exchanges. Gandhi's metaphor of self and nation – as an open-windowed, open-doored house – hinges its meaning on the realities of domestic space, the gendered

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seat of culture. Women are key agents of cultural transmission, as scholarship has shown and as groups like the Women's Cultural Group are themselves aware.

The story of a Muslim women's society, told in the 21st century, necessarily carries the burden of the current global geo-political context in which Islam – and especially Islamic womanhood – have become highly charged. A substantial literature exists to probe and debate questions generated by Western feminism about the agency and subjectivity of women who identify with religious and cultural formations which defy, or appear to defy, secular, liberal and individualist conceptions of bio-political freedom and civic androgyny. In this debate, as in the official discourses that pervaded US offensives against Afghanistan under George W Bush following the 9/11 attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon in 2001, the figure of the veiled Muslim woman has operated as potent symbolic currency.

The fifty-year history of the Women's Cultural Group, as an organisation of mainly Muslim women, speaks to changes not only in national politics and the global economy, but also in local doctrinal contestations within Islam and the shape that gender has taken in Durban Muslim life. Over the decades of its existence, the Group was initially viewed in religious circles as posing a radical, modernist challenge with regard to the status of women in Islam. They advocated space for women in mosques and an interpretation of Islam that showed women to be equal partners in public affairs. In relation to the patriarchal apartheid state, the Group positioned itself as being for racial and gender equality. Later, with the rise of feminism and radical political activism in the 1960s and 1970s, the Group's activities and approaches came to be regarded as moderate or, as compared with new forms of political activism and class constituencies, even as conservative. In the last decade or so, with religious ground having shifted once again, the Group retains its advocacy of education for Muslim girls when many Muslim families are looking to reformist interpretations of an 'Islamic way of life' that prescribe a dramatic narrowing of educational opportunities for daughters. As social inequalities and poverty continue unabated in post-apartheid South Africa, the reformist zeal and liberal pluralism of voluntary associations like the Women's Cultural Group have become cutting-edge models of a selfless citizenship in stark contrast to the conspicuous consumption signalling new avenues of class mobility.

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Another notable trend that presents the Group with new challenges is the growing sense of communalism, among both Indians and Muslims. This has been bolstered in response to the policies of the new South African state, led by the African National Congress, which have used race-based schemes for historical redress and favoured Africans as the group hardest hit by apartheid. High-ranking individuals in the ruling party speak a language that is racially and culturally nationalistic, with neo-traditionalist rhetoric pointing to an uneven commitment to women's equality, despite parliamentary quotas and constitutional leverage. Clearly, the meaning of citizenship and civic agency that is crafted by a Muslim women's voluntary association will continue to be responsive to shifting political, religious and socio-economic conditions. The story of the Women's Cultural Group is far from over.

We have organised this book thematically. As a whole, it conveys a broad account of a particular group of remarkable women. Yet, each chapter also reflects on how the specific experiences of the Group articulate with events and trends in the regional or local social landscape. The chapters can be loosely grouped into two parts. The first four chapters reflect on the Women's Cultural Group primarily as a cultural entity, while the second half of the book explores the activity of the Group in the arenas of social reform, welfare and philanthropy.

Chapter One introduces the context of mid-century South Africa and the interlacing configurations of marriage, family, class and community as traced through key moments in the biography of Group founder Zuleikha Mayat. The chapter is named after Mayat's metaphor and working definition of South African pluralism, a piquant mix of humanity, and it highlights those aspects of her life that reveal the experiences of Muslim womanhood within this variegated context. In Chapter Two, we chronicle the founding of the Group itself and explore its aims, ambiguities and multiple meanings as reflected in the experiences of some of its members. We explore generational changes in women's motivations for joining the Group and in its membership and organisational identity. Chapter Three recounts the planning, compiling and authoring of the famed and best-selling cookbook, *Indian Delights*, a publication that

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elevated the Group to a new level of independence and acclaim. We argue that this book was historically significant, too, as an artefact of print culture – in the imagining of both a creole 'Indian' cultural identity in South Africa and a global diasporic community. The fourth chapter considers the public avenues and mediums through which the women's familiar, 'private' worlds were expressed as part of the Group's cultural mission. These include theatrical productions, publishing, lectures, poetry festivals and fashion shows. Taking on various socially available roles of historian, anthropologist, ambassador and critic, the Group and its cultural productions have reflected shifts in the ideological positioning of culture and identity over the latter half of the 20th century.

Chapter Five fleshes out a theme that is flagged in earlier chapters, the concern for women's literacy and education. Biographical reflections by several Group members from three generations help to explain why bursary loans to students constitute the core philanthropic venture of these women. Chapter Six concerns fundraising and friendship, and traces the evolution of the Group's non-profit, money-earning strategies and social occasions over five decades. This is a story that underscores the creativity, resourcefulness and sheer hard work that has remained characteristic of this women's organisation, even as its approaches are transformed through a professionalisation of skills and self-understanding. This chapter also reveals how informal labour and moral work have operated as a motor for circulating local wealth, and how social capital and status are generated alongside quantifiable sums, enlivening local ideals and imaginaries of community. Chapter Seven catalogues the charitable endeavours and welfare work undertaken by the group and its civic petitioning over formal political issues. It is in offering a community resource that the Women's Cultural Group has found its current core of identity and activity, and in Chapter 8, we follow the steps the Group took in pursuing a dream for its own future: the building of an institutional space – an activity centre for women – in which to co-ordinate their many involvements and formalise their ideals. We explore the meaning that this dream had for the Group as its membership grew beyond what could be accommodated by home meetings and as success with non-profit projects, *Indian Delights* in particular, produced a solid confidence in their capacities. Their quest for such a space and the compromises they were eventually compelled to make illustrates the

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tenuousness of their gender position within a context of power, and how the winds of political and social change around them displaced the foundations of their vision.

The delights of friendship, luncheon and 'a good natter' (as Ranji Nowbath put it) are certainly a part of why the Women's Cultural Group continues, after fifty years, to be a vibrant avenue for civic and community-based involvement. But as long-time member Shairbanu Lockhat roundly declared, and as readers will certainly discover for themselves, for members of the Women's Cultural Group 'it's not just coming here and having tea'.

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1
THE CHOW-CHOW PICKLE JAR

On a summer's day in December 1947, a few months before the National Party's electoral victory, a young bride travelled by car from a town in the Transvaal highveld to her new home in the Indian Ocean port city of Durban. Her name was Zuleikha Mayat.

The wedding had been modest: about sixty family members gathered in the lounge of the family home where Zuleikha sat in a dress of white lace, her hands glowing with mendhi artistry, while the imam conducted the nikah ceremony at the local mosque. More well-wishers were invited to the lunch that followed, some arriving by train from Johannesburg. Many brought gifts and kunchas, trays of savouries and sweets, and wondered why the young woman had married a stranger from out of town and, alarmingly, from a different ghaam when there were eligible local men whose parents or grandparents also hailed from the Indian village of Dabhel. A few took offence that Zuleikha had declined a relative's proposal. Back in Dabhel, her family, the Bismillahs, generally married other Bismillahs, Akhalwayas or Haffejees; and here in the Union, too, marrying within one's kutum was common to most Gujarati-speaking Muslims. This was the first opportunity for many of the guests to set eyes upon Dr Mahomed Mayat, who had recently been awarded his medical degree from the University of the Witwatersrand, and was a friend and contemporary of Zuleikha's brother, Abdulhak. Some knew the love story:

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that the couple had first encountered each other through a letter Zuleikha had written to the newspaper, *Indian Views*, to which Mahomed had publicly replied.

The letter, signed 'Miss Zuleikha Bismillah of Potchefstroom', had argued for girls to have access to higher levels of education. The style of its writing revealed not only a principled passion concerning this matter, but also the author's sharp mind and biting wit, betraying a more personal, frustrated desire. It also displayed political savvy, appealing to a range of sensibilities before pleading:

> Will not our parents realise that in these modern times we would prefer a good sound education which would equip us to face the future, rather than have them shower on us gifts of clothes or sending us to bioscopes or weddings as recompense? If the girl of today is given a chance, the woman of tomorrow will be able to bring up better Muslims and citizens.[1]

In his letter to the paper, 'MGH Mayat' agreed: 'The numerous articles on the education of girls is a healthy sign of the awakening of the Community to the importance of Learning.' Moreover, he continued, because educated men preferred to marry educated women, it would be 'politic' to ensure that there be appropriate ratios of educated men and women for the 'welfare of the Community'.[2] Clearly marriage, and the attractions of a clever woman, were on his mind.

This exchange, in English and in writing, with its public beginning and expression of modernist views, set the tone for the personal correspondence and courtship that followed. The would-be couple wrote letters to each other for almost two years. Through Zuleikha's brother, Mahomed learned that the determined young woman harboured dreams of becoming a medical doctor, that she was working to complete her Standard 8 through a distance-learning course and that she wished to strengthen her mathematics skills. As one of two Indian students to receive a first-class matriculation certificate at Sastri College in 1941, Mahomed was in a position to offer some chivalrous assistance. 'So this was his opening gambit,' recalls Zuleikha. 'He sent me some notes on algebra and so on. And slowly, then, I replied, and then he'd write [again].'

> [This was all] without the parents knowing about it. I mean, I used to tell our messenger, you know, who was the delivery boy, to go and get the

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Zuleikha Bismillah

Mahomed Mayat

post. And I used to wait on the veranda. As soon as the post came, I'd collect it first, take my letters and then give [back] the rest. [*laughs*]

For Zuleikha, the exchange also provided an opportunity for her to practise the English she had learned through her correspondence courses. And writing, even in a third language, was easier than speaking for at least one crucial reason. On occasion, when Abdulhak returned home during breaks from his medical training, he brought Mahomed along with him. Yet opportunities for conversation were few. In response to Mahomed's frustration following such a visit, Zuleikha explained:

> Brought up in a society which thinks that a great sin is being perpetrated if a girl so much as looks at a boy, or displays slight signs of interest in him, can you wonder that I tried my utmost to concentrate on my studies and remained as silent as a sphinx? Believe me, I would have liked to talk with you and broach certain subjects, but under the prevailing conditions I was bound to submit to conventions…Does it not occur to you that I would have no scruples in talking with you were it not [for] this fear of being the object of local scandal mongers? Personally, I do not care overmuch for a dented reputation, if my own conscience remains

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> clear. But I must take into account my parents' feelings…I sincerely wish that they should not be hurt through me.[3]

The 'certain subjects' she wanted to broach included the ideas of Sigmund Freud, the study of medicine and the rights of Indian women. However, letter writing would be the medium for these discussions, a sharing of views on 'all *interesting* things. Not "I love you" and "you love me" and that sort of business. It was really at an intellectual level.' In letters addressed with formal correctness to 'Mr Mahomed Mayat', Zuleikha confessed the depth of her longing for education:

> For as long as I can remember, I have always craved to be educated and this I think has now become an obsession with me. To proceed someday to a varsity and become a doctor is my greatest desire. (All this not in order to rise in the estimation of the opposite sex – although this is Freud's contention – or if such thoughts are in existence then they are so far in my own subconscious mind that I am not aware of them.)

The young woman's aspirations to become a physician were closely connected with her concerns about the status of girls and women:

> I feel that an Indian lady doctor, especially a Muslim, is very essential towards the upliftment of our community. As a doctor, I can come into contact with Indian women of all kinds and needs and…if I can only make the women dissatisfied with their menial and subordinate position, I shall be satisfied. I want us women to realise that to gain freedom we must fight for our rights, since nobody will help fight for those who are too busy to fight for themselves. Man's supremacy must be erased for all times.[4]

Yet, despite these bold proclamations, Zuleikha was not convinced that the opportunity for further education would be presented to her: 'I have lived in hopes till now and I will do so till I pass my matric. Although my parents are determined not to let me proceed to university, I do not let this knowledge daunt me but try even harder to succeed.'

When Mahomed broached the subject of marriage, less than a week later, he could not have been unprepared for the concerns she expressed in her reply:

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'I have been pondering over your suggestion about getting engaged, but have not ascertained whether indulgence in that "disaster" can possibly enhance my chances of attending varsity.'[5] Still, the letter was encouraging. It ended with 'yours truly' and with the quip: 'No doubt, mother will welcome this since she has always feared an old maid on her hands for life.'

The couple's desire to marry was negotiated between themselves through letters and conspiring siblings: it was not an arranged union initiated by their respective parents. However, understanding themselves as members of a community, they were respectful of customary sensitivities. Mahomed's family was obliged to send a formal proposal of marriage through an intermediary. His father, GH Mayat, had business links to the well-known Mia family, who, in turn, were distant relatives but close friends (and fellow villagers) of the Bismillahs. In October of 1945, GH Mayat paid a visit to the Potchefstroom household with Mawlana Mohamed Mia. Once the parents of both parties had been properly introduced, Zuleikha was called in to meet her future in-laws, who enquired about her cooking and domestic skills. After that, conversation turned to the much more tricky matter of her professional ambitions.

In a seven-page letter to Mahomed a few days later, Zuleikha recounted this meeting in painful detail, describing the nuanced generational and gender politics conducted in polite but steely conversation. Her sister Bibi, her only ally, had 'strict orders from mother not to traverse the grounds from the kitchen to the lounge while I was there.'

> In the lounge, Maulana introduced me to your Daddy and then told me that Mahomed's parents and my parents were eager to enjoin me and Mahomed in holy matrimony. He only wanted my consent to proceed with the engagement. Maulana must have noticed my obstinacy in giving an answer, so he proceeded with his unwelcome advice: Two doctors in a family were one too many…Upon [my] inquiry that if two or even half a dozen shopkeepers were not too many in a family, how could two doctors be, Maulana replied that it was quite a different thing to be a doctor and a shopkeeper.[6]

The lengthy interchange that followed proved more than a nineteen-year-old girl, surrounded by moral pressure from six authoritative adults, could be expected to withstand.[7] Still, it is clear that Zuleikha held out with all the

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Dabhelian village culture was brought to South Africa by Zuleikha's parents and blended with local opportunities: Zuleikha's brother Abdulhak (left) graduated from medical school and later emigrated to Canada, while Abdul Hay (second from right) inherited his father's position in the shop.

considerable intellectual resources and determination she possessed, but 'being all alone to defend my case and no support coming from any corner' she felt 'helpless and despairing'.

> Opposite me was the awe-inspiring Moulvi with his magnificent beard. My unrelenting Unky [Uncle] glowering at me for my audacity. Your Dad at the gallery end, commenting time and again that youth were turning away from religion and were becoming unfilial. My mother on the one side who was a staunch supporter of the opposition and most energetically fought the case for them. My Dad lying unobtrusively on a settee, avoiding my gaze and refusing to enter into the controversy.

'All this hurts very much,' she confided to Mahomed towards the end of the letter, adding with bitter irony, 'Thank God for blessing women with the quality of inconstancy – I shall recover as soon as I have transferred my aspirations to other channels.' Still, she continued, 'as far as the engagement is concerned I am very happy.'

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Mahomed responded with sympathy and worry, pledging his own unwavering support for her and her education. He had experienced a similar familial confrontation in isolated circumstances and compared the power play of the elders to a military conquest, observing dryly that 'as far back as the late 18th century, Napoleon realised that to overpower an opposition the best tactic was to divide an enemy and deal with each subdivision individually. Maulana, your uncle, and my Dad appreciated this fully.' He asked her to promise him that she would attempt the matriculation examinations in November. Reflecting on these letters almost sixty-five years later, Zuleikha Mayat comments, 'You can see evidence on paper what kind of a man he was. How could I pass up such a chance?'

The marriage, which would be a passionate one that also energised their community life, took place over two years later. Like most Indian brides of her time and place, Zuleikha moved into the household of her husband's family. Life as a member of a new unit, with all the benefits and obligations, intimacies and tensions that circumscribe extended family relations, commenced immediately. The Mayats drove Zuleikha home to Durban in their navy-blue Dodge. The full day of wedding festivities, however, meant a late departure and the party made a stopover in Waschbank, where they could count on the hospitality of relatives, the family of Dr Daoud Mall, who was married to Zuleikha's sister Bibi. There, as guests observing proprieties, Zuleikha slept beside her mother-in-law on her wedding night, while the men shared the only other bedroom.

With its humidity, coastal vegetation and the smell of the sea, Durban was a change from the dusty streets and seams of bluegum trees that mapped out Potchefstroom's segmented communities. Urban segregation, too, was different from the kinds of divisions and multiculturalism Zuleikha had grown up with as the daughter of shopkeepers in the Transvaal.

The Bismillah shop had been open for business in 'Potch' since 1886. In 1881, her paternal grandfather, Hassim Bismillah, had risked a passage to South Africa, one among a generation of teenage entrepreneurs from the Indian state of Gujarat. Arriving in Durban, at that time a city of about ten thousand inhabitants, he worked packing parcels for several months before securing

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passage by coach to Johannesburg. Hawking there, among stiff competition, proved gruelling. A few years later, the discovery of gold stimulated a rush of immigration and commercial activity. Someone told Hassim that Potchefstroom, a farming community on the road between diamond-rich Kimberley and the gold reefs of the Rand, was a good bet for starting up one's own business. Within a couple of decades, about twenty-five Asian-owned stores, including four under Chinese proprietorship, were clustered on King Edward Street (eventually renamed Kerk Straat) all stocking the same goods. All of the Indian traders were Muslim, almost half of them Dabhelians, seven of them Bismillahs. Hassim changed the name of his own shop from 'Bismillah's' to 'Dabhel House' after several serious delivery mix-ups!

Men of Hassim's era seldom sought marriage partners in South Africa. They returned to their ghaam for wives who shared their linguistic, cultural and religious background. Hassim married Ogie, who remained in Dabhel while he travelled back and forth. In Dabhel, their son, Mohammed, was born in 1889. Around the time of the South African War (1899–1902), Ogie and her son made their way to the Transvaal to join Hassim. As soon as young Mohammed reached puberty, he was sent back to Dabhel to become a hafez and to find a marriage partner. There, in 1914 – four years after the Union of South Africa was formed – he married Amina Bismillah. After the birth of their daughter Mariam in 1916, Mohammed returned to South Africa to help his father in the Potchefstroom business. Such a pattern of movement was common among migrants of this social class. Strong family ties and long-term separations, mediated through a fluid conception of home, were resourceful strategies of livelihood and capital accumulation. A South African government commission, commenting in 1921 on the numeric discrepancy between married Indian men and women living in the country, noted that it was 'the custom among resident Indians of keeping their wives in India, where they are visited by their husbands at intervals. Thus a commercial or business domicile is maintained in the Union, but a domicile of home and family, that is, true domicile in such cases is retained in India.'[8] Yet, like Ogie before her, Amina also left her Indian domicile, joining Mohammed in 1920. In Potchefstroom they had six more children.[9] Zuleikha was born in 1926. Among her family and close friends, she was known as 'Julu'.

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Zuleikha's mother, Amina, arrived in South Africa in 1920.

Transoceanic waves brought other family members as well. Cousins, brothers and nephews were sponsored for economic ventures and, as was the case in many towns around the Transvaal, collections of agnatic households expanded into communities that could locally reproduce the familiar rhythms and practices, as well as culinary traditions, of faraway home. Political exclusions and social discrimination colluded early on in creating immigrant neighbourhoods with linguistic and ethnic, but increasingly racialised, identifications. By the 1890s, there were about fifteen thousand people of Indian extraction in the two boer republics, most of them in the Transvaal and a small number in the Orange Free State. Legislation curtailing rights for these immigrants began with Law 3 of 1885, which denied citizenship to 'the native races of Asia, including so-called Coolies, Arabs, Malays, and Mohammedan subjects of the Turkish Empire'. 'Asiatics' could only own fixed property in racially designated areas. Law 3 of 1897 prohibited the marriage of white people to Asians or Africans. Law 15 of 1898 stated that no person of colour could hold a licence for gold digging. The Transvaal Corporations Ordinance of 1903 authorised local authorities to designate contained residential locations (townships) for persons of colour. The Asiatic Law Amendment Act of 1907 (also known as the 'Black Act') compelled Asian males to be registered and fingerprinted, and to carry a pass at all times. As the Transvaal and, later, Union governments developed identity classification mechanisms and legal measures to exclude people of Indian ancestry from access to basic civic amenities, these diasporic communities mobilised their own resource networks and communal identities to look after themselves. They founded places of worship, schools for children and spaces where mutually supportive social circles could be nurtured.

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Yet, throughout Zuleikha's childhood, segregation and racial prejudice in Potchefstroom was not totalising and, though racialised boundaries increasingly hardened, it is still difficult for Zuleikha to identify a moment when apartheid could have been anticipated. Pondering this question in *A Treasure Trove of Memories*, she considers her grandfather's experience: 'He, the Arabier, as they referred to him, was a respected person and Dada could never pinpoint when that term had been replaced with the derogatory "koelie" which was a label his sons and grandsons would have to cope with.'[10] For the 19th-century merchant, cultural intermixing was intrinsic to success, and during his years as a hawker Hassim had applied himself to learning the local languages and folkways of his clientele. Even after geographically settling his business, he continued to travel to the farms of Dutch-speaking customers. While he still had his donkey cart, he sold flour and sugar and quantities of staples; upon his exchanging animal conveyance for a Hercules bicycle, Zuleikha remembers that he stuck to lightweight goods such as 'cotton, sewing aids, baking powder, little things that people would run out of'. Sometimes, if it became late, he stayed in their homes. He found that his skills as a literate person were valued by boere with limited schooling, and he would read and explain their correspondence to them and help to draft replies. In Bismillah family lore, it was thought that 'Afrikaners could not count' as it was not uncommon for these farmers to give Hassim their money and ask him to take what was due. Zuleikha recalls:

> The Afrikaner people had gone through the war times and they really were deprived of education. The father of the family could maybe read the Bible, but in so far as arithmetic was concerned, they were really very poor, you know, compared to Indians. They used to have preachers going around the farms teaching them a bit of the Bible and so on, and that was the extent of the education of that generation of Afrikaners. So when my grandfather would go to these places…they would just take out a chamber pot [full of money] from under the bed, and put it on the top, bang it on the table – so he had to take the money from that, count what belonged to him.

Notwithstanding any chauvinistic views of the 'other' likely to have been privately felt by both parties on such occasions, the relationship between

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An Indian shop in Potchefstroom – many such shops were lost as a result of the Group Areas Act.

shopkeeper and customer clearly invited some concrete expressions of trust and social intercourse. As new formulas of power emerged in the early 20th century, however, existing stereotypes and economic anxieties held by white people about 'Abram the shopkeeper' developed new legal and political teeth to undermine earlier forms of respect and tolerance. Yet its impact was uneven. It was not until the 1970s that the implementation of the Group Areas Act removed Asian retail competition, including Dabhel House, from Kerk Straat into a racially segregated ghetto.

Meanwhile, third-generation immigrants of Indian origin like Zuleikha were part of a plattelander multicultural mix. Potchefstroom, which she would later fictionalise as 'Pampoensville',[11] had its own, modest brand of cosmopolitanism in which a Muslim trading store figured as a fulcrum of activity by offering low prices, tolerant credit terms, courteous service, odd-job employment and tasty snacks. Small-town politeness and different minority groups contributed to relations that Zuleikha remembers as 'always friendly and respectful, an amalgam of race, creed and colour that was forced to share the limited space and yet contrived to live harmoniously.'[12] The Bismillah shop was located between the white Afrikaans-speaking centre of town and the African locations, and it was 'surrounded by aaprawalla neighbours whose financial positions differed' as well as Malay, Christian and Hindu families. Their next-door neighbours were Chinese, their customers of all colours and languages. Children who

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grew up in Gujarati-speaking households, who studied Urdu at madrassah and English at school, also spoke fluent Afrikaans as well as some Sotho.

Like sons, daughters became part of shop-based community interchanges. Business and household were intertwined, leaving little distinction between public and private life and little room for gendered seclusion. Zuleikha's mother, Amina, worked such long hours in the shop that it was known locally as 'Amina se winkel'. She cooked food as much for visitors and customers as for family. Growing up, Zuleikha developed an interest in sport, generally a more masculine preserve. For boys, there were afternoons of cricket and soccer on nearby pitches, while girls learned to cook and honed their domestic skills. Zuleikha's brothers played golf in the open veld behind their house, but 'whenever they were short of a player when informally indulging in these games, my sister and I were always called in to join', and 'there was little chance of being caught out unless Maggie, our domestic worker, squealed'. Zuleikha thinks she developed some of her strong will and personality through sport and by 'always fighting with the boys'.

> I used to play more cricket and soccer…Whenever the boys were short of somebody, they would call me in to even be the wicket keeper or be in the goals or something. My brothers, too, would just, you know, drag me out 'come on, help us out'. So that also put a bit of fight in you.

Outside of school, though, most of young Julu's hours were spent assisting in the shop. 'Nowadays,' comments Zuleikha, 'this is termed child labour. We, however, saw [ourselves] as essential cogs in a family enterprise wherein there was teaching and guidance by adults.' Valuable lessons included:

> restraint in the face of irate customers; ability to carry out instructions; book keeping; developing business sense; learning to order what would sell; what was not profitable; but above all how to get to know different races, find out their concerns, empathize with them, compare their values with ours and detect differences: all these were factors that bred awareness, led one's mind to find more about others. The Qur'anic verse, 'We have made you into different races so that you can know each other' is now in adulthood ever so meaningful. What we gained through those years was valuable knowledge of other peoples.[13]

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This 'valuable knowledge' certainly assisted in the family economy, but Zuleikha would in later life draw upon these formative lessons and experiences when fashioning a working definition of South African multiculturalism. Community was both diasporic (made up of aaprawalla) and local (a collection of distinctive 'peoples' whose interactions were simultaneously fraught with power differentials and humanitarian impulses). Her memories of the space of the shop, recounted in *A Treasure Trove of Memories,* are full of vivid characters and quirky encounters. There was, for example:

> Mrs Labuschagne, an Englishwoman, [who] had married an Afrikaner soon after the second Anglo-Boer War…Mrs Labuschagne always spent some time discussing news and events with father when she came to the shop, and each Christmas, she presented father, who only wore hand-knitted socks, with a pair she knitted with mercerised cotton.[14]

A trader's shop, even in a small and formally divided town, was a space of daily mixing and exchange. But by the 1930s, there were some institutional lines that could not be crossed, especially when Zuleikha and her brothers and sisters reached their teens. The Bismillah children, like others in the community, attended the local school for Indians up to Standard 6. There was no high school that Indians were permitted to attend. As Zuleikha explains:

> Potchestroom was the hub of education for the whites. Name it, they've got colleges there for arts, music, gymnasiums, handicrafts. But none of them would let me in. My father tried very hard to get me into one of them, maybe as a part-time student. The only people who responded positively were the Roman Catholic nuns. They said, 'Look, we will gladly take her, but she will have to come after hours, because there will be an outcry.' Now, 'after hours'! What? I'm working! And they have their evening mass and so on. So that didn't work out.

Families who could afford to sent their sons to live with relatives while they received further schooling at Waterval Institute in Johannesburg or Sastri College in Durban. Medicine and Law were preferred professional degrees. But the idea of sending daughters away was rare indeed, and almost unheard of in the days of Zuleikha's childhood. Despite the fact that her educational aspirations were cut short upon her engagement to be married, she believes that her

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desire to be a doctor was sufficiently powerful that her mother might have, early on, approached an uncle in Johannesburg, but

> there were no girls' schools; there was nobody who would board a daughter. I had an uncle in Johannesburg – my mother must have just tentatively suggested to him [that I go there to school] so Mamajee [uncle] said, 'Behn [sister], send the sons anytime, six, seven (we had only three brothers!) but *poiree tho pothe hachawanu* [the daughters you must take care of yourself] you understand?' Okay. So there was no place that I could be sent and I could only finish Standard 6 in our school.[15]

Of the four daughters in the family, Zuleikha was the only one to further her studies. She had developed a love of reading, nurtured by the enthusiasm of her Chinese friend Pengy, a teller of superb adventure stories who loved to discuss literature and who read aloud to the Bismillah daughters, keeping them perpetually supplied with magazines and books. Pengy 'was an elder sister to all of us and she used to buy lot of books and my [eldest] sister used to, you know, join with her to buy books. So we read everything in her library – lots of novels [like] *Gone with the Wind* and *When the Rains Came*.' Zuleikha's sisters and brothers pooled their Eid money one year, 'fifty cents, five shillings each, you know, all us children together', to buy a thick volume of Andersen's and Grimm's fairy tales. Understanding Zuleikha's special ambitions for education, her sisters were supportive, sometimes taking on her chores so that she had extra time for studying. She studied through correspondence courses, working mostly in the evenings when her other responsibilities had been attended to:

> I had to work in the shop with my parents all day. In the evening my mother had to see that I did some of the housework, not leave it to my sister, because that would be unfair. And then no mother would marry a daughter off without her knowing something about cooking. And then after that you sat with your books. By this time you really are tired. And I must say my one sister really helped me in this, she would say 'Get off, I'll finish this work'. So she would take over my portion and try and conceal it, even from my mother, because here's a daughter who's not trained for domestic chores.

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The friendship and alliance between Fatima Meer and Zuleikha Mayat helped build bridges between public and private spaces and opened up many opportunities for women in Durban.

As Zuleikha worked to complete her high school education she discovered that she had a gift as a writer, an intellectual orientation and a capacity for expressing strong views. These were talents she would develop. Through the medium of writing – pen and paper – she opened up a larger world for herself. She sent three opinionated letters to *Indian Views*, including the one that brought her into correspondence with her future husband. Through letters also, she developed an early but important contact in Durban. A girl named Zohra Meer was an only child in the family with whom Abdulhak Bismillah resided while attending Sastri College and, knowing his sister's passion for writing, he suggested that the two girls become pen pals. The epistolary friendship that developed afforded Zuleikha an independent link with Durban – and her first opportunity to perform a community service in the city where serving the community would one day become her life's work.

> Zohra was collecting subs for the *Guardian* which was a [news]paper I had not heard of and I immediately subscribed. She also wrote [about] collecting funds for the Indian TB association, Friends of the Sick, and I responded by digging into my pocket money and cajoling parents and siblings to add to it.[16]

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Indian VIEWS

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Women's Column

Fahmida's World

A RAMADAAN STORY

(OLD THEME: CONTEMPORARY SETTING)

(Continued from last issue)

PART II

Hardly were the words gasped out when Fatima felt her breathing easier, the palpitations of her heart slowing down in tempo and the curtains of fog lifting from her benumbed brain. Soon she felt herself regaining vigour and it was like someone resuscitated — like a little puppy shaking off water after being dumped in a tub and she felt it once more wonderful to be alive.

All this, if calculated in time as we know it, was no more than a few minutes duration but in the state and the world in which Fatima was it seemed like eons. Perhaps that is what is meant by eternity.

Hardly had she appreciated the rest when she felt herself to be in a courtlike room — or so she imagined a court room to be since in her sheltered life on this earth she had never been within the precincts of one. Her companion of the spirit had now assumed human form and in fact the whole court was full of human officials, some in the role of prosecutors, some defenders, others who had just come out of curiosity to listen to the sensational. The psychiatrist would explain away that as Fatima was now in a lighter sleep, because her mind was now more conscious, therefore the phenomena of dreams had taken on more of a material aspect; that the dream was now based on the experiences of her rational mind, an not on the supernatural. But we know that it was so near Sehri time that habit was claiming good old Fatima.

There was an air of expectancy and most eyes were focussed on her and already she had a feeling of deep guilt which she tried her utmost to fight off. In all her life she could not remember that she had ever physically harmed any one, neither did she owe a penny which she could not pay off, all her religious commands such as the prayers fasts, etc, she performed with diligence. She could not imagine what possible charge could be levelled against her.

As though reading her thoughts she saw a dark, moron like character reeling off the charges and her immediate reaction was to recoil and cringe, but after a brief interval she got angry and in her mind she protested vigorously at the injustice of it all. She, a God fearing Muslim, to be called indifferent to faith, a panderer to society, its customs and superstitions, insincere and a gossip monger!

She looked around her to see whether there was anyone who would uphold her in her protests. It was with mounting anger that she saw the vigorous nodding in acquiescence to the charges by the silly gossip mongers, the sadists sitting in the public gallery, who had come to view her discomfort; the accusing looks on the faces of the accusers, and the meek, subdued attitude of her companion who to all intents and purposes was to be her sole defence.

derstand the Quran. Did we send down the Quran to you as a jewel to be guarded, or some-

Women's Column

Fahmida's World

Business acumen, ability or those qualities which raises a person just above the ordinary is not the prerogative of any race, and whilst education is a great help to enterprising people, it is not completely essential. This statement can be born out when I give you pen-pictures of personalities I have come across here and there.

OUMA KOOL

Literally in English this means "Grandmother coal", but what a world of meaning this Pseudonym holds. It speaks of enterprise and acute business sense in times when women were only associated with domestic service in her particular society.

This truly black as coal African woman, looked most dignified as she went sitting primly on the seat, next to the driver of her cart, pulled with two horses. In a spotless white blouse and a denim overall beautifully starched and ironed she went around the 'native location' selling coal by the half and full bucket lots. A small piccanin sat in the back amongst the coal bags filling the parrafin tins as soon as they were sold by the sharp eyed old woman. He could feel her round marble eyes boring his back if by as much as one little piece he gave overweight.

Legend has it that she was a washerwoman under contract to one of the European schools and found it most irksome to haul the coal home from the Indian shops herself, as they were not interested in selling and delivering small amounts of coal. There were many of her people in the same plight as no many of them did the washing of the white and Indian citizens of the town. Ouma therefore with money carefully accumulated from her toils of some years, ordered a bulk of coal from the coal merchant and had it dumped in her small yard. From there as she did her washing she started selling coal to the other washerwomen of the neighbourhood who found this a very convenient distance from their homes. The procedure was that they came and filled a bucket or half a bucket (four - gallon paraffin tins neatly cut in half served as measures) full themselves, showing it to Ouma and paying the shilling or sixpence, empty the amount in their own tin and carry it away home. A bag of coal cost Ouma two shillings (Bulk price) which brought in four shillings when sold. This hundred percent profit and no expenses put Ouma into a flourishing business and soon she bought the cart, the horses, engaged the driver and the little boy, and went house to house selling coal in small lots to her people. Later in years a daughter took over this task whilst Ouma remained at home selling coal and in addition she had added a little room to her mud house from where she sold in addition to the coal such commodities as matches, candles, paraffin, sugar etc; etc; Whilst she did not make millions in this venture, she was the first African storekeeper in her town, whose children were given the maximum education available to them then, and who could afford most of the comforts necessary for a civilised way of living. When she died the town came out to mourn her, and right at the back of the funeral procession came the little coal cart minus the coal for this solemn occasion, but from which the grit and dust of years could never be rubbed off. Her death was the end of an era but in it's wake it brought to life slowly but inevitably other African business men who by her example established themselves.

KRISTAMA

I phoned several times at the Aryan Benevolent Home and the cheerful efficient voice at the other end would take down details and reply to queries briskly. I had imagined it to belong to a social worker of at least thirty years of age, so when later I had occasion to meet her was surprised that it belonged to a young girl just out of her teen and who is an inmate of the home, but who assumes the res taking charge whenever the away, which is he has to atten things. Showing and explaining one admire this has assumed so bility, but at t makes one a society that it grent a burde shoulders.

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By the time she arrived in Durban in 1947, Zuleikha's reputation as a writer was known among the extended Meer family, including Zohra's cousin Fatima[17] – and Fatima's father, MI Meer, the editor of *Indian Views*.

'She was part of everything so she had to write'

Through additional correspondence education, Zuleikha Mayat completed a course in journalism through Union College. In June 1956, now a resident of Durban, she was invited by MI Meer to write a weekly column for the newspaper *Indian Views*. For six years, under the heading 'Fahmida's World', subscribers all over southern Africa read Zuleikha's column. The name 'Fahmida' means 'intelligent' or 'wise' in Persian, and Zuleikha thinks she 'must have read an Urdu novel around that time. Actually, when I started, Mawlana Mia from Waterfall Institute, Johannesburg, sent a message that the spelling… should be 'Fehmida', not 'Fah', but 'Feh', but I never changed it…I liked it very much.' Writing under her nom de plume, she developed an outspoken public voice. Despite the subtitle 'Mainly for Women' that an editor added a few years later, Zuleikha did not think of 'Fahmida's World' as an exclusively women's space. 'Fahmida lived *in* the world and she observed everything and she was part of everything so she had to write – this is why it is such a mixed column. You don't find me sticking to any one subject.' Despite catering to a generally conservative community, MI Meer, did not censor her thoughts:

> Of course my English was not so good at that time. Come on, man, [learning it] through a correspondence college in an Afrikaans-speaking town! So the compositor would sometimes pick up mistakes and go and tell the old man. He [Meer] said if it's a spelling mistake or something you do it, but her ideas don't change!

Zuleikha sometimes worked with a mental image of her readership, fixating on her uncles in the Transvaal, as she wrote down thoughts and assertions that she knew might stir things up, but 'I had to get through what I wanted to say'. Not surprisingly, a good part of what she had to say concerned women's lives, both domestic and public.

> I knew [my writing] was going through to the community because lots of people – not only the young girls – the older women would comment on

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> it. [Then they would] tell me 'you know, *this* is not right'; maybe trying to tell me also, 'you can focus on it'. You see the ulema in those days and even now, when they stand on the platform the first thing they attack are women – their dressing, the hairstyles and 'they are going out' and so on. So one very old lady, [who] was my father-in-law's sister, mentioned one day when we were all sitting together, she says, 'You know, why don't somebody tell the mawlanas that there are other people that they can lash, why do they just pick on women all the time? We are tired of this issue.' Obviously they wanted their views expressed, so I would pick this up and try and get it some way into the columns…I think ['Fahmida's World'] was really a conduit, you know, of concern to the community.

Fahmida's textual musings advanced a particular ideal of community. The column celebrated progress and modernity, was critical of public and private hierarchies that made up social life in South Africa, and reflected on the ethical triumphs and moral transgressions of daily life. In Potchefstroom, community had meant a compilation of transnational heritages and street-level interchanges, incorporating both the local and the diasporic. Through 'Fahmida's World', Zuleikha brought these formative experiences of community to bear as, weekly, she scripted her own vision of the good society against the dividing forces of apartheid, with women playing a more meaningful role in civic life. South Africa, Fahmida poetically asserted, was like 'a bottle of chow-chow pickle' – a spicy, domestic concoction in which something new is made out of diverse ingredients (onions, chilli peppers, celery, vinegar, salt, sugar, and even cabbage, garlic, and carrots). It was cultural mixing and exchange that made the nation a rich and interesting place to live. In a series of columns written in June 1957, as the Group Areas Act began to take effect, Fahmida fancies herself on a psychologist's couch and describes a troubling nightmare: in her dream, a worried gentleman who had willingly moved into the new 'Indian Group Area' of Lenasia gave her a warning:

> Do not go and reside in any of the areas set aside for your own group or you will rue the day as surely as I do, both economically and socially. God intended South Africa to be a stew pot of many races and cultures and in that way it retains the tang and piquancy of the chow-chow pickle. Dividing it into unnatural barriers makes it insipid.

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Fahmida continues:

> In this inexplicable dream, I stood helplessly watching as Lenasia turned into a huge bottle of pickle. The gentleman was hunting at fever pitch in the bottle, but it contained not the delicious little varieties usually associated with chow-chow pickles. Instead there was an endless number of mangoes, ripe mangoes, small mangoes, big mangoes, mangoes, mangoes, mangoes…

With this striking culinary metaphor, Zuleikha Mayat brought political narrative into association with the world of kitchens, home life, and women. As a housewifely vision of demographic pluralism, the chow-chow pickle jar expressed a value that opposed the apartheid dream of purity preserved in separate containers. While, across the Atlantic Ocean, Sylvia Plath was using the image of a bell jar to express the confinements of gender ideology,[18] Fahmida's pickle jar was laden with a local, diasporic 'feminine mystique'.[19] Far from rejecting the role and status of the modern housewife, Zuleikha's pen harnessed its power – its rootedness in discourses of progressivism. Gendered modernity offered space for a woman to speak authoritatively about politics, religion, community values and identity. Gastronomy, a woman's art, would prove fundamental to opening up an enduring public life for Zuleikha and her many female associates when they created their own community organisation, the Women's Cultural Group.

Durban pickle

Zuleikha Mayat arrived in Durban in 1947, a time when South Africa was on the cusp of events that would transform the various notions of community that existed within the broader national conception of the Union. The larger Durban area was a racially segregated city, full of class and cultural complexities. According to the housing surveys that documented residents as belonging to four 'races' in 1951, it was home to 123 165 people of Indian ancestry out of a total population of 373 671. The survey indicated that there were 129 683 white residents, 109 543 Africans, and 11 280 coloured people, revealing that the urban population had increased rapidly during the Second World War's booming wartime economy. Just fifteen years earlier, Indian and African residents had been counted at 80 384 and 63 762 respectively.[20]

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Modernity in mid-20th-century Durban was born through a mix of influences and traditions that did not easily correspond with the segregationist vision of town planners.

Official racial classifications concealed the commonalities and differences that shaped life for most Durbanites. The designation 'Indian' masked a multitude of identities. People from the Asian subcontinent had arrived in southern Africa in two broad streams. Just over 152 000 came as indentured migrants between 1860 and 1911 to work on Natal's sugar plantations, railways and coalmines. Of these, between ten and fifteen thousand were Muslim.[21]

Free migrants like the Bismillahs – who were called 'passengers' because they came at their own expense and were supposed to be subject to the ordinary laws of the Colony – arrived from the 1870s from different parts of Gujarat (Kutch, Kathiawar, Gujarat proper). They were of different religious faiths (Hindu, Parsee, Christian, and Muslim), spoke various languages (Hindi, Gujarati, Memonese, Marathi, Konkani, Urdu) and were divided by class (from wholesalers to hawkers, farmers to farm workers). Gender and marital status further complicated each axis of identity. Many passengers tried to obtain equality with white colonists in terms of Queen Victoria's 1858 Proclamation asserting the equality of British subjects. This, however, was to prove futile because they did not conform to the imperial imaginary of civilised social order.

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Distinctions among Indians in South Africa shaped life well into the 20th century. A Tamil-speaking man cutting sugar cane just north of the city since his term of indenture would have had a very different set of prospects and urban sensibilities to that of a downtown Muslim clothing retailer; and that same retailer might find that his Gujarati language allowed him to have more in common with Gujarati-speaking Hindu traders than with fellow Muslims who were descended from indentured workers (known locally as Hyderabadee). Passenger migrants from Rander who spoke Urdu (known as Mia-bhai) and Konkani-speaking Muslims (Kokni), although smaller in number, practised endogamy; and it would be frowned upon for a Memon Muslim from Porbander to marry another Memon from one of the smaller villages around Porbander, who were known locally as Jodhya. Class, language, ethnicity and ghaam all weighed heavily on status and social practice.

Upon arrival, this diasporic collection of people proved a challenge to settler statehood which attempted to unify and manage them as 'Indians' or 'Asiatics' or, in common parlance, 'coolies'. When, for the first time, in 1894, the Indian population of Natal (at 46 000) exceeded the white population (of 45 000),[22] the prospect of being swamped by 'coolies' heightened white racial hysteria. Upon achieving self-government in 1893, Natal – like the Transvaal at this time – passed a series of discriminatory laws to restrict Indian immigration, political rights and trading rights.[23]

It was, in part, the state's failure to differentiate between Indians that inspired organised resistance. Protests were led by the Natal Indian Congress (NIC), which had been formed in 1894 by Indian traders led by Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi. With a few exceptions, Gandhi was slow to take up the grievances of indentured Indians and the NIC focused rather on the trade, franchise and residence rights of merchants.[24] From 1906 to 1910, Gandhi organised passive resistance in the Transvaal against a law requiring Indians to register and to provide all ten finger-impressions. By 1910 the movement had lost steam and, for the following three years, negotiations took place between Gandhi and the Smuts government. In Natal, meanwhile, Indians were labouring under a £3 tax, imposed on free Indians in 1901, effecting perpetual indenture for many.[25] In 1913, Gandhi (perhaps opportunistically) added this tax to a list of grievances, which included restrictions on inter-provincial migration, denial of entry to the Orange Free State, onerous trade-licensing laws, non-recognition of Indian

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marriages, and restrictions on the entry of wives and children from India.[26] In mid-October 1913, Gandhi initiated a strike by four thousand Indian workers at the coalmines in northern Natal. By the end of October, fifteen thousand coastal sugar workers had joined the strike. Mass action drew both merchants and workers, as the government's use of violence and its system of racial classification unified disparate groupings as 'Indians'. Communication between Smuts and Gandhi, and the press coverage of the strikes in India and England,[27] led to the Indian Relief Act of 1914, which abolished the tax but left many restrictions directed specifically at Indians in place, including inter-provincial mobility.[28]

In Durban, being 'Indian' was reinforced, day to day, by de facto residential segregation.[29] By the 1940s, the city's racial mappings showed Indians to be geographically concentrated in various pockets in and around the city: around three thousand working-class Indian families resided in the wetland areas just north of the city in the Magazine Barracks, which was adjacent to the partitioned location of Baumannville, the 'native married quarters' and the Msizini migrant worker hostels that accommodated Zulu-speaking men.

Indian market gardeners, hawkers and the generally poorer descendants of indentured migrants, as well as a few rural traders, settled in places like Clairwood and Merebank in the south; Sydenham, Overport, Clare Estate, Mayville and Cato Manor in the west; and Riverside in the north.[30] A striking feature of these areas was that the rich and poor lived side by side. HR Burrows has recorded that high- and low-income family units lived near each other and that there was no distinction based on income.[31] The 1952 *Durban Housing Survey* noted that 'Indian families in all areas are of widely differing economic standards', and that a distinctive feature of Mayville, for example, was 'the mingling of well-constructed houses and small clusters of shacks'.[32]

Outside of the city, white families established residences along the expanding railway line in Westville, Sea View and Malvern and, inside the city, they had settled on the sea-facing slopes of the Berea ridge from the 19th century. Although there was some integration at the bottom of this ridge, Indians of a passenger background settled mainly in three zones around Durban: a business and commercial area bounded by Pine Street, Albert Street, the railway line and the West Street cemetery; an area around Garnet Road and bordering Umgeni Road; and the Warwick Triangle between Alice Street and the Greyville Race Course.[33]

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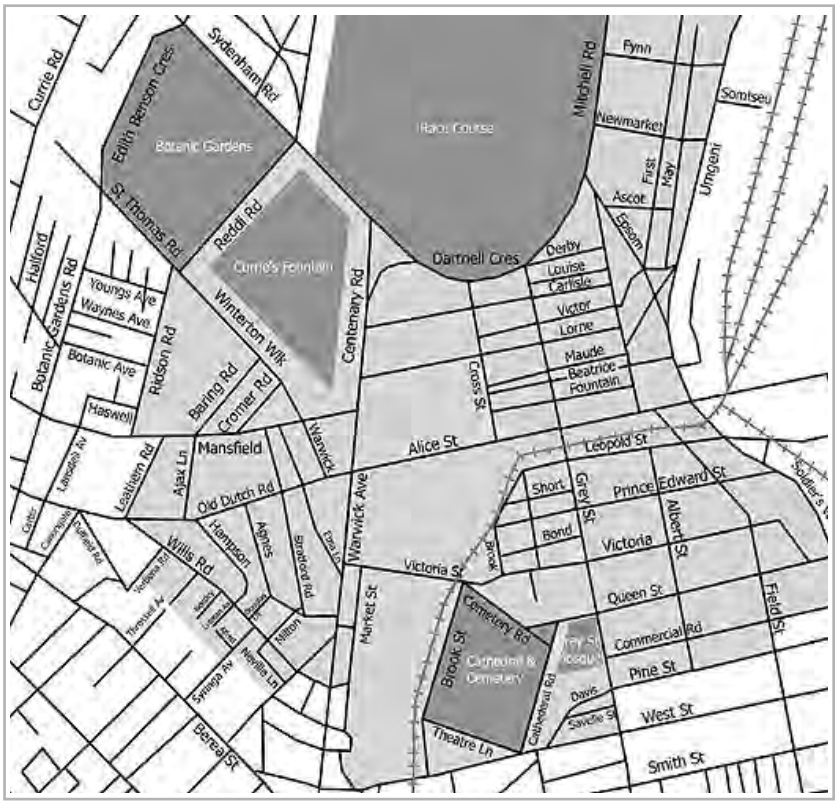

Zuleikha and Mahomed, his parents, his brother and his brother's wife and children occupied a house on the corner of Mansfield and Cowey roads, in a relatively mixed area near the Warwick Triangle. It included some important landmarks: Sastri College (the first Indian high school in South Africa) and Currie's Fountain (the mecca of non-racial sport and arena for political rallies organised by the NIC in the 1940s and 1950s). In addition, the Indian Market, Scala Cinema, St. Aidan's Hospital, the bus rank, Greyville Race Course, the fire station, Natal University's Non-European Section, and the presence of the notorious Ducheen gang all made for a vibrant neighborhood.[34] Phyllis Naidoo recalled that when the poet TS Eliot visited South Africa, he told students of the 'non-European' university that the only thing missing from the area was a graveyard.[35]

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The home in Mansfield Road that the Mayat family lost under the Group Areas Act.

Zuleikha's father-in-law, GH Mayat, was of passenger background, running a small retail store, AM Mayat & Sons, eponymously established by his own father at 130 Field Street.[36] As small traders, the Mayats of Mansfield Road were relatively well placed on the social ladder but not on a par with the some of the Gujarati-speaking Muslim social elite in terms of economic and political clout.[37] Living in the wider Warwick Triangle, however, were figures influential in shaping the period's political and intellectual life: Dawood Seedat, George Singh, George Ponnen, Hassen Mall, IC and Fatima Meer, Radhi Singh, Ahmed Bhoola and others. Dhanee Bramdaw, proprietor of the *Leader*, a popular Indian weekly launched in the 1940s, also lived here. MI Meer, editor of *Indian Views*, lived around the corner in Ritson Road. Some of the neighbours, such as Zubie Asmall, Nafisa Jeewa and Tehmina Rustomjee, would become Zuleikha Mayat's friends and peers in the Women's Cultural Group.

Zuleikha moved into her new home on Mansfield Road mid-way through a new campaign of passive resistance, this time to the Asiatic Land Tenure and Representation Act of 1946 (widely known as the Ghetto Act), another initiative by the white establishment to redesign the city on racially exclusive lines.[38] Between June 1946 and June 1948, two thousand people were arrested for

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protesting the Act's new restrictions on Indian land ownership and residence. The Mayats' house was a stone's throw from Currie's Fountain, where many of the rallies were held. The same site hosted the British royal family during their visit to the city in July 1947, when (despite a call by the NIC to boycott the event) sixty-five thousand Indians filled the stadium to honour King George VI, his wife and their two daughters, Princesses Elizabeth and Margaret, who were seated on a platform that was a replica of the Taj Mahal.[39]

Clearly, it was a creolising and politically complicated idea of 'Indianness' that operated in Durban, with a multifarious set of references, material resources and often contradictory symbols both binding people together and separating them in onion-like layers of identification: locally, regionally and in relation to the 'mother' nation across its namesake ocean, which – at the time Zuleikha was beginning her Durban life – was heading towards independence from British colonial rule, led by Mohandas Gandhi and Jawaharlal Nehru.

Other bottles and other blends

The Mayats lived in a double-storey house. Each couple had a bedroom on the top floor. The shared lounge, dining room and kitchen were downstairs. For a young woman living in a patrilocal, extended family, there were inevitable challenges but the most immediate one was cooking. The two sisters-in-law shared this daily responsibility, but 'my mother-in-law would occasionally come in and supervise'. Zuleikha was conscious of her small-town roots, which, in the eyes of many urbanites, made her a ghaamariya – a villager or peasant.

> Here [in Durban] the cooking was much more sophisticated but I learnt under them…In the beginning I was really a rookie. I didn't know much of cooking, not their standard…My sister-in-law was really an excellent, a *par excellence*, cook, and so was my mother-in-law…A bit of humiliation, a bit of embarrassment, because you had to ask and then try and show that you knew a bit. You couldn't show that you were absolutely, you know, ignorant or something. So it was a bit of a challenge…there were tensions. Our home, now you must know, was a [replica] of the whole area. This sort of tension went on in every home. The one had to show that 'I know much more than her', and the other had to now pretend that she also knows something, and that sort of thing.

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This could have proved difficult for someone of Zuleikha's independence but Mahomed was

> a determined husband who wanted a companion, so he saw to it that I met interesting characters: he took me to an old uncle in Verulam who narrated lovely incidents of the past; he took me to lectures and cinema when in those days ladies from 'good' homes didn't frequent such places.[40]

He 'was a person who wanted a wife to walk alongside him, not behind him. Wherever he went he wanted to take me and that was breaking a lot of ground in Durban,' Zuleikha remembers.

> You know in Indian society, once you get married you're not your husband's wife, you're the daughter-in-law…look, I don't blame the old people, that was how the tradition was. You are the ornament of the house, right, and you do exactly what they tell you. And Mahomed had to fight to get me, you know, wherever he wanted to go to. He wanted me to be a companion, not just a wife and that is what I wanted too.[41]

As a new couple in Durban in the 1940s and 1950s, however, their movements were somewhat constricted by conventions of gender. When they attended public events together – films, sports events or meetings – they found themselves continually testing boundaries. While Mahomed was filled with the confident zeal of a young man with movie-star good looks and the standing of a professional occupation, Zuleikha the daughter-in-law and wife was compelled to be more diplomatic. She remembers her in-laws as 'a very caring family who went a long way in catering for my views and hobbies, but that was not enough for one who was still on a learning curve!'[42] It was clear that they, like other families, were concerned with reputation and suggested as much to Zuleikha. Mahomed, in some anger, hinted at a gendered double standard within 'community norms' (his strong view was that the reason husbands did not want their wives at the cinema was because they were frequently accompanied by their mistresses).

Mahomed would, throughout their marriage, insist that Zuleikha accompany him wherever he went: to medical conferences in India, Afghanistan and Russia; on trips to Nigeria, where they entered without a visa; and, in the 1960s, to London when he worked at the Royal College of Obstetricians and

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Sightseeing in Cairo: in a world becoming more accessible via air transport, the Mayats travelled extensively, returning to entertain their friends with slide shows of their trips.

Gynaecologists in Hammersmith as a trainee. Experiences of travel opened up a world of discovery for Zuleikha, as well as opportunities for further education. During their nine months in London, she enrolled for two semesters at the University of London's School of Oriental and African Studies, taking courses in Urdu and Islamic Studies. She also 'tried to do Indian Music but the professor – it was winter – we had to go into his little room and there will be a heater and he will put the music on and I would be asleep'[*laughs*].

Back in Durban, the young couple crossed into spaces that were (by law or by custom) exclusively male. The 'magnificent' Orient Club, for example, situated on thirty-five acres of land in Isipingo about twenty kilometres south of Durban, was one such space.[43] Since 1927, it had provided for hospitality and formal meetings in exclusive opulence. A visitor in 1936 remarked that 'having seen great parks with their fascinating fountains playing at London, Cairo, Versailles, and Constantinople, I can assure you that this club in its beauty, layout and approach, can compare well with any of the gardens'.[44] GH Calpin, friend and biographer of AI Kajee, observed that the luncheons for white guests were so lavish that 'I fancy that the majority of Europeans…have left wondering what Indians have to complain about, so pleasant are the surroundings and so obvious the signs of hospitality'.[45] By the 1950s, the club was a meeting ground for Muslim professionals and businessmen. It was abuzz with activity on Sundays when the men were treated to a film show and swam or played tennis, snooker or cards. When Mahomed brought Zuleikha with

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him to a meeting, it upset decorum and caused excitement. And, as if being the only woman in a room full of astonished men was not sufficient discomfort for his brave wife, Mahomed iced the cake with his signature wicked humour. Zuleikha laughs, recalling that she had gone in and 'sat right at the back. Now, [when] Mahomed had to pass the vote of thanks, he began, "Gentlemen and the lady at the back". You know, I could have throttled him!'

The strong relationship between the couple made room for Zuleikha to be active in her own right. In a clearly well-used turn of phrase she declares that 'one often hears that behind every man is a woman. Well, behind me, there was Mahomed.' Her husband, then, was an enabling male figure, using his status in the community to open up a space of social legitimation along with the advocacy he offered privately. He had confidence in his wife's abilities and a desire to see her use her talents. '[Mahomed] would tell me, "Don't hang onto me. You're my wife, fine, but…do something for yourself, right?" And this is why I got so involved in so many things.'

The support was mutual. Nafisa Jeewa, a long-time family friend as well as a former member of the Women's Cultural Group, reflects on the match:

> Dr Mayat was tall and handsome…fair, blue eyes…so if he entered a room he was that kind of a, a very commanding person. If he entered a room, he'd make an impression…And then Julu was quite a backbone for him as well, you know, she had his support in a different way but she urged him on too…Julu's got a very strong personality. When [Mahomed] became a gynaecologist it was 'wow', right? And then, if your husband is a 'wow' you had to live up to that expectation in those days. But if you are [also] a strong personality from the outset, then you are your *own* personality, then you are not under his shadow.

Zuleikha's experience highlights some of the ways in which gender and marital heterosexuality shaped life for Muslim women in mid-century Durban. If the institution of marital partnership could be a vehicle for crossing over customary gender lines, it also played a role in shaping society across the boundaries of race among the city's liberal and professional classes.

Pockets of Indian-white inter-racial co-operation originated in the Round Table Conference between South Africa and India held from December 1926 to January 1927, when the Indian government agreed to a voluntary repatri-

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ation scheme for Indians and the Union government promised 'upliftment' for those who remained. An Indian Agent-General was appointed to monitor the workings of what was known as the Cape Town Agreement. The first Agent, Sir Srinivas Sastri, formed the Durban Indo-European Council in 1928, which saw Indians and white liberals working together on social services, education and child welfare. Agents placed great store on contact with whites. Kunwar Maharaj Singh, Agent-General from 1932 to 1935, told a white audience at the Durban Rotary Club that

> very few of the Indians know you individually, they only know you as a community and they are apt to regard it as a hostile community. If only they would know you as individuals, as I have known Europeans from the time of my youth, I am perfectly convinced that a great deal of this suspicion and mistrust [would] diminish.[46]

Some Durbanites of European ancestry had a similar view, believing in assimilation and an idea of progress in which good 'race relations' were essential. The institution of marriage had a role to play in expanding social networks, and husband-and-wife teams formed a gendered unit of action. Civic manners and middle-class etiquette were joined in polite, home-based hospitality: dining and conversation could expand acquaintances of similar opinion and taste. White, English-speaking men such as Maurice Webb and Edgar H Brookes were involved with Indians through the South African Institute of Race Relations (SAIRR). Their wives were sometimes involved through the Black Sash. Miss Dorey, principal of the Durban Indian Girls' High School (Girls' High), asked Zuleikha to participate in the SAIRR's literacy campaign. Together with Amina Butler, the first Muslim Indian teacher in Natal, and Radhi Singh, a teacher at Girls' High who subsequently became a lawyer, they compiled a number of books to teach literacy. Through this work Zuleikha met Mary Grice, wife of Duchesne Grice of the law firm Shepstone & Wylie.[47]

For Zuleikha, another conduit for inter-racial co-operation was Fatima Meer, who was then a research assistant to the well-known anthropologist Hilda Kuper at the University of Natal. Hilda and her husband, Leo Kuper, had moved to Durban during the Defiance Campaign of 1952 and were active in the Liberal Party. Through Meer, acquaintances were made with others associated with the university: Violaine Junod, a university lecturer and daughter of writer

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and missionary Reverend H-A Junod; Devi Bughwan, from the university's Drama Department, whose husband, Dennis, was a well-known photographer; and Doris Wallace, wife of Professor HL Wallace of the university's medical school. In the home of Fatima and Ismail Meer, Zuleikha and Mahomed dined with Chief Albert Luthuli, Alan Paton and his wife, Dorrie, and JN and Radhi Singh, among others.

For his part, Mahomed had a close association with Dr Alan B Taylor at McCord Zulu Hospital, and the professional arena of medicine and healthcare services provided a range of contacts across solidifying lines of race. When Zuleikha and Mahomed moved into their own home, about six years after their marriage, it became a standard practice for Zuleikha to prepare a big supper on Wednesdays, open to whoever Mahomed would bring back to dine. This arrangement unquestionably assisted Mahomed's career and also provided Zuleikha with some key contacts who could be invited to the Women's Cultural Group as speakers, funders or members. Chief Mangosuthu Buthelezi and his wife, Irene, were early dinner guests. Mahomed had delivered their babies at McCord Hospital and Buthelezi later delivered a keynote address for the Women's Cultural Group's 18th anniversary celebration in 1972.[48] As a couple, the Mayats hosted many visiting dignitaries who gave lectures on Islam and other topics both for the Arabic Study Circle of Durban, founded by Dr DS Mall, and for the Women's Cultural Group. Their household was also the site of evenings of culture, musha'iras and musical events. Occasionally, too, the Meers used their home as a safe-house for activists from the African National Congress:

> Like Nelson Mandela, if he came, he couldn't stay in any of the very [politically] active homes. Ismail Meer would quietly get a message to my husband that he would be coming, and my husband would pick him up at a certain garage. He would be dressed in overalls and cap like a petrol attendant. Pick him up, bring him home, he would sleep the night there. In the morning after breakfast, very early, even before my children woke up, he would be ready and, you know, a little packet of sandwiches or something for the road and a little satchel, and then we would drop him at some other garage, where he would be picked up. It was always different garages, not the same garages and so on. And then somebody else would

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> pick him up. And this went on for quite a few visits, four, five visits or so, and soon after that he was picked up [by the police].

As the 20th century reached its midpoint, state politics imposed legislation to bring apartheid notions of race, community and space into alignment. Middle-class, liberal, civil society in Durban provided some basis for resistance. Meanwhile, in Durban's working-class and impoverished sectors, alliances across social divides were made not around the supper table or in the board-room, but rather in the street and on the shopfloor. And while trade unions and national political activism attempted to suture divisions between 'non-Europeans', local tensions and fractures of prejudice created by differential discrimination were showing themselves.

The year 1947 witnessed an important development in non-racial coalition building for political struggle against the racist state. In March, South African Communist Party member Dr Yusuf Dadoo, with Dr Monty Naicker of the NIC, signed a joint declaration of co-operation with Dr AB Xuma, president-general of the African National Congress. This was facilitated by the unfolding passive resistance campaign and Dadoo's growing links with the African National Congress through his participation in the 1946 African mineworkers strike. The so-called Doctor's Pact pledged 'the fullest co-operation between the African and Indian peoples'.[49] The alliance was, however, largely constructed among political elites while, in some sections of 'grassroots Durban', identity was becoming a flashpoint for conflict.

Relative to Indians, many Africans were late entrants to the city of Durban and began to occupy nearby Cato Manor from the mid-1930s. Their unequal incorporation into the city created competition over housing and jobs. On the afternoon of 13 January 1949, large-scale rioting erupted in various sections of Durban. Details of the incident that sparked the riots remain hazy and disputed, but it is generally accepted that the catalyst was an argument between George Madondo, an African youth of fourteen, and a sixteen-year old Indian shop assistant, whose employer then assaulted Madondo. The assault took place at the Indian Market, where every day thousands of Africans and Indians jostled for space as they waited for buses to ferry them in and out of the city at the Victoria Street bus rank. Rumours of the incident set off a spate of attacks by Africans on Indians, starting in Victoria Street but quickly spreading to Grey

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Street and Warwick Avenue, and outwards, up and over the Berea Ridge, to Tollgate, Musgrave Road, Mayville, Cato Manor and Overport. When the riots were forcefully subdued three days later, 142 Indians had been killed and 1 781 injured.[50] In the days that followed, 44 738 Indians were moved into refugee camps, as many Indian homes were looted and partially destroyed or burnt to the ground. Damage to Indian-owned vehicles totalled £49 980.[51]

Zuleikha's ability to recount the detail of events indicates how the violence created a fear that solidified around an awareness of identity, an awareness of 'being Indian'. Her mother and a few family members were visiting from Potchefstroom for a holiday. Zuleikha's sister Bibi Mall was in hospital delivering her second child and Dr Mall brought their older son along with their African domestic worker, Pauline, to Mansfield Road.

> Then the rumour went that they were now coming onto the Berea [towards Mansfield] – the gangs of the Zulus. Victoria Street was where the big branch of the Mayat family was…They phoned and said, 'Everybody together, we don't want anybody isolated', so we had to pack up there and we went to Victoria Street. My husband refused to move from the house. He says, 'I will not move. There are neighbours on both sides remaining so why will I move?' So Mr Bobat from next door said, 'I've got a gun, I'll give it to you'. Of course the family was very upset that he stayed behind but he wasn't going to move. My mother-in-law said, 'Come', so I had to go, and actually [Mahomed] was quite happy that I went…so we all went to Victoria Street and there we stayed. Now, my husband then put on a felt hat and went with his car to Camperdown and fetched a rifle from there. The Malls in Camperdown were people who went out hunting and so on, so he brought it here and kept that with him. But there was no need…[Then] there was a response group from the doctors, from the nurses, from people trying to help in the hospital and so on. So he was fully occupied in that.

As raised by the figure of Pauline in this account, the presence of Africans working for wealthier South African Indians placed the reality of the racialised economic gap between communities up against personal dependencies and loyalties. For example, when SI Mahomedy sent a car for Zuleikha's sister-in-law, a woman who had green eyes and light skin, in order to rescue her from a

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holiday cottage at Brighton Beach which was about to be under attack (and which was indeed looted and set alight), their 'African driver who'd been with them for years…told my sister-in-law, "Take off your scarf, put on a hat, because I can't drive with you as an Indian woman".'

Studies analysing the riots point to the fact that Indian, African and white people were incorporated separately into the local economy.[52] Indians were disadvantaged relative to whites, but better placed than Africans. They dominated trade in the 'non-European' sector of the city, including the African areas, and, as inflation cut real wage levels after the war, the rising prices of goods in Indian stores were the most tangible index of declining living standards.[53] Furthermore, Indian bus owners controlled transport to African areas, and many Africans rented land from Indians in Cato Manor.

Patterns of domestic servitude also revealed the economic disparities of the racial hierarchy. Like many white householders, wealthier Indians could afford domestic help – African or Indian cooks, maids, drivers, and gardeners – but few Africans were in a position to hire Indian or white staff.

From the 1940s, middle-class Africans launched a number of protest actions around work, housing and transport. Many believed that ethnic mobilisation had been responsible for the success of Indians and they proceeded to use the same strategy. The stereotype of the 'trader' became useful for mobilising against Indians. In evidence put before the Riots Commission, the principal grievances of Africans were stated as: insolent treatment by Indians, overcharging by traders, ill-treatment and incorrect change given on buses, sexual relations between African women and Indian men, exorbitant rents by Indian landlords, competition between Africans and Indians for bus certificates, the superior position of Indians in industry, and general economic competition between African and Indian traders.[54]

Indians denied these allegations. In a statement to the Riots Commission, the conservative Natal Indian Organisation tendered evidence to argue that Indians were targeted because the African 'knew that his oppressor was the European, but he also knew the might of the European...He was afraid to show his hostility to the European. He found in the Indian a convenient scapegoat.' The Natal Indian Organisation also suggested that inflammatory anti-Indian speeches by white politicians 'have tended to single out the Indians in Natal as an unwanted entity. These must inevitably reach the ears of the Africans...The

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Native would not fail to observe that the general attitude of the European is to send the Indians back to their country, lock, stock and barrel.'[55] The NIC and the African National Congress boycotted the official commission that investigated the riots. They considered it 'unrepresentative', since white men who were seen as partial to the state dominated the process.

Racialised violence in 1949 fed the political agendas of the power emerging in Pretoria. During the 1948 election, the 'purified' National Party had run on a ticket warning against the dangers of racial assimilation and mixing. South Africa, it argued, was a land of distinctive 'peoples', of separate 'communities'; assimilation both compromised the distinctiveness of each group and created discontent and competition. Minister of Interior, TE Donges, would later cite the riots in Durban as evidence that the policy of apartheid was the only feasible one for ensuring racial harmony in the country.

'Every day was a historical day'

Apartheid policy developed from the Sauer Report of 1946, which advised that 'non-Europeans' be relegated to ghettos and reserves, and their mobility more heavily controlled. Apartheid aimed to 'maintain and protect the purity of the white race' through territorial segregation, labour control, Christian National Education, and separate political representation. The report was unequivocal on the so-called Indian Question: 'Indians were temporary sojourners in South Africa and should be repatriated as soon as possible.'[56] This was incorporated into the National Party's election manifesto:

> The National Party holds the view that the Indians are a foreign and outlandish element which is inassimilable. They can never become part of the country and must, therefore, be treated as an immigrant community. The party accepts as a basis of its policy the repatriation of as many Indians as possible…No Indian immigrant will be allowed to enter the country. In view of the seriousness of the problem, South Africa must be willing to make great financial sacrifices for the achievement of the aim. So long as there are still Indians in the country a definite policy of separation will be applied.[57]

Between 1948 and 1954, Prime Minister DF Malan laid the basis for the new order with a series of laws that classified and registered all residents into racial

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groupings; outlawed marriage and sex between differently classified people; entrenched and created new racially separate residential areas; and removed people designated as coloured from the common voters' roll.[58] In fulfilling his party's manifesto, Malan insisted that Indians be forced out of homes that threatened the exclusivity of white suburbs, that their trading opportunities be radically curtailed, that job reservation be more systematically policed, and rights to citizenship and political representation be denied to Indians who should be 'repatriated' from the land of their birth. No representation would be given to Indians in the legislative bodies of the country.[59]

For Zuleikha, apartheid meant that 'every day was a historical day, really. There was not a day when you were not somehow affected by the laws…[And] you had no dignity. You were just – anybody would come and say "Hello, Mary". You're a "Mary". You are "Mary"…you didn't have another name.'[60] While acknowledging that African people endured the greatest suffering under apartheid, Zuleikha explained some of the humiliation that Indians faced daily:

> I mean a simple journey, like me wanting to go from here [Durban] to Potchefstroom to visit my parents…you would have to go and get a two-and-six-penny sort of permit…And once we were asked, 'Where's your permit?' Fortunately we had it too and, I don't know whether it was my husband or my brother or something, he said, 'Supposing we didn't have it?' 'Oh, we'll lock you up, you can bail yourselves out the next day.' So every policeman was just targeting you...And once [at a petrol station]… Mrs [Mariam] Motala was with me – she was pregnant at that time. When we opened that toilet it was so dirty, she recoiled, so I said, 'Let's go into the white toilet', and we went there and we did what we did. One of the Indian attendants saw us coming out and reported to the white woman inside. The white woman comes out, rushing, 'You're not allowed to go there.' So Dr Motala said, 'We're allowed to fill up petrol here and there's a toilet and they went in, and if you clean up the other one, we don't mind going there.' And – but, you know, ugly little things like this.

The politics of race and colour intervened in an intimate way for Zuleikha and Mahomed as a couple, creating a distinctive set of 'ugly little' experiences. Mahomed could pass for 'white'. However, when paired with Zuleikha (who, in a letter to Ahmed Kathrada in 1986, described herself as unable to be

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mistaken for 'anything but a child of Indian parents'),[61] racial confusions and exclusions often trailed them. On one occasion, an obstetrician at Natal University organised a medical conference at the Kruger National Park and invited Mahomed, who could enter the Park, but not Zuleikha. Mahomed insisted that the meeting be moved to a different venue. That did not happen and the Mayats chose not to attend.

Another anecdote reveals how the visual cues by which 'race' was off-handedly determined both failed and succeeded in effecting intended exclusions while causing other complications among friends and within the complex gender make-up of a single household. A light-skinned Indian Muslim professional colleague of Mahomed's, who had anglicised his Indian name, Dawood, to David and was married to a British woman, arranged for tickets to a local cricket match. They invited Mahomed, who did not realise that they had bought three tickets in the white section. When Mahomed proposed that Zuleikha come too, the friend panicked. He showed up at the Mayats' house and suggested to Zuleikha's mother-in-law that cricket was perhaps 'not the right place for women to go'. As a gendered exclusionary tactic to remedy a racial exclusion, the strategy almost worked:

> So, after that when Mahomed comes in, he says, 'Come.' I said, 'No, I'm not coming.' 'Why not?' Because he could see the mood had changed. My mother-in-law didn't say anything. I said, 'No, I just don't feel like it.' Now he's angry, and he goes off with [his friend]. When he comes later that night, he says, 'I know now why you did not go. When we got there, [my friend] was trying to take me into the white section. I said, "No… we can't go in there." He says, "[But my wife] is already inside there." "Sorry, I'm not going there." So his friend is in a quandary! He says, 'Alright then, let's go.' Now they're trying to get into the Indian section and that [ticket-vending] chappie says, 'You pay proper tickets and go into the white section,' [*laughs*] because they thought it was for cheaper tickets that they were going [into the Indian section]. So, they start talking in Gujarati. Then they were let through [as Indians].

While uncertainties sometimes enabled negotiation, the lines of identity had material consequences and the visual cues of racial perceptions could rapidly freeze into rigidity, creating conditions in which individuals were rendered powerless.

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Zuleikha's early life in Potchefstroom, with its zesty blend of cultural flavours and timbre of different languages, the comings and goings, the buying and selling, the variety of colours and creeds, greatly shaped the understandings of diversity and community that she brought with her to Durban. With this pickle-mix of pluralism, a sense of community informed her social interests and involvements, as well as her views of political change. It is not surprising that, initially, she found the social circles of married, middle-class Muslim life in Durban to be insular and confined compared with the interchanges in the family shop of her childhood.

> You knew that there were different people with different histories and all of this made life very interesting for me, and when I came to Durban and I was in Mansfield Road, in a family, just Muslims, I felt cramped, you know – you miss that cross-cultural mix of people that you used to mix and talk and interact with. And this is why I really started the Women's Cultural Group. Because I wanted different people to be in the Group so that they could know of each other. I mean, you live in the same country!

Diversity would not come looking for her: she, her sister Bibi, and her friends and associates would have to seek it out and labour to create a space for it. A women's group would also be the way in which to realise those civic aspirations that were nurtured in Zuleikha's early dreams of becoming a doctor: the upliftment of women's status and the service to the community she had aspired to as she studied English and mathematics through correspondence courses. In Durban, she found intellectual kinship and a faith community that shared many of her views, and she was encouraged to express herself through writing and activism. While at least two women's societies existed for Muslim and Indian women in Durban, there was more than enough work to be done, as well as space for new leadership with new ideas to emerge. Additionally, there was a desire among Zuleikha and her peers for a space over which they could preside without deference to the control of senior women. In the venture to create a civic group of their own, many participants enjoyed the enthusiastic support of men, husbands or fathers who were eager to promote an ethos of progressivism.

Zuleikha's story – her family history and her move from Potchefstroom to Durban – highlights some of the intricacies of South African public and private life, a chow-chow pickle mix of family, class, gender, ethnicity, religion

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and race politics. Her early life shaped the vision she brought to the Women's Cultural Group as a founder member and long-time leader. Her biography also sketches a picture of how the legal contours of South African politics and the customary practices of family and religious life could be experienced, resisted or transformed by individuals. The Women's Cultural Group was founded and nurtured within the tension between constraint and agency.

For Zuleikha Mayat, citizenship meant rights and responsibilities. Apartheid was an unjust denial of both, with social inequalities that were nothing less than lethal. Writing in the 1990s, after apartheid's end, she observed:

> Apartheid, defensively labelled by the authorities as Separate Development and sold to the world as being parallel and equal for all groups, was anything but equal. All facilities, whether educational, medical or recreational, were minimal among us blacks and mostly what existed had been put up by ourselves…A child is the most valuable asset a family possesses. A citizen similarly the most valuable asset of a country…In South Africa, black lives were cheap.[62]

These words were no abstraction, no mere social comment. They were deeply personal, an attempt to make some sociological sense of the greatest tragedy of her own life. Mahomed and Zuleikha enjoyed many years of marriage together after arriving in Durban in the summer of 1947. Their partnership was heartbreakingly shortened in April 1979. The couple, along with Zuleikha's sister Bibi and their niece, was driving from Johannesburg to Potchefstroom for a family reunion. There was an accident. Bibi was killed instantly. Mahomed 'died in my arms in the ambulance'. In her memoir, *A Treasure Trove of Memories*, Zuleikha recounts the confusion about the seriousness of his injuries and the question of where he, a man whose life had been dedicated to professional medicine, should be transported for emergency care. Instead of being taken to the closer and better-equipped 'white' hospital, he was taken to a 'non-white' medical facility much further away and did not survive the journey.

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2
STEPPING OUT

In 1954, Zuleikha Mayat and a number of other Muslim women in Durban participated in a speech contest sponsored by the Arabic Study Circle. The Circle was headed up by Dr Daoud Mall, a medical doctor interested in religious scholarship and modernist interpretations of the Qur'an.[1] His wife, Zuleikha Mayat's sister Bibi, was involved in the practical functioning of the Circle's activities and meetings, drawing upon her friends to help in preparing food, raising funds, and organising events. Shamil Jeppie points out that the Circle drew its panel of judges for the competition from professional and academic institutions, as well as religious leadership, 'reflect[ing] the Circle's attempt to act as a conduit for modernity by looking to the appropriate and modern experts in a particular field as a source of advice and knowledge'.[2]

The speech contest demonstrated another important aspect of the modernist orientation of the men in the Arabic Study Circle: they were advocates of women's civic and intellectual participation. Yet, despite their advertisement in *Indian Views* announcing a competition that was 'open to women', there remained the question of how it would proceed. Bibi Mall and her friends proffered a solution. Zuleikha Mayat recalls that

> the contest, which was for men, [also offered] a separate session for women. But now: who would chair the women's sections? At that time there was

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Informal social groups like 'The Bridgeplayers' Wives Club' overlapped with membership of women's voluntary societies. Women such as Zuleikha Mayat (standing, far right) enjoyed the companionship of the wives of professional men, such as Hajra Seedat (seated fourth from left, wife of Dr Kassim Seedat) and Rookani Padayachee (seated far right, wife of Dr Nad Padayachee) as well as with women who were professionals in their own right, such as Dr K Goonam (wearing glasses).

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> no society and so on. So my sister said, 'What do we do?' So we looked around us and [there was] a women's society that was virtually on its last legs, but it still had a name, so we used their name to launch this first [contest]. And immediately after that contest, those of us who had participated formed this [Women's Cultural] Group.

For the participants, the speech contest was a literal and symbolic discovery of a public voice. This entry into public space, even though it was under very controlled circumstances, was revolutionary for the conservative Muslim community of Durban. As far as the women were concerned, this was a moment of exuberance to build upon. Zohra Moosa can clearly remember their spirited enthusiasm and that 'afterwards Mrs Mayat said, "Why don't we form a group where we can have debates and, you know, sort of get visiting lecturers to come and give us a talk, something cultural?" and we decided to form the Group'. They conferred and consulted other friends. Zuby Seedat recalls that first meeting when 'Julu [Zuleikha Mayat] phoned…she got hold of us and we all went and met there one day and we hatched the plot to start this Group'.

Seedat was asked to come to the flat in Foundry Lane where Zuleikha and Dr Mayat had just set up home together as a couple on their own. Seedat brought along her great friend, Tehmina Rustomjee. At the meeting there were also Bibi Mall, Zohra Moosa (née Jhaveri) and her sisters Bilqish and Laila, Khatija Vawda, Zubeida Barmania, Fatima Osman (later Loonat), Sayedah Ansari, Fatima Meer and Devi Bughwan – thirteen women in all. They considered the question of how to use their energy and creativity to make an impact in the community and in the world at large. Seedat remembers, 'We all thought it was a good idea. It would be fun to start something, you know…we thought there was a necessity for it', and so they formed a voluntary association, a women's society. Two years later, Zueleikha Mayat, writing as 'Fahmida' in her *Indian Views* column, summarised what the Group was about:

> Whilst there is no religious or age bar, the present members are practically all Muslim girls in the younger age group. It is the aim of this society to promote cultural activities amongst the community and entertain them with plays, debates etc. Amongst themselves, the members try to discuss and understand various problems that confront the community and to have an intellectual appreciation of religious culture and art.[3]

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The idea of a women's society was not a new or original one. By this time, Indian women had, for almost half a century already, been forming associations with an eye to helping to shape their world and improve life for 'the community' in Durban. Women's societies had been a part of the modernist imagination that shaped reformist colonial politics in India and in South Africa – functioning in liberal circles as a sign of progress and civilisation. This meant that there were role models to emulate or reject, and a widespread understanding that, in the absence of formal and customary political authority, voluntary associations could provide women (and other subjugated groups) with a measure of civic and public influence. Access to such power, however, had not gone uncontested. In 1929, *Indian Opinion*, a newspaper which was at the time edited by Mohandas Gandhi's son Manilal and published in Natal, reported that the 'women's enfranchisement movement in this country is daily gaining strength' and chastised 'mothers…crying for political rights while the children are lacking the refinement and character of olden days':

> If the mother is to be praised for the greatness of man she is equally to be censured for the degradation of man. Mother is the maker of a man – of a nation. That is why wise men have said 'the hand that rocks the cradle rules the world'. Would that the modern mothers realized their true greatness and retained their lovable femininity and directed it in its right channels, than to seek masculine powers or rather the shadow for the substance.[4]

Yet the quest for civic power was not a claim to a 'masculine' privilege or identity. Several societies for Indian women sprang up in 20th-century Natal clinging tightly to discourses of feminine respectability. The Durban Indian Women's Association, formed in 1907, initially comprised the wives of educated Tamil-speaking men: Mrs Bryan Gabriel, Mrs Ellen Paul, Mrs KR Nayanah, Mrs VR Moodaly (vice-president), Miss R Goonaruthinummal (secretary) and Miss Cecilia Sigamoney. The Association took a position on many of the issues affecting Indians at the time, speaking specifically to worries about gender morality. In 1909, for example, it passed a resolution regarding the £3 tax imposed on all non-indentured Indians. It was, they argued,

> repugnant to British justice to impose a tax upon women and girls to live with their husbands or natural guardians. The law is an immoral one for

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> it fosters domestic infelicity and leads to evil tendencies. The susceptibilities of the women must be respected. It is earnestly hoped that the tax upon women and girls will be repealed, otherwise, as the case is of a grave nature, it will result in serious consequences.[5]

In 1914, with Kasturba Gandhi, wife of Mohandas Gandhi, as a patron, the Indian Women's Sahba was formed to 'study the Hindu religion and Social Progress'.[6] New energy was given to women's education and civic participation following the Cape Town Agreement of 1927. The upliftment of Indian women was billed as an important measure of Indian social development and wives were again mobilised as a force for change. This included the wives of various Agents-General who took an active hand in forming organisations in which Indian women could be mentored in the gentilities of modern imperial culture. For example, from 1933, Lady Kunwarani Maharaj Singh, wife of the then Agent-General, presided over a refurbished Durban Indian Women's Association with Christian missionary zeal, and promoted Indian women's involvement in areas of social welfare, house hygiene, and 'general improvement'. The Association engaged in charity work, raising funds for soup kitchens and welfare interventions in the Magazine Barracks;[7] they distributed clothing, donated in cash and kind to the Red Cross, sold Christmas Stamps, bought books for schoolchildren, offered sewing classes, made speeches and played music.[8] The office holders in the Association included women from the families of prominent politicians. In 1938, for example, the officials were Mrs Sushila Gandhi, Mrs Ghadija Christopher, Mrs Royeppen and Mrs Halima Jhaveri[9] (aunt to three of the founding members of the Women's Cultural Group).

The Association extended into the community what were deemed to be women's natural proclivities for caregiving labour in the home. European women often served in leadership positions, promoting literacy and charitable sisterhood. From its AGM in 1936, we find that Councillor Edith Benson was chairwoman and that Durban's mayoress, Mrs George Cyrns, presided.[10] In 1934, *Indian Opinion* reported that the Kunwarani delivered an address to the Association for University Women in which she had 'appealed earnestly for European women to come forward and help the Indian woman to improve herself and to turn her into a decent citizen, but pointed out that this was well-nigh impossible until good schools, with free education, were available.'[11] The education of girls was indeed a sticking point. In 1931, the Agent-General, Sir

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Kurma Reddi, made a speech at the Mitchell Crescent Indian Girls School, complaining that the 'girls' school is staffed by three teachers, but there are only nineteen pupils in the whole school, which means less than seven for each teacher. You probably know that the Education Department expects a minimum number of thirty pupils to each class.' Addressing the males in the crowd, he appealed to politics and duty:

> You know that under the terms of the Cape Town Agreement we have agreed that we will maintain a western standard of civilization amongst our people. I would ask you if this is possible if our girls are not given a better education than at present? Are we not failing in our duty in this respect in not responding to the authorities when they have given us a good school and with it a good chance? The only burden the authorities ask us to shoulder is to send our girls to school.[12]

Sir Kurma Reddi expressed his disappointment 'not to find a single Mahomedan girl attend[ing] this school' and warned of the consequences for the Muslim community more broadly:

> Just think what this means. I know there is the purdah system that may be the difficulty, though it should not be for there are only girls in the school, and there are lady teachers. Where is the trouble?…Let our Mahomedan friends bring their children to school in their closed cars if they like or send them in closed carriages…I address the Mahomedan parents and ask if you are going to be left behind other sections of the community? If your girls are not educated you will find yourselves in the background. You have amongst your community some of our Indian leaders; you are the wealthiest section therein, for you are mostly traders and you are in a position to educate your girls, for you are rich. But if you remain apathetic, if you choose to neglect your children's education you will find yourselves in difficulties. Your boys are being educated; they will grow up and they will some day look about for an educated girl to marry. What will happen? Do you think they will want to take uneducated girls as their wives?

In the context of the region, the opening up of educational opportunities for girls was a general trend in both mission stations and government schools. African Christian converts were beginning to hold aspirations for their daughters

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as well as their sons, as the nursing and teaching professions became more accessible. A growth in educational opportunities accompanied the labour stabilisation strategies engineered by the Durban Corporation, as literate African clerks and civil servants were in demand to manage urban population growth in the interwar period.

Societies and voluntary organisations promoting learning, cultural values, languages and community service were ubiquitous, vehicles both of an emerging bourgeois vision and of its moral and intellectual management. Football clubs in the Durban and district areas provided opportunities for future leaders like Albert Luthuli to cut their political teeth; associations like the YMCA became prominent. In 1932, the Bantu Social Centre was created to keep male African labourers off the streets during leisure hours, but participants were quick to use the space for political organising; snooker, draughts, ballroom dancing and beauty contests commingled with meetings of the Zulu Society and, later, the African National Congress. The growth of welfare and charity organisations, some with a religious basis, such as the McCord Zulu Hospital or the Bantu Welfare Association, emerged in the momentum of progressivist idealism, sometimes with the patronage of liberal intellectuals or missionaries. The city of Durban was laden with societies that sprouted up in communitarian silos.[13]

Many women's organisations formed around this time were religious, or specific to ethnic or language groups. For example, the Durban Women's Zionist League was founded in 1933 by Helena Lieberman, described as a 'dynamic and idealistic personality', for the 'preservation of Jewish Identity and the fostering of Jewish education',[14] as well as to support Jewish refugees from the Second World War and the state of Israel. Among the League's activities were sewing groups, dramatic performances and fêtes. The Union of Jewish Women of South Africa had a Durban branch that was active from 1937. They engaged in community works, such as the 'meals on wheels programme' which served hot food to elderly and frail people in their own homes, and helped to establish the Ekuthuleni Nursery School in 1958, first in Cato Manor and later (when Cato Manor residents were forcibly removed) in KwaMashu township.[15] A group known as the Gujarati Mahila Mandal was established in Durban in 1930 by Zaverben Patel, reputedly the first Gujarati woman to get a driver's licence in Durban. The organisation's focus was on promoting the Gujarati language and

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while membership was theoretically open to all women, they overwhelmingly attracted Hindu membership. Over the years they raised funds for various social welfare and educational projects.[16] Gujarati women from Kathiawad formed the Kathiawad Hindu Mahila Samaj in 1950. Its members appeared on the local radio station to explain different aspects of their religion and part-icipated in educational projects.[17] Among Tamil-speaking women, TD Pillay formed the Mathar Sangam (Women's Group) in Clairwood in 1928. This was a mainly religious group that remained active until 1960.[18] Thandroyen Subra-mani and Rukmani Naidoo formed the Cato Manor Mathar Sangam in 1947, an organisation of Tamil women that focused mainly on promoting the Tamil language and religion.[19]

An Indian Women's Reading and Education Circle was formed in February 1935. Through the newspapers, they invited interested parties to join, informing them that the annual subscription was one shilling per year, the 'rules were few', and that meetings were held monthly. Already, in the first year, there had been

> some very enjoyable and interesting meetings and discussions on varied topics, such as the lives of famous women, including Helen Keller, Florence Nightingale, Annie Besant and some of the Greek heroines. There have been also interesting talks given by various speakers – Miss English, on the Natal Writers' Club; Miss Thelma Whitcutt, on her travels in Russia; Miss Alice Acutt, on Greece; Mrs Moore, on the work of the Christmas Stamp Fund; and Sister Pratt on the subject, 'Nursing and the Training of Nurses'.[20]

Towards the end of the decade, the Indian Women's Association came under fire for its conservative vision of women's advancement and its upper-class orientation. The Agents-General and their wives were accused in a newspaper commentary of having favoured one particular sector of the Indian community at a time when the community was in need of unification and more attention had to be given to the poor. A newspaper article in 1938 pronounced that 'the present Indian Women's Association, which was formed by Lady Kunwarani Singh, is a farce. The mere drinking of tea in one's home will not uplift Indian women.'[21] Although Mrs J Lawrence, the Association's secretary, replied with a long list of charitable achievements undertaken by members (adding also that 'the best societies drink tea'),[22] the criticism continued. Goonam Naidoo

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of Pietermaritzburg accused the Association of being 'too much on the aristocratic side' and 'an inactive body with sparse attendances'. She went on to level further accusations of tea-quaffing futility, alleging that the Association 'did nothing but attend receptions and tea parties. If this is what [they call] working for the poor, then they have certainly done something.'[23] Another fierce objection was to the composition of leadership in the hands mainly of European ladies. R Govindamah complained that 'the Indian Women's Association is more or less composed of the well-to-do and its prominent officials are Europeans; surely we have capable persons who can occupy these positions comfortably with distinction.'[24]

Meanwhile, that same year, Edinburgh University-educated Dr K Goonam, the first Indian woman doctor in Natal, petitioned the Natal Indian Congress for the representation of women and was allegedly informed that women were 'not sufficiently advanced to receive representation'. Although this response was later denied by the organisation's leadership, the controversy generated a spate of letters to the press in support of women's inclusion in politics. Several months later, Goonam and others formed a women's group independent of the Indian Women's Association, both in Durban and Pietermaritzburg. In Durban, the first meeting was held at the Tamil Institute with Mrs VRR Moodley, one of the first Indian women schoolteachers, presiding. Their aims were more radical in terms of transforming the gendered and class-based status quo. Among their objectives, which sought the emancipation of Indian girls and women, they proposed to work for the political and social advancement of women; to encourage women to enter professions, trades and occupations; and to educate women to organise into trade unions to fight for better rates of pay and conditions of employment.[25] At the end of the year, *Indian Opinion* again weighed in on the matter of women's status, declaring it 'madness' for a woman to seek equality with a man, arguing that, indeed, she was 'lowering her dignity in doing so'.

> God has created woman as the gentler sex and man is only honouring her by treating her as such…In moral and spiritual strength woman is far superior to man and if she only develops that…she will rule him and be the moulder of a nation. The present tendency of the woman in the West…will, we fear, bring about her own downfall and with it the downfall of humanity.[26]

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Yet, women were taking an interest in politics for many reasons. In March of 1939, Dr Goonam's Women's League met at the Tamil Institute and passed a unanimous resolution against proposed segregation measures.[27] And pressures for gender liberalisation were also building in the commonwealth. When Lord Clarendon met local (mainly Muslim) Indian VIPs at the all-male Orient Club in Isipingo, he pointedly expressed 'regret' that he had 'not had the pleasure of meeting some of the wives and daughters of the prominent members of the club. If opportunity occurs, as I hope it will before we leave these shores, once again to visit the Orient Club, I hope…that the omission will be rectified.'[28]

The new Agent-General's wife, Mrs Rama Rau, arriving in 1938, moved into this contested terrain when she, like her predecessor, advocated voluntary associations as a means for women's upliftment. The *Cape Times* introduced her as an advocate of women's progress and an experienced advocate of social clubs, having served as a member in no less than twenty societies, including the Students' Union of the Indian YMCA, the 'Indian Section' of the Overseas League, the Board of the International Alliance of Women for Suffrage and Equal Citizenship, and the British Commonwealth League.[29] In an appeal published in the *Natal Mercury*, Mrs Rama Rau called upon South African Indian women to emulate their Indian counterparts:

> There are some social customs that belong to an older period of Indian life which my sisters in this country cling to and which retard their progress considerably. If they could have lived in their own motherland during the last fifteen years perhaps they would be more willing to throw aside hampering customs and adopt a more progressive mode of life. In India today women are taking their rightful place in public affairs by the side of men and playing important parts with great credit.[30]

In Durban, Mrs Rau urged the Indian Women's Association into more concerted action in recruiting members, expressing disappointment 'to see that of the eighty thousand Indians in Durban only forty-five of them are members of this association'.[31] She petitioned for land to be assigned by the municipality adjacent to Durban Girls' Secondary School in Dartnell Crescent in order to build a Women's Club. The Club, stated the Agent-General's secretary to the Town Clerk, would have 'a fourfold object – educational, cultural, recreational and social'. It would offer:

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> a lending library, and a room in which lectures could be given on subjects like Girl Guides, First-Aid, Home-Nursing, Child Welfare, trained Social Service, and topics of general interest…Arrangements would also be made for cultural activities – music, singing and play-acting, also sewing and fancywork. It is proposed to have a tennis court at the Club, and also to make provisions for healthy games like tenni-quoits, badminton, ping-pong, croquet…In short, the Club will function in much the same way as the YWCA.[32]

The same letter expressed the concern that 'the backwardness of Indian women in South Africa has repeatedly been commented on by high authorities' and proposed that a women's club would do much to 'help to counteract the prejudice against the education of girls and the purdah system itself'.

Within the heavy divisions of class and identity that framed the aims and composition of voluntary organisations, a gendered ideal of progressivism was thick in the humid Durban air during this period. Prominent male figures in the Indian community could showcase their willingness to be trendsetters of a diasporic modernism by sending their daughters to school; their wives and female dependents could join women's clubs and organisations.

The women who founded the Women's Cultural Group in 1954 were, overwhelmingly, daughters and wives within Gujarati-speaking families of trader class, and a few were from very prominent families indeed. Many of these women brought broad professional and business associations to the Group, along with progressive outlooks and a family history of involvements in charitable trusts, clubs and women's societies. Yet the experiences and personal backgrounds that these women brought with them into the Group, and which helped to shape its aims and outlooks, still varied considerably. What it meant to be a Muslim woman in Durban at this time was by no means uniform. The short personal histories that follow demonstrate just how varied it could be.

Inheritances and new directions

In the early half of the century, prominent businessman AI Kajee headed an enormously wealthy household and feared few social consequences for bucking conventions: everyone was entitled to associate with whoever they wished. Kajee ran two homes, one headed by his wife Amina in Mansfield (where his

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immediate neighbour was Sorabjee Rustomjee, prominent businessman and political leader and father of Group founder-member, Tehmini Rustomjee), and another in Ryde Avenue in the then predominantly white area of Glenwood, where his alleged mistress, Pauline Morrell, the principal of the Durban Girls' Secondary School in Dartnell Crescent, hosted his many guests. These, according to his granddaughter Zubeida Barmania, included 'people like Chief Luthuli and other people [who] stayed with him – my grandmother wouldn't have been comfortable with that'. The widely read Kajee had one of the finest private libraries in Durban, and even his political opponents on the left, like IC Meer, HA Naidoo, Pauline Podbrey and Dawood Seedat, would frequent his home to access his books. Pauline Podbrey, who attended some of Kajee's parties, writes of his luxurious house:

AI Kajee with his eleven-year-old granddaughter, Zubeida Barmania, in 1944.

> His candle-lit dinner parties were posh affairs, with damask tablecloths, sparkling wine glasses, polished silver. One dressed up to go there and the men behaved with courtesy and charm. Of course the men far outnumbered the women; the only two females apart from me were Dorothy Naylor and Dr Goonam.[33]

Such a household incubated a cosmopolitan and confident eccentricity in a parochial locale. Reflecting on her girlhood and adolescence in this environment, Zubeida Barmania recognises that, in comparison with many of her contemporaries, she herself

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Zubeida Barmania and her mother, Fatima, pushed the edges of a variety of social conventions.

> was not a conformist. I think they knew that – that I was out doing my thing and, you know, I was young and running around the world while they got married to proper cousins and had their children…they sort of saw me as this liberated woman…[and] one or two of my friends confided and told me actually that, you know, our mothers wondered if you were a good influence on us. [*laughs*]

Barmania's mother, Fatima, was a divorcee – quite a rare identity at this time – who had been broad in her personal associations. As her daughter remembers, 'women who were kind of shunned by society because they were second wives, or they were not Muslim, my mother would welcome them into the home, you know, she was very much for this underdog type of thing'. Her mother was also an especially close friend of Bibi Mall and Dr K Goonam, the latter who, ironically, was AI Kajee's great political foe. Barmania describes her mother, who ran her own clothing company, as 'very strong':

> When we went to functions, weddings or whatever, I remember the men used to make her come and sit there, and she had great business relationships, formal relationships with a number of men in our community – Mahomedys, Lockhats, Paruks, all of them. They talked to her on a very

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> equal basis because she had established herself in business. My mother wearing a sari and having her own business – of course she was an exception.

Barmania's mother was indeed unusual in a community that practised strict purdah. Fatima Kajee, Bibi Mall, the cigarette-smoking Dr Goonam and another of their friends, Mrs Nad Padayachee, were also among a handful of women who dared to attend the cinema, which was seen as a largely male preserve, especially among Muslims. When Bibi's husband, Daoud Mall, started the Arabic Study Circle, Zubeida Barmania (who would later qualify as a barrister, move to Canada and, after 1994, return to South Africa, where she has served the new government led by the African National Congress in several capacities) attended their meetings and, a few years later, was among the first members of the Women's Cultural Group.

Another of the founding members, Zubeida Seedat, was the granddaughter of Mahomed Seedat, who, with his three brothers, was part of one of the earliest and most influential trading families in the town of Newcastle in northern Natal. Mahomed was the oldest of the brothers and was the first to settle in Newcastle in the late 1880s. His business did very well and he opened branches at Harrismith and Estcourt and built shops that were let out to tenants. He was involved in the Natal Indian Congress, and elected to chair the Newcastle Passive Resistance Committee during the 1913 coal miners' strike, initiated by Gandhi. Mahomed's son, Kassim, was born in Newcastle in 1897, educated at the New-castle Convent School, then in Aligarh in North India, Grant Medical School in Bombay and London University. He qualified as a medical doctor and practised for several years in India before returning to Natal and starting a medical practice in Durban.

Kassim's wife and Zubeida Seedat's mother, Hajra, was involved in the Indian Women's Association and in the passive resistance movement of 1946–48. Kassim was known for his willingness to assist people across lines of class, religion or ethnicity, and Zubeida grew up in a household where 'we kept our faiths to ourselves – so there was never any divide as to a Hindu/Muslim type of thing that we were aware of, or were made conscious of – not like today'. To the suggestion that her father was the 'first Muslim doctor in Durban' she mused, 'Was he the first Muslim doctor? I suppose he would be. I never thought about it because we never think in terms of Muslim/Hindu, that kind, you see.'

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Zubeida Barmania and Zubeida Seedat were both raised in families with cosmopolitan ways of viewing the world that informed their professional careers.

Seedat recalled her first trip, as a child, to their village of Mota Varachia in Gujarat with her father:

> People came from all over the area. They segregated them – the Indian villages – they had their own little ghettos – Muslim ghetto, Hindu ghetto, and that's how they lived but, when they heard that my father had come, they were crossing over ghettos to come because he used to practise on horseback and go from one village to the other, one section to the other, so they knew him and, you know, he would look at them and talk about their ailments.

In Durban, her father settled in North Street, Greyville, and opened his practice in Grey Street. The stream of visitors to their home included people across religious, ethnic, linguistic and political divides – AI Kajee, Dr K Goonam, Sorabjee Rustomjee, Dr KM Mistri, VN Naik, Dr Monty Naicker, 'all of them used to be in and out of our home so I knew them all…' VN Naik's family

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hailed from the same village as the Seedats' and it was Zubeida Seedat's grandfather Mahomed who enticed VN Naik to immigrate to South Africa.[34]

Zubeida's maternal grandfather, Mohamed Ebrahim Motala, arrived as an orphan and married a white woman, Sarah Briton, who died not long after the wedding. He returned to India and remarried. Zubeida's mother, Hajra, was born in 1910. She recalls that 'my mother and them were educated by governesses…my grandfather had white governesses for them, sent them to madrassah, insisted that they learn proper Arabic – sent them to Malays to learn how to do that – [but] didn't send them to formal school'. Motala lived in Foundry Lane, being the owner of the building in which Mahomed and Zuleikha Mayat rented an apartment, but he also had a weekend home in Currie Road on the Berea. Zubeida recalls that 'he had this car, [and a] white chauffeur driving them around, you know, with gloves and all that, incredible man'. Zubeida's closest friend was Sorabjee Rustomjee's daughter Tehmina:

> Her father and my father were very good friends. She used to spend more time in my home than her home, and my mother was extremely fond of her in fact…[Later] he used to fly me to Johannesburg to spend my holidays, December holidays, with Tehmi. Then they went off to Dublin, he had a house in Dublin, Tehmi did her matric there and then she came down to Durban to be with her father in the business.

Tehmina Rustomjee, who served as treasurer of the Women's Cultural Group for many years, was the granddaughter of Parsee Rustomjee, who arrived in Natal in the late 1880s and was a close associate of Gandhi. Rustomjee, a successful businessman, donated generously to educational, welfare and religious organisations, be they Hindu, Muslim or Christian. At a farewell reception prior to his departure for India, Gandhi commented that Parsee Rustomjee 'knew no distinction of religion. He was a Parsee among Parsees, but also a Mahomedan among Mahomedans in that he would do for them, die for them, live for them. He was a Hindu amongst Hindus and would do for them likewise.'[35] When Rustomjee donated £1 500 to the Roman Catholic Indian Mission for an orphanage for Indian boys, at the opening ceremony a Muslim, Zohra Moosa's grandfather OHA Jhaveri, spoke on his behalf.[36] Differences of religion were clearly secondary; a fraternal mix of class and Gujarati identities was perhaps paramount. Tehmina was the daughter of Sorabjee Rustomjee, who, like his father, was also

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Formal family portraits, such as those depicting the Rustomjees (above) and the Moosas (below), capture the weight of influence common to many of Durban's trading families. Young Tehmina Rustomjee (seated centre), with her dynamic father Sorabjee at her shoulder (wearing a fez), and Zohra Moosa (in glasses), one of three Moosa sisters involved in the Group, hailed from families with a long history of public engagement and liberal views on women's education.

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involved in transnational politics. He was a charming and cultured man who hosted visiting Indian philosopher Sir Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan, India's first vice-president and its second president; the future prime minister of India, Indira Nehru (née Gandhi); and the Aga Khan III, who was at one time the president of the League of Nations, and his wife Lady Shahzadi Begum. Sorabjee was elected president of the Natal Indian Congress in 1928. At times he was an ally of his neighbour AI Kajee, who with PR Pather was the public face of a conservative faction in Indian politics. But from the mid-1940s, Sorabjee gravitated towards the emerging radical faction led by Dr Monty Naicker, and accompanied HA Naidoo and AB Xuma to New York in 1946 to place Indian and African grievances before the United Nations. From New York Rustomjee went to Ireland, where he met Éamon de Valera, who was then chancellor of the National University of Ireland, and negotiated for the university to accept five to six South African Indian students to its medical school annually. Numerous students benefited from this arrangement until at least the 1970s.

Zohra Moosa came from a more orthodox Muslim household, but one with a deep historical involvement in politics and women's societies. Her grand-uncle, Aboobaker Amod, is widely regarded as the first Indian trader to arrive in Natal (c.1872). Her grandfather, OHA Jhaveri, was born in Porbandar and arrived in Natal in 1884. According to family folklore, he was passionate about education and attended the Boys' Model School in Smith Street, but was unable to fulfil his dream of becoming a lawyer when his brother, Aboobaker, died in 1886. This forced him to take charge of the family business. Jhaveri had seven children: Mariam, Noor Mahomed, Halima, Jubeda, Julekha, Shirin and Yusuf. He was also well travelled. His journeys took him to the United States, Europe, England, India and Egypt. He was a loyal supporter of Gandhi and served as secretary of the Natal Indian Congress for several years. He was also variously president of the South African Indian Congress during the 1920s, chairman of the Orient Club and trustee of the Jerbai Rustomjee Trust, the Rustomjee Gorkhoodo Trust, the MK Gandhi Library, the Mahatma Gandhi Phoenix Settlement and the Jumuah Musjid Trust.[37]

Jhaveri's daughter, Halima, was involved in the Indian Women's Association, while some of his granddaughters, the children of Noor Mahomed, were active in the Women's Cultural Group. They were among a handful of Indian girls who had had an opportunity to obtain a secondary education, although they had to respect strict social conventions. Ayshoo – who was once noted in the news-

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paper as the 'small girl' who 'ably conducted' St Anthony's School percussion-band performance for Lady Rama Rau in June 1939 – was conveyed to school in a curtained rickshaw. As Zohra Moosa remembered:

> My sister Ayshoo was older than me actually when she went to high school…Durban Girls', you know, in Dartnell Crescent. She used to go in the rickshaw from Grey Street, you know, because my father felt she's a Muslim girl and where will she walk from, Madrassah Arcade right to the Crescent? So he had arranged a rickshaw for her. Every day the rickshaw came to take her and bring her back. We, of course, as little ones, we used to walk…

Zohra herself did not complete matric but it was not for lack of opportunity: 'I wasn't interested, don't know why, I liked home, you know, domestic work, cooking and sewing and things like that, although my parents said I could go, but I regretted it later of course.' Zohra and her sisters maintained their grandfather's close friendships across religious lines. Zohra points out that

> as a matter of interest, Sita Gandhi, Mahatma Gandhi's granddaughter, she and I were in the same class, we were friends, I used to go to Phoenix because our neighbour was Dr Desai [a Gujarati Hindu]. Dr Desai's wife and my mother were very good friends because we lived in the same building, that was straight after we moved from Madrassah Arcade. So the girls and I were very friendly. When they went to Phoenix for the weekend I used to go with them to the settlement.

Zohra Moosa explained that women's societies were very much a part of her upbringing:

> My mother and my mother-in-law were going to this [Indian] Women's Association, and then when [my sisters and I] grew we used to go with them, too…[we would] go with them and attend the meetings, too, because there wasn't very much else for women, you know…After the Women's Association, Indian Women's Association, the elderly Muslim women also formed a group called the Mehfile Khwateen Islam, and that also, my mother, my mother-in-law, my auntie-in-law, her auntie went to attend…And we used to go there, too, because there was no other outlet, so, you know, we used to go to those meetings with them too.

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The Mehfile Khwateen Islam was the group that Zuleikha Mayat had described as being 'on its last legs' in 1954. From the perspective of the Women's Cultural Group, the Indian Women's Association and the Mehfile Khwateen Islam 'had in their heyday made valid contributions…[but] were past their prime and the activities had a tinge of maturity that did not appeal to more vigorous youth'.[38] There were other important reasons for creating a new organisation, even though by setting out to do so, Mayat, Moosa and their associates were asserting themselves within an existing tradition of community politics. As Zubeida Barmania points out, the founders of the Women's Cultural Group 'were mostly elite, you know, they were mostly elite. But [the Group] was interesting because it was a little bit – it was sort of *different* in the sense that so much was being done.' The women were seeking to do something rigorous and new but, even more, they were asserting their confidence in taking charge of a recognised and respected form of civic involvement. Although there was an initial suggestion that they might join the Mehfile and then try to play an active role within its structures, Mehfile's young secretary Fatima Osman (later Loonat) emphatically discouraged the idea. 'Don't do that, you will be so frustrated,' Zuleikha Mayat remembers her urging. The women not only heeded the advice, but absconded with her. Fatima Loonat, who qualified as a teacher, became the first secretary and a lifelong member of the Group.

The young women who had gathered at Foundry Lane, fresh from the speech contest, clearly wanted a social and intellectual domain of their own, a space in which women of their own generation could spend time together outside of the tight and sometimes insular relations of their respective households. They wanted to be independent of social circles and voluntary activities over which their in-laws and other senior women presided. Against the vertical hierarchies of generational power expressed between women in the world of the family, they asserted a horizontal front of power as a peer group.

Their sleight of hand in this move was the ideology of modernism, encapsulated in the global figure of the post-war housewife. Far from being limited by her role as a domestic goddess and new consumptive force for capitalist markets, the modern housewife was empowered by these identities. She was attuned to the world beyond the household. Mayat, writing as Fahmida in her *Indian Views* column, gave voice to the complex vision of social agency she shared with many of her peers, and to the way that gender, generation and class shaped this view of productive and engaged modern womanhood:

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> Some of my friends accuse that this column is not typical of women's affairs. That for instance it should contain recipes, hints on housekeeping and advice as to the upbringing of children. That is dependent entirely as to one's conception of what is a woman's world. Whilst recipes and training of the young are most important in our lives, such advice should come from specialists in these respective fields and not from novices like Fahmida. Granny is any day a better teacher than I shall ever be in these matters. To my mind what is rightly a woman's world is an awareness of the social and political conditions of our environment, of the country and the world. Not just an interest but a very active participation in these affairs; even more than men since we are not burdened with the responsibilities of being the breadwinners of the family. The South African housewife especially can do a great deal to make this world a better place since as a leisured class most of our work is done by servants.[39]

Such a definition of housewife does not turn on the drudgery of labour – the washing, ironing, cooking and cleaning. While women were indeed expected to fulfil these tasks as daughters and daughters-in-law, well-to-do families were able to hire domestic workers to assist with some of this work. Indeed, class privilege, and the ability to subcontract household chores out to women of poorer economic means, is part of what made it possible for some women to participate in the social and political world. In the Women's Cultural Group's story of themselves, it was also the high-spiritedness and progressivism of their age-set that provided them with self-definition: 'youth and enthusiasm were the unique qualities in those days, and these were responsible for the "*always something new*" image with which the Group soon came to be identified'.[40] As housewives, many (but by no means all) of whom came from an affluent class, the Group's origins were linked both to an awareness of relative privilege and to a shared generational interest for creative control.

Like Zuleikha Mayat, many Group members had experienced marital life within a patrilocal, extended household arrangement, in which behavioural expectations were regulated by gendered custom and enforced by older women. However, moving into the household of one's in-laws was experienced differently by different women. Because it was relatively common to marry cousins, an aunt could double as a mother-in-law and would therefore represent continuity of familial inter-relations. This was the case for Zohra Moosa, who married Yusuf

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Moosa, the son of her maternal aunt Halima.[41] In mid-20th-century Durban, marriage to first cousins was fairly common among affluent Gujarati-speaking families (with names such as Paruk, Lockhat and Mahomedy), as well as among Memonese-speaking families who trace their roots to Porbander (Moosa, Jhaveri, Jhavary and Joosub). For others in the Group, like Bibi Mall, marriage meant moving a good geographical distance away from their childhood homes.

In most homes, the premium on respectability meant that a new bride arrived within a set of expectations about etiquette, labour, time and social life. Gori Patel, who joined the Group in the early 1960s, spoke of her experience as a young bride:

> You know when you get married, you go to the in-laws too, they won't allow you all these [activities away from the household]. We had to be *there*, with them *only* and all that, you understand? Those times the married life was very, very different…Then, we used to respect our people – our mother-in-law and all of them – and, then, we obey them. They tell you 'cook this', we cook that. We got no servant; we have to do all the housework.

Education and skill-building for young girls were typically directed towards preparing for the crucible of marriage, to ensure that daughters would be able to showcase their good upbringing as caretakers of domestic wellbeing and the family. Outside that household, 'for our Muslim women, there was no activities,' Patel continues, '[just] stay at home, go visit neighbours and do housework. And then we'd learn everything – embroidery, beadwork and crochet and everything we learn. Sewing – my mother taught us to sew so we – still I do my own sewing.' For women like Patel, with limited opportunities for engagement and entertainment outside of the family circle, the Women's Cultural Group provided an array of stimulation – intellectual, civic and aesthetic – as well as opportunites for leadership in the rotating offices of president, secretary, treasurer and a range of committee chairs. Involvement with a group of peers was a source of self-improvement and recreational fun. Patel recalls, for example, that one year some of the members decided to learn to swim, visiting a private pool together and enjoying their watery freedom in secure company. In the early decades, Group members also ventured out to play tennis, take acting lessons and join poetry classes.

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If living with in-laws could be claustrophobic for some women, extended households also had definite advantages for individuals and for the household economy. Children benefited from much adult care and attention and women shared in the work of child-minding, domestic chores and meal provision, translating into a lighter load for all. Long-standing member of the Group Ayesha Vorajee spoke of the extended family as a source of resilience and abundance that provided a sense of a surety for the young; for example,

> if your parent died, like for instance your mother died, the aunt always brought you up, one of the paternal women, paternal aunts. And there was always good food cooked because everyone was living together. So there was one big pot, whatever it is, whether it was chicken curry and rice…

For Vorajee's sister, Mariam 'Mana' Rajah – who had completed a design course at the ML Sultan Technical College and, prior to her marriage, had opened and co-run a boutique in West Street – moving into her husband's household meant joining the family business, Rajah's Greenhouse in Brickfield Road.

> Before Sunrise [Fruiterers] or anybody came into the picture, they were there and we used to sell the best fruit. And people used to come from all over, but we used to give them the service too. People used to walk in and say, 'I want one kilo potatoes, one kilo onions', and here we used to dash around and put in packets and it was hard work.
>
> I worked there as well. I left my designing [career]. Then I was doing wedding dresses and things from home and working late in the night doing baking and everything. And that was nice too, but when you live with a family, they want too much of your time, so I couldn't concentrate on that as well. So that was shelved. But I still enjoy my sewing.

When her brother-in-law died, Mana and her husband were still part of the extended household, and took their two nieces into their care as their own:

> I had no children; and the two girls, my husband and I brought them up. We lived in Brickfield Road where the shop was, and then we built our house upstairs. So the one young daughter said to me, 'I'm coming up with you Mummy-ma.' So I said, 'Ja, fine' and we educated them. One did designing, the other became a pharmacist. Both got married and both have one son each…so, from the big family, now there's very few left.

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For some Group members, learning to play tennis meant having some time away from home and with peers.

Fatima Patel, who joined the Group in 1989 after she lost her husband, married into a family that was more orthodox than the one she had been raised in, and this presented challenges as she tried to adjust to her new household:

> My parents were not – we used to wear the scarf, ja, but they were not fussy about this thing. We used to stand in the shop all day. I got married to a very conservative family which never took off their scarf.
>
> For me it was a bit difficult because mine was an arranged marriage so I felt it very different when I got married. We were not allowed to go to movies, we were not allowed to go shopping, nothing…I [moved into my husband's family and] stayed with my mother-in-law until she died. Twenty years I stayed with her, my mother-in-law, my father-in-law, my three brothers-in-law and one sister-in-law...I was the eldest daughter-in-

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> law. Lucky my [own] mother was a very good cook and we [daughters] knew how to cook and all but I, when I was in Standard 9 I got – that time we had Standard 9 [now Grade 11], so that's when I got proposed [to].

Laila Ally was raised in a household of no fewer than forty family members, including six aunts, and describes her childhood in this context as 'absolutely fantastic':

> It taught me so much, prepared me for the world out there…At one time when I was quite young, growing up, I didn't even know who my mum and dad were, because my uncles were like my dads, and my aunts were like my mums…I see more positives than negatives because it taught the children to interact with one another, and it's amazing how, although there was a lot of sibling rivalry, we grew up as siblings and not as cousins. Even now we have that relationship.

Ally's experience highlights the camaraderie and co-operation that, contrary to stereotype, could exist among the women in a large household, though she acknowledges the potential tensions:

> We were forty of us living together, you can imagine how many women we were, and that's not easy, you know, taking everybody's temperaments into account. But Alhamdollilah it worked out so well, and I only felt sorry for the girls that got married into the family because for them it was like being thrown into the deep end. So I always had sympathy for the sisters-in-law…At that time, we had a roster: one aunt in the kitchen [for a week and then] she gets five weeks 'holiday'. [She'd cook] for one week [and] for that one week the entire family became her own, for breakfast, lunch and supper. She provided breakfast for everybody, lunch, school lunch, sandwiches [which at that time it used to be twelve to fourteen sandwiches] and then supper, and two of my aunts were vegetarians, so we had to make a complete vegetarian [meal] and a complete other meal.

Under the tutelage of many mentors, all in mild competition with each other, Ally herself became an accomplished cook, 'so I know how to make aloo fry in six different ways, to put it nicely'.

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Some women did not move in with their husband's families. In Mariam Motala's case, marriage at a young age broadened rather than restricted opportunities for her. She was thrust into the wider world immediately and, indeed, remembers the initial years as isolated and lonely. At age sixteen, in 1949, she set off to London with her husband, Yusuf, who received his medical qualification at St George's Hospital in Hyde Park. Yusuf was one of a handful of black medical students to have attended the University of Cape Town in the early 1940s. Racism at the institution encouraged him to leave:

Mariam was young when she married Yusuf Motala and moved to England.

> In the second year we did anatomy and physiology. There was apartheid there too – they won't allow us to have a white body, to do post-mortems on white bodies. And then when we went to the hospital, if they had a demonstration, a clinical demonstration, if it was a white patient we were not allowed. If it was a white patient, you must walk out. And if they put outside 'NE', Non-European, then you can go in – it's all right. What broke the back was the fact that now they even objected to post-mortems – even the dead whites objected to our presence there. I was getting fed up. And even some of the lecturers, sometimes they will take the white students and talk to them and educate them, tutor them, but ignore you.

Cape Town widened Yusuf Motala's social and political horizons, however. He was a regular at the parties and meetings of the cosmopolitan Gool clan. The Gool's extended family included Cissy Gool, IB Tababta and Dr Goolam Gool. Yusuf described Goolam's brother Dr AH Gool, as a sophisticated Englishman, 'he was a pukka Englishman, only played Beethoven and Bach and things like that'. Moving to England, Yusuf met medical students from India, Pakistan,

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Australia and West Africa. His young wife, however, endured extended periods of time alone at their residence at Earl's Court while Yusuf worked at a hospital in Wimbledon. For Mariam, adjusting to England

> was very traumatic because at the young age of sixteen, you know, I had not gone away from home before. I had to adjust – to myself being there. And it was, it was very difficult because there was no family, there was nobody there – very, very few Muslims or very, very few Indian people you'd see around, not many. Very few blacks you would see in those days too.

But then, England 'grew on me and I [was] getting around, doing my own thing and I had other friends, South African friends who all came to do dentistry or something else; then there were some Pakistani friends and we used to meet at weekends.' Mariam was also introduced to her husband's wider social circle and credits this period with making her more 'mature… self-reliant…independent…and open to ideas'. Upon her return to Durban, being related to the Malls, she was persuaded to join the Group and served as its president for a number of years.

Sayedah Siddique (later Ansari) was another early member of the Group. Sayedah, who was born in Meerut in India, came from an ancestral line of religious leaders tracing their lineage back to Hazrat Abu Bakr Siddique, the first Khalifa of Islam, on her paternal side while her mother's lineage is linked to the Prophet Muhammad. The 'Cultural' in Women's Cultural Group was apposite in Ansari's case. Her grandfather Mawlana Abdul Hakeem Siddique was a renowned poet who wrote under the pen name Josh (an Urdu word for 'passion' or 'intensity'). His brother, Mawlana Ismail Siddique, published numerous Urdu books which continue to be used in schools and universities in Pakistan – according to Sayedah, this great-uncle was also Queen Victoria's Urdu tutor. Sayedah's father, Mawlana Mohamed Bashir Siddique, and his brothers Abdul Aleem, Nazeer Ahmed and Mukhtar acquired the title 'Roving Ambassadors of Islam' because they travelled to places such as Singapore, Malaysia, Thailand, Vietnam, Japan, Philippines, Belgium, France, Trinidad and Tobago to establish mosques and madrassahs. Mawlana Nazeer was a great sha'er in Mumbai, earning the title Shamshul Ulema for composing shairs in Urdu, Hindi, Parsee and Arabic. The youngest brother Mawlana Abdul Aleem Siddique, became the father-in-law to the renowned scholar, Fazlur Rahman Ansari.

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Sayedah Ansari was herself a performer of Urdu poetry, a singer and a teacher. She had been involved in the Mehfile, and regularly read the Moulood Sharief, which was an intrinsic part of the Muslim landscape in South Africa until reformists criticised this tradition as bidah and succeeded in reducing its practice. When the Women's Cultural Group was formed, Ansari gave Urdu classes in private homes 'for the ladies' and participated in the musha'iras, which were a regular feature of the Muslim cultural experience in Durban.

Ansari's early experience of her family was shaped by its transoceanic nature, with close family members spread out accross India and South Africa. She had arrived in Durban during the Second World War, at the age of six, by cargo ship in the company of her older brothers. Her mother had, on this crossing, remained in India. One strong memory she carries from that voyage was hearing a siren and being helped into an orange life jacket, after being told that 'on the third siren' they would 'jump' into the lifeboat because a submarine was beneath the ship. When the third siren did not sound, she remembers a scene of relieved prayers and crying among the grown-ups but that she had felt distinctly 'disappointed. No jumping!' That same voyage to her new home also brought her to meet her father for the first time. Mawlana Bashir had left Meerut while his wife was pregnant with Sayedah. The only description of him she remembers bringing with her: 'He'll be tall and he got turban.'

> So that is how, when I see my father I said, 'There's my father!' When the immigration officer came he said, 'Who's your father here?' So I just pointed my finger towards my father because there was nobody taller than him and with a turban – I was very impressed with him. I was very thrilled. I just hugged him.

When Sayedah's mother arrived in Durban a few years later, she became ill and Sayedah, aged ten, cared for the family and younger siblings in the daytime, and her father instructed her in languages, Persian scholarship and Islam in the evenings. Her marriage had been tentatively arranged, but it was left to her to approve of the choice: at a picnic, she was able to spot the young man at a distance, liked the look of him and assented to the match.

Khatija Vawda, a founding member, was the daughter of GH Mayet and Mymooha Vawda. She grew up in an extended family that was spread out geographically across the province of Natal. She was born in 1926 and was one

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of several children: Ahmed, Fatima, Ayesha, Hawa and Amina. Her father ran a company in Durban that manufactured paper for cigarettes. When the business became insolvent, he relocated to Newcastle, where his wife's family lived. Khatija and Ahmed remained in Durban and were 'adopted' by an uncle, SM Mayet, who did not have any children of his own. The fluidity of extended family meant that such arrangements were not uncommon and, after about five or six years, her parents returned to Durban. Meanwhile, her aunt, Ayesha 'Burri' Mayet, according to Khatija's sister Fatima, was

> a very social person and, as a result, we used to accompany her – Mrs Paruk was somewhat related to us so we used to go to Paruks frequently – they used to visit us and so on. And she had a lot of contacts. She, at that time, belonged to the Women's Association – the Indian Women's Association – and because she didn't know much English and didn't speak English, Khatija or I used to accompany her to these meetings.

In this way Khatija Vawda was socialised into the workings of the women's organisations. Her sister Fatima, on the other hand, did not join the Group. Slightly younger, she insisted on an education and qualified as a medical doctor and went on to become a professor of medicine at the University of Natal. It helped too that their uncle, SM Mayet, was a well-known public figure who was involved in politics as a member of the Natal Indian Congress and, at the time of his death in 1973, was its longest-serving member. It was he who read out a message of condolence on behalf of the organisation at the funeral of Chief Albert Luthuli in 1967.

While a few of the founding women would go on to become highly educated professionals, Zuleikha Mayat explained that the idea behind forming the Group was to cultivate the talents of 'the ordinary housewife, who was sitting at home, being a bonsai, really. They had talent [but] they didn't even know what talent they had.' For this reason, their friends who were scholars and doctors, such as Fatima Meer, Hilda Kuper, Devi Bughwan and Violaine Junod, were associated more as 'patrons' than regular members. 'Ours was a little housewife thing that started off – we were just housewives and so on. Also some of the members might be intimidated by [too many professional women]. So you have to protect this.'

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Ingredients of autonomy

Though occasionally the word 'feminist' has been used in relation to the Group, none of the early and current members have claimed to be part of a women's movement seeking to undermine a patriarchal order of life. This does not mean they remained silent about what they saw as gender injustice and inequality. As Mayat said, the Group was 'not women's lib', but was oriented towards the recognition of women as equal partners in the project of community development and family upliftment, with the capacity and freedom to pursue employment outside the home if desired. Without recognition and support, women's energies, capacities and native talents were a squandered resource:

> This is what I've always felt – that there's so much potential in women, so much talent, but they've never been allowed to exercise it. It makes me very, very angry. I knew of women who were running the business, who were really the earning power in the house, but yet the man was in front, maybe very lazy, not capable and so on – but he was now the big shot in the air. I know of these women who used to make mithai, right, daughters of rich, rich families who have made mithai and they earned so much and they kept the whole household running, children's fees, whatever, whilst the husband would have a little shop which was not doing well, or maybe he was working as an assistant somewhere, and that made me angry. Alright, the woman worked, it was fine, but give them recognition for what they are doing!

A founding ideal of the Group was that it could develop and utilise the unrecognised talents of women. It was dedicated to seeing women empowered, not as androgynous or secular citizens in relation to the state, but as gendered and culturally embodied agents with a capacity to offer material and moral welfare, close to home and beyond. Women in the Group did not view their political agency as falling under formal government, which was in any case not offering enfranchisement of any sort for women of Indian descent. For women in the Group, civic participation largely meant a desire to live with a fuller capacity to contribute to society within an Islamic way of life.

With passing decades and the end of apartheid, the Group's Muslim identity has been augmented. As one committed member has critically commented,

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'somewhere along the line it became just very Muslim-oriented. Not that I have anything against it, but the aims and objects have changed [from those of its founding].' She continued:

> The activities were going to be cultural – plays, you know, and we were going to – the whole thing now has changed in that they are doing more charitable work. The whole complexion of the members has changed too, the whole ethos has changed. It's become very Muslim-orientated. They have no [active] non-Muslim members. We had some but now, you know, everything has changed. I would have expected it to be slightly different with the founder members that, you know, they could have broadened their whole outlook. But it's become more narrow and parochial.

The Group did not set itself up as a Muslim women's group. Although religious ideals certainly have informed most of their activities, the Group had long determined officially to maintain a more open sense of itself. It is also the case that, for some of its non-Muslim participants, the Group's Muslim orientation was a drawcard rather than a detraction. Mary Grice, born in colonial East Africa in 1926, the same year as Zuleikha Mayat, was a founding member of the Durban Black Sash and active in the Women's Cultural Group from the 1960s as she was looking for avenues of cross-cultural exchange. In her understanding, 'the life of the members was mostly based on Muslim religion and they did everything on that basis. They worked jolly hard.'

> I perceived [the Group] as an Indian Muslim group and it was a fantastic experience. They didn't push their religion at you so that did not put me off, but their actions and the drive to raise funds and see to others was driven by that religious belief. It is sad but among whites there is much more mistrust of Muslims today and I don't know how we are going to end that.

Siko Mji, a medical colleague of Mahomed Mayat, was a graduate of the University of the Witwatersrand. She participated in many community development activities of the Group and was similarly energised by the multicultural exchanges this afforded:

> The Cultural Group came through as a Muslim group. I saw Julu [Zuleikha Mayat] as a conscientious and practising Muslim. At the time of her

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> husband['s death] she did all those rituals of bereavement of Muslims. This was new to me. It was a learning curve to me. I saw them as a conscientious and wholesome group of Muslim women but, you know, they never tried to impose anything on me, and I appreciated their culture and learnt from them. In fact, I was so fascinated that Julu must have thought I was going to become Muslim. [*laughs*]

The participation of women like Mji and Grice, who were not Muslim, held many benefits for Muslim members and for the Group as an organisation. Over its half-century of existence, the story of the Group's beginnings has been well circulated in its own literature, and all members can recite its inception at the speech contest and the subsequent launch by thirteen women. This history has had ongoing importance in affirming the identity and purpose of the group, and is worth considering here not merely as an empirical sequence of events but also as a narrative resource. Narratives of origin often assist in the ongoing conception of a group's cohesion and direction. For example, in preparation for their 50th anniversary, the joint president-treasurer's report at the AGM in June 2003 poetically recounted the Group's beginnings and development:

> Great hopes accompany the birth of a child. The young parents in whose laps the baby falls are often not well prepared for such a heavy responsibility. With prayerful hearts they start the nurturing and rearing process, seeing to its health, education, its well being, hoping that it attains adulthood to become a respectable and useful member of society. The birth and rearing of the Women's Cultural Group underwent a similar process. It was not a well-planned birth, for it was hurriedly conceived by young women who had participated in a speech contest. Prematurely born, the thirteen parents struggled to keep it alive and rear it to maturity. It was a heavy task.

Feminist scholars have observed that familial metaphors, utilised to naturalise group identity against divisive realities and counter-narratives, tend to entrench women in a narrow maternal role. Here, with a humorous admission of parental befuddlement, the Group's existence is set within a discourse of sustenance and maternal care, perhaps eliding the contingencies and class positioning that also shaped its evolution over the years. Yet, it is just as crucial to note that the

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image of the Group as 'child', a baby nurtured by its membership into adulthood, is a claim of proprietorship that allows no possible contestation. The Women's Cultural Group belongs to its members and to no one else: it is 'their baby' and they are responsible. As a claim to autonomy, the Group's founding narrative has served them in a number of ways.

Importantly, in many recitations of their story there is mention of founders and early members who were not Muslim. This religious statistic has allowed – at different times and for different reasons – the Group's proponents, critics and neutral observers to portray it as a 'mostly Muslim' association. While 'mostly Muslim' is not incorrect as a description, the participation of Parsee, Hindu and Christian women was crucial to the Group's independent conception of its identity and aims, oriented often towards a national rather than a religious delineation of community. The first instance in which the importance of this can be witnessed is in the name they selected for themselves. Over the course of their existence, it would often be suggested to them, mainly by leaders in the Muslim community, that they should rather be called the Muslim Women's Group. Yet, they had rejected this idea from the outset. This is evident in Zuleikha Mayat's account: 'And now to look for a name. We couldn't make it a religious thing, although, you know, most of the thirteen members – ten – were Muslim and three were non-Muslim.'

Clearly, the multi-religious composition of women mattered greatly to the self-definition of the Group as it was formed. It provided a means of distinguishing themselves from the Mehfile Khwateen Islam, sending a clear signal that they were not setting out to take over occupied terrain. But it also justified their forging of a civic identity that was, at least officially, independent of direct religious regulation and monitoring.

One name they considered was 'Progressive Women's Group'. This name spoke to their own enthusiasm for modern innovations and ideals, in many ways typical of the post-war period. Yet, leftist political uses of the adjective 'progressive' were beginning to circulate and, as Mayat's activist friends pointedly informed her, the Group did not fit well into that definition. Zuleikha recalls: 'Fatima Meer said, "What do you mean? You are not *progressive*, you are *retrogressive* or something like that!" [*laughs*].'

In choosing a name, the women considered their aims and their assets. As they would write later, part of what they wanted to do was 'to promote cultural

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and educational activities [and]…create an "awareness" of these in the public mind'.[42] Their constitution would make it clear that these functions would be carried to 'as wide and varied a public as possible' and 'develop and inculcate in the public of the Republic of South Africa a meaningful interest in and understanding of the culture, the arts and crafts, the traditions and religions of Indian South Africans in particular and of other communities.'[43] From this angle, cultural diversity within the Group would be an asset and a trait they would attempt to cultivate. Culture was an open concept, an avenue towards knowledge of self and other, and this openness is clearly what they wanted. Mayat says that 'after three or four months we landed with this "Cultural Group" and it somehow worked for us'.

Claiming a sense of independence has not meant a severing of social ties in the quest for autonomy, but, as Sayedah Ansari remembers, they aimed for a broad definition of culture, not one that was defined as Islamic only. This meant that they sought connections with the public face of the Durban Muslim community, but in a relationship that allowed them to maintain the terms of their own agency and identity. In practice, this has meant a negotiated relationship with several prominent men: businessmen and philanthropic leaders such as Cassim Bassa, AM Moolla and Essop Randeree, and local ulema including Mawlana Bashir Siddique, Mawlana Abdur Rahman Ansari and later Mawlana Yunus Patel. The Group cultivated ties with supportive males whose influence could open doors – not merely financial doors, though this was crucial in some of their fundraising activities, but also ideological doors. Respectful relations with men's societies or individual leaders, not to mention male family members – husbands, fathers and uncles – was crucial to claiming legitimate moral ground as they increasingly entered into public life. As will become clear in several of the chapters that follow, key males – powerful or cosmopolitan men who held modern views about women's participation – promoted their cause. While it is also true that stonewalling and the withdrawal of support from male community leaders could work powerfully against Group aspirations, the Group sought to avoid dependency. And when the Group achieved financial success through the publication of their best-selling cookbook, *Indian Delights*, they successfully diversified the basis of their organisational longevity.

As a Group of mainly Muslim women, members also have related themselves to the ulama and have, in some cases, submitted to the concerns expressed by

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a given mawlana on customary matters. These occasions are matters of principle and what Mayat has called the 'very Islamic respect for religious diversity and dignity'. For example, one of the Group's functions at Orient Hall featured Indian girls dancing. A local aalim took exception, as Mayat explains:

> He called in Dr [Daoud] Mall and he said, 'Tell Bibi that they must stop this, this is the Orient Hall, you see that Kabah frieze there? How can you have dancing there?' So, when this message came to me, I said, 'Daoud, tell Mawlana that that hall is being hired for Hindu weddings every week and there's bhajans and all sorts of things going on there.' So Mawlana then said, 'Yes true, but those are Hindus doing it, not Muslims doing it.' And that was very fair. And we accepted it. After that we would see that that sort of thing didn't happen.

Yet the Group resisted wholesale submission to the preferences of religious leadership that might seek to push them in a 'retrogressive' direction and, early on, pushed towards a greater space for religious learning and participation in religious affairs, which sometimes brought them into conflict with traditional ulema. One example is the holding of tafsir classes by women. Khurshid and Salman Nadvi arrived in South Africa in the 1970s, when Salman Nadvi assumed the professorship of the Islamic Studies Department at the University of Durban-Westville. Khurshid Nadvi joined the Group and gave the members tafsir classes – that is, exegesis of Qur'anic texts. Zohra Moosa points out that 'she used to give us tafsir, you know, meditation on the Qur'an, I used to go every week. We sometimes went to Farouk Moolla's house…because when Mrs Nadvi was very sick then Ayesha [Moolla] started [the classes], because she studied Arabic too.' The hour-long weekly classes were conducted at private homes, and for two years at the Group's Centre in Kenilworth Road. According to Fatima Mayat, 'about ten to twelve members used to attend. We used to thoroughly enjoy the lessons.' Shairbanu Lockhat, a second-generation Group member, who completed reading the Qur'an at the age of five, has always sought to understand more of its meaning:

> I had finished my Qur'an so early. The Qur'an is not something to be put on the shelf, it's a way of life – that is your guidebook, that is your encyclopaedia. I regret that I didn't learn the meanings of the Qur'an in English. In that era we were not told to learn the meaning, as long as we

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learnt the Arabic it was fine. And at that time, we were not allowed, we were not told to go to these meetings [tafsir classes]. It was just to read the Qur'an and come back. My mother and them didn't go to these meetings as such. They used to read at home every day. So supposing my mother sat this morning, she would make sure she read about a chapter, a long chapter which is about thirty pages, so she made sure that she read it. But beyond that, no. Because first there was no transport so, and nobody had cars. And then living with your mother-in-law and that, you had to look to their needs – your father-in-law and sister-in-law and all that. I don't think they had the time to do it too. But then my generation came up, and then the splurge of getting to know, read the Qur'an more, read the meaning [so that] it makes sense. When you stand up, when we say our prayers, we are reading in Arabic, but if you sit down and you read the meaning of what you are saying in prayer, you find enjoyment in that, you know what you are reading. So it's very important.

Three pupils of the Siddiqi Free School in Durban, Shaher Banoo Paruk (6½ years), Fatima Bibi (5½ years) and Ebrahim Randeree (7) who featured in the Mainly About People page for having completed the Quran within a period of 11 months.

Shairbanu's early accomplishment was documented in the Leader.

For Zuleikha Mayat too, tafsir has been instrumental in her own development. While her father was very strict in a religious sense,

> we were also allowed to debate issues and I don't know whether this is wrong, and I still keep on asking questions of myself. I've got all the translations of the [Qur'an] – Asad, Yusuf Ali, Maududi – five, six different translations. I still like Mawlana Maududi very much, especially his Urdu translation. The mawlanas don't like Maududi because he was controversial in a few places and they said, 'Don't read, [it's] very delicate – you

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> won't know where he's gone wrong'. [But] I keep on reading every morning and asking questions and so on. I conducted a tafsir class at my sister-in-law's house for five years and I finished it with a few of them. Mrs Nadvi was very strict. She was the one who had started it at the Centre. I find so much in the Qur'an, which is so broad and it is so scientific.

Such activities brought reproach from the ulema, who argued that only those who have formally studied to be Islamic scholars should provide Qur'anic exegesis. They wanted to maintain their monopoly of Islamic knowledge and also feared that some Muslims may employ tafsir as a vehicle for reformist ideas. As Zuleikha Mayat maintains, 'I respect them [the mawlanas] very much but they are also in a "trade union". They can't speak out too much out of the way…'

Another issue that Zuleikha Mayat and the Women's Culutral Group have struggled with is the access of women to mosques. Traditionally, women are prohibited from entering mosques controlled by Indian Muslims in South Africa. Zohra Moosa explains: 'Mrs Mayat, as you know her, she used to say, like, "Why can't the ladies go?" And then they used to make arrangements for ladies to be there.' Khatija Vawda remembers that 'we used to go and Mawlana Ansari used to give us talks; we used to attend his talks down there, the ladies only used to go down there'. As a result of pressure from the women, an area in the basement of the West Street Mosque was set aside for women. Yet even this was more than many men were prepared to tolerate. The pressure on the trustees to totally forbid women was sustained. The women stood their ground, and with the support of the some of the trustees, such as AS Vahed, Ebrahim Moosa, Essop Randeree and Ismail Kathrada, they were able to attend the mosque. Mayat articulated her position clearly in a letter to the trustees on 20 January 2003:

> At the outset let it be stated that I am in no way qualified to pronounce on Shariah rulings but as a Muslimah I have always questioned and debated on some issues with ulema, both local and visiting ones from overseas. Like your late father, I could not gulp down everything that was being bandied about in the name of our Shariah. This issue of 'Women in Musajid' I have pursued for nearly four decades and whenever a visiting aalim or lecturer from overseas arrived, the men started making

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> jokes about the perennial question from the Women's Cultural Group about the role of women and their presence in Mosques. They expected it to be asked. I did, and was applauded or jeered by the 'fors' and the 'againsts' in the audience. I am enclosing some material on the subject by very eminent authors, all of them belonging to the orthodox school, for whatever the modernist authors have to say on the subject, will not be acceptable until the time when the Ummah honestly start reading, meditating and acting on the Qur'anic guidelines as lived out by our Nabee (peace be upon him).

Mayat's letter is lengthy and will not be quoted in full. The following, though, is worth relaying:

> I would like to narrate my experience with Late Mujahidul Islam (1937–2002) an eminent authority on Islam who held highest posts [in Islamic organisations] in India. He came to Durban in 1979 and through courtesy of Mawlana Yunus Patel a lecture was arranged by the Women's Cultural Group at Orient Hall, but I held a private meeting with him beforehand, appraising him of the dilemma faced by women who work for a living, who maintain their families, who are working within areas adjacent to Masajid and yet at salaat times they are locked out of the premises, boss and males go to Masajid while female employees mull outside window shopping etc. I had posed three questions to him, one was about nursing and medicine as careers for women.
>
> After the private meeting I had to leave for Johannesburg and on that trip my sister Bibi Mall and [my husband] Mahomed died in the tragic accident, and I was left in hospital with broken limbs. The night of the lecture (two days after accident) Mujahidul Islam gave a lecture that had everyone in the hall, especially women, enthralled. He skirted around the three questions, but did not give any clear clarification, mentioning that these need to be sorted out. However, Mujahidul Islam came to see me in hospital and assured me that he would have the brains in India and the Islamic scholars dwell on the questions posed, and when he returned to South Africa in the early nineties he asked Shuaib Omar that I should come to the Truro Hall Board Room and attend the discussions between him and the Islamic Medical Association.

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Members of the Group challenged the pronouncements of religious leaders about their presence in mosques from the earliest days.

My son Aslam escorted me there; I was the sole woman present and Mujahidul Islam and Dr Yusuf Motala gestured that I should sit in front but I preferred to remain in the rear behind the small gathering. At the end of the discussions Mujahidul Islam addressed me saying that you had asked me about presence of women in Mosques. The pronouncement of Islamic scholars, he said, was that there was no way in which they could be debarred but he added a rider saying that women should not be confrontational but must quietly enter, perform their salaat and exit. I am confident that this pronouncement must have been related to our Jamiatul Ulama.[44] Whatever conclusion your committee or myself or anyone else will arrive at after reading the views of the eminent scholars, it will carry no weight. Everyone seems to consider himself or herself an authority on the Shariah and the views of the ultra-orthodox ulama has burrowed deeply into the psyche of persons. The mood of the Ummah currently is loud and clear: Women in hijab, back in the home, women out of mosques.

The Group's relationship with the ulema has not always been confrontational. Over the years, they consulted with mawlanas, forming solid relations with several individual leaders that led to mutually beneficial arrangements. Mayat

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had a healthy respect for Mawlana Ansari: 'My relationship with Mawlana was very good, he was quite liberal. Mawlana was quite liberal, you would phone him and he would give you an answer.' In terms of stature, Mawlana Yunus Patel replaced Mawlana Ansari among a large segment of the Muslim community in Durban. Mayat relates her first contact with him:

> I see Mawlana Patel coming out. He says, 'Is there anything I can do for you?' So I said, 'Are you Mawlana Patel? I am Zuleikha Mayat.' He said, 'I know you.' I was taken aback. He said, 'You know, every home may not have [a] Qur'an, but they have an *Indian Delights*.' [*laughs*] So I said, 'Mawlana, is that a reprimand or a compliment?'[*laughs*] That was my [first] association with Mawlana Patel.

Mawlana Patel told Zuleikha Mayat that he was starting an Islamic school for girls who were being taken out of government schools at a young age and not receiving an adequate secular education. He wanted to provide an education in mathematics and English in addition to Islamic studies, and was looking for teachers. Mayat spoke to her daughter-in-law Shameema, who agreed to teach at the school and worked with him for six years. Any religious issues that Mayat had, she would discuss with Mawlana Patel whom she 'found to be a very fair person. But the younger mawlanas coming in now, who just go straight from here to India, into those madrassahs and come back, and they think they know everything…'

Shifts in the political orientation of Islam worldwide have impacted upon the Group and the pressures they face. The following transcript of a few of the older members speaking about it with the authors testifies to how some perceive the changes in local religious leadership since the 1950s and 1960s:

> I think at that time the mawlanas didn't really object to our group at all, and we didn't do anything that was objectionable – I mean, some of our dinners were mixed [men and women together], initially when we had one dinner at Kajee Street Hall too.
>
> But then, whoever wanted to come came, and people who didn't want to come didn't. There may have been a little controversy about it, but I think now [the mawlanas] are more meticulous than they were at that time.
>
> Mawlanas didn't take objection at that time – I'm sure you've noticed too, as the years go by, they're becoming more, sort of…strict! And

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> complete segregation and all that. I mean [in the past] we didn't go overboard; we did everything in limits you know.
>
> *Interviewer*: But even what you did [in the past], *today* they will say you can't do it.
>
> Well, we're still doing it. [*laughs*] I mean we still have our mixed dinners too, as you know.
>
> But then as people walk in, you can sit with your wife down there, or you can sit separately on one side. We leave it to them to decide.
>
> We leave it to you to decide, whether you want to sit together. But we don't put a curtain or anything like that.

While Group activities have, over the years, often indirectly challenged received views of gender propriety, they have on occasion advocated for women's religious equality more directly, such as the wish to enter mosque space. Not everyone in the Group may have shared the same view, and some members declined to be involved with politics. Acting in her personal capacity, Zuleikha Mayat frequently exercised her public, journalistic voice on women's issues. In a series of radio essays, broadcast in the 1970s on a programme called *Saturday Mirror*, Mayat often recounted the role of famous Islamic women of the past, such as Razia, Queen of India, who

> often deputised for her father when he was away for any length of time. Her grounding in statecraft and warfare was thorough and so in 1236, nearing the end of his long rule, Ilututumish willed the care of his Kingdom to her. When the coterie of forty Turkish Amirs, who as State counsellors jointly held power of King Makers or Breakers, objected to her on the grounds of sex, the King asked them to show him where in the Qur'an or Shariah this right was denied a woman. To their murmurings of it being against tradition, he quoted them the many examples including that of Bibi Ayesha, wife of the Prophet, who had led an army against the Caliph; of Arjundkht, who had succeeded her father; of Gur Khan's widow, who ruled so ably after her husband's death; and of that pearl of a slave girl, Shajarat Al Durr, who had succeeded Sultan Ayub of Egypt. 'No my Amirs, I chose not Razia because she is a woman, but because dynamism shines forth from her. Despite her beauty she is not given to a life of ease and comfort.'[45]

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Over the course of the decades, the Group has aimed to interface with their own Muslim orientation without being subjected to direction from religious authority.

Under Mayat's leadership, regular members developed a thick skin to criticisms, some of which came from their own families. Yet, with sufficient numbers of economically powerful and professional men who viewed women's participation and equality as an important indicator of community progress in the modernising world, they were not in danger of exclusion. And Mayat was a stubborn, if diplomatic, leader.

Zubeida Barmania remembers that the first time she met Mayat at the speech contest in 1954 she was 'very struck by her because…there was something about her. She had spirit, she was, she was sort of strong and she had a presence, and I was really taken by the kind of confidence she had.' As Ayesha Vorajee observes, following any controversy 'there [are] a couple of phone calls from the religious fraternity, but of course, within the community Mum [Zuleikha] is respected, greatly respected. The day she is not around, I hope that we get the same sort of treatment.'

Gender and generation

Besides being an avenue of civic and cultural expression, one of the benefits of the Group for its early members was a space away from the control of family and in-laws where a horizontal peer-sisterhood could be cultivated. Members have made lifelong friendships and have been with each other through joys and sorrows, births of children and deaths of parents or husbands. The membership, however, has changed and shifted in its numbers and make-up. Some members remained in the Group until the end of their lives; others have come, remained for years or decades, and then pursued other ventures; many, too, have come into the Group and left after one or two meetings. Once established, the founding Group recruited new members, a difficult task as Mayat told the audience at the Group's 50th anniversary celebrations in 2004:

> Keep in mind that women had to be motivated to join the Group. The thirteen of us that founded it were, so to say, friends but we had to absorb more members. The young ones that wanted to join were held back by the more conservative elders in the family. When that was overcome there was their acceptance in the Group. If they found a niche

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> in it they stayed, but many could not handle the hard work that was involved and would drop [out] after a few working sessions.

Some of the daughters of early Group members, or of their friends and associates, joined the Group as teenagers. Such was the story of Shairbanu Lockhat, who first entered the Group at the age of eighteen, accompanying her mother in the early 1960s. According to her account, she found it an intimidating experience initially and sat at the back, while the older women planned and prepared and articulated their ideas. After a few years, however, Zuleikha Mayat invited her to step in as acting treasurer, because of a temporary vacancy. By this time, she was keeping the books for her husband's business and Mayat expressed confidence in her bookkeeping skills. Lockhat slowly gained confidence to join in on more of the management activities required by the Group. Now, many decades later, she reflects on what attracted her to the Group and why it is currently more difficult to find young women who want to become members:

> As you get older you think about all the lovely times we had and I think it was fun with all the youngsters, but as you see now, we are not getting a lot of the youngsters. At that time, you must remember it was the apartheid era, so we couldn't go to restaurants, we couldn't go to the beach and all that, so this was a way of meeting other people, I mean other different types of groups of people. Now, with the present genera-tion, now that you have got everything, the children get out, now they [parents] are spending more time with the children, they are making their own friends, they have got their groups, their lift clubs and things like that.

Ayesha Vorajee came to the Group in the late 1950s through a connection to Zuleikha Mayat that pre-dated the launch of the group.

> Mrs Mayat was living in the next building. And she used to come and teach my mother and my aunts, teach them English, to read and write English. From the time I was a little girl, I remember that when I was, I think, seven or eight years old, she used to come and give my mother and my several aunts English lessons.

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Mana Rajah often organised a fresh-produce stall for Group fêtes and bazaars.

Vorajee's great-aunt, Hafeza Paruk of Derby Street, was a member of the Group who often opened up her house for meetings and for culinary preparations for various events. Ayesha was invited to come along to these meetings. Like Shairbanu Lockhat, she found that the Group was a place for young women to develop practical skills and, despite her young age, she was given responsibilities almost immediately:

> Very soon after I joined they encouraged me, too. I was nominated to become the secretary. And I was the secretary for quite some time. I had just done my Junior Certificate, Standard 8, which is now Grade 10, and Mrs Mayat, who was the president at that time, she used to come home and then help me to write up the minutes of the last meeting, and so on.

Vorajee was especially drawn to the Group's passion for continued learning, the admonition to pursue education from cradle to grave. She has enjoyed the lectures, particularly (being a painter) those related to the arts.

Vorajee's sister, Mana Rajah, joined the Group before she was married, but living and working in her in-laws' business made meetings difficult. '[We] had a very busy supermarket and there were times when I couldn't make it [to Group meetings] and I couldn't go, so I sort of dropped out and then later

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rejoined.' Similarly, Sara Simjee joined the Group early in 1970 soon after she married and had children. But later in the decade, she accompanied her husband to London for a number of years, and when she returned they moved into a home south of Durban that was physically too distant from the Group's epicentre to be able to participate as a full member. She attended functions and supported fundraising events, but it was not until her mother's death in 2006 that she rejoined. By then, her children had grown up and losing her mother had meant a period of loneliness for her. During a casual visit to Zuleikha Mayat:

> She asked me, 'What are you doing?' and I said, 'Well, I'm quite depressed and I lost my mother and I don't know what to do.' And she says, 'Okay, come with me and I'll take you around the homes and you can come to one of our meetings here.' And that's how I rejoined the Group. And once I did that, I felt I was part of the Group again, you know, I felt very welcome – my daughter is working and she stays with me and I look after the [grand]children, but she says, 'No, Mummy, go ahead [and join the Group] since you are not doing anything, go ahead, do it.' And I said, 'Ya, fine,' and when I came here I enjoyed it. When we get together we not only work, we sort of socialise, we have fun, we go out, and eat. And I liked it and I said, 'Okay, put my name back in'.

She found herself taking on responsibility for the old-age home and spending time with elderly residents, involving them in crafts and other projects. In this activity, she has found herself useful as well as reconnecting with friends.

Second-generation Group members have found it difficult to recruit their own daughters to full membership status, although all count on family support to help with fundraising and often expect them to attend special events. As Ayesha Vorajee points out, 'We have been trying in the past as well to join [younger members]. I have two daughters-in-law and both of them have three children each, they are members, but they cannot attend every meeting but they are there at every function and so on.' Vorajee's point was that because of increased opportunities for women in education and work life, as well the additional responsibilities on them, all in the context of nuclear families, which has increased the workload of women in many instances, many of their daughters do not have the time or the flexibility to attend. Shairbanu

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Lockhat also emphasised that women's increased responsibilities have restricted their ability to participate actively in the Group:

> Whenever [younger women] come [they] say, 'Oh I have to pick up my children, I have to do this, I have got to do this, I've got tuition, I've got to go to swimming classes, or gym' or whatever – I think more of the younger mothers are more involved with their children [and related activities].

Notwithstanding the changing profile of the Group, and the difficulty of attracting new members, this is unlikely to mark the demise of the Group. As will be made clear in later chapters, a core of new young talent has been recruited and has taken charge of updating the look and feel of its fundraising events, and applying new technologies and school-taught skills to increase the efficiency of its administrative work. While the older members constitute the heart of a 'roll-up-your-sleeves' work ethic and retain the benefit of decades of resourcefulness in the face of adversity, the younger members bring professional skills and worldly cultural knowledge to ensure that the Group's central projects run smoothly. They, too, have passion for contributing to the wellbeing of others and believe that their own involvement in the Group has set a good example for their children, as well as being an exceptionally positive experience in their own young lives. As Shameema Mayat, a member since the early 1980s, noted, the women of the Cultural Group operate as a collective of nurturing aunts and grannies for the offspring of its membership and affiliates. In the 21st century, the Group offers something of the lavish attention, positive role modeling and discipline that inter-generational, extended family households once took for granted. A voluntary association with such longevity continues to feature in the childhoods of sons, daughters, nieces, nephews and grandchildren. So, although the Group was founded half a century ago by young women seeking a measure of autonomy from the inter-generational pressures of extended family life, what it now offers is precisely that cross-generational companionship that threatens to diminish with the rise of new family norms.

Of similar importance, the Group offers its young members a channel for action that is civic and community-based, and which departs from the growing contemporary ethos of individual accumulation and consumerism. As Shameema put it:

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> We [in the Group] are fortunate – if we can't help others then what can we do? We go to bursary meetings and when we see how little others are living on, we feel blessed. Our mission and responsibility should be to help. Even when Mrs Mayat is not here we must carry on the good work. There is great joy when you see someone benefit from the little you do.

These sentiments are shared by most of the younger members, suggesting that, although the personal reasons why women find it worthwhile to join the Women's Cultural Group have changed, these motivations are just as strong as those of its founders. They are likely to carry the Group well into the future.

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3
INDIAN DELIGHTS

In early 20th-century Durban, a woman wishing to concoct a biryani, khurma, khuri or patta employed the skills and knowledge transmitted through apprenticeships to her mother, aunts or mother-in-law. Her repertoire of dishes was largely a familial or circumstantial inheritance, falling within a matrilineage of recipes that had traversed the Indian Ocean. Women who immigrated in the late 19th century as labourers and/or wives, under indenture or in trading families, had incorporated imported and locally grown ingredients to make meals that tasted of home. The familiar savour of meat or vegetables prepared with jeera, arad, lavang, methi and other spices made daily nourishment for the body also a ritual of cultural reproduction and transmission. Just as crucially, pleasures of the palate and aesthetics of the table were a medium for local (and commercial) adaptation, experimentation and change. As in other diasporic communities, food and the material relations of sustenance reflect the varied and changing socio-economic, gendered and cultural realities of Indian South Africans.

By the late 20th century, an authentic-tasting biryani might be attributable to another skill: that of literacy. Putting gastronomic knowledge into writing reflected and shaped the way community was imagined among people of Indian ancestry and also localised changes in family, gender and class relationships. The development of culinary print culture turned household kitchens

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into public spaces and their gendered readership into agents of diaspora. In Durban, the most important text in this process was the cookbook *Indian Delights*, compiled and published by the Women's Cultural Group.[1]

The success and circulation of *Indian Delights* makes it possible to consider the interface between food and text as an aspect of cultural change – and to focus on those gendered spaces in which blended practices of cooking and literacy affected collectively imagined meanings of national or diasporic identity. There are two aspects through which this can be observed. The first relates to the compilers of the cookbook, who in their aspirations to produce a literary work – albeit one with a focus on preserving traditions – sought to make modern, public citizens of themselves. Members of the Women's Cultural Group collected varied, oral food knowledges, which they translated into replicable, print-based recipes and then collated them into a single 'Indian' cookbook interspersed with proverbs, stories and other narratives of a cultural past. Sales of this runaway best-seller have sustained the Group's civic life and philanthropic involvements for half a century. The second point relates to readership and the social life of the book as an artefact that crosses oceans and kitchen thresholds. Now in its thirteenth edition and with over three hundred and fifty thousand books sold locally and internationally, *Indian Delights* has become a standard gift for young newly-weds and culinary novices. With its

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wide circulation, this text provides a common household reference on Indian South African communal identity and its transoceanic origins.

During its first few years, the Group considered embarking on a literary project as a means to raise funds to provide educational bursaries for disadvantaged children, but members were unsure what to do. Zuleikha Mayat explained that some members 'had been working in isolation, [others] in the community, [and] we'd been always wanting to expand on our activities and also to help people at the same time, so members were constantly asked to bring in ideas'. Frene Ginwala, on a visit from London, mentioned to Mayat that she had been asked to produce a study of Indian South Africans, and that she hoped somebody with more time might take up that challenge.[2] Mayat reported this to the members, who wavered as to whether such a project was within their capacity, 'so that fell flat'.[3] But their determination grew when anthropologist Hilda Kuper asserted at one of their meetings that, after a century in South Africa, Indian South Africans had failed to produce a literary work of note. Mayat objected strongly, arguing that PS Joshi's *Tyranny of Colour* was a fine example of Indian work. More importantly, she stressed to Kuper, the masses of Indians lived in poverty and did not have access to proper education or leisure time to produce works of note.

> I told Hilda,'Listen, literature is written when there is, you know, satisfaction here. You may be angry, but the other social structures must be there. You can't be working in the shop and trying to get pennies together, sending money to India, to the family there, looking after things here – there's no time for [writing].'

But Kuper had clearly touched a nationalistic nerve and as Mayat puts it, 'I told the girls, "Come on! Let's do something".' Hawa Bibi Moosa suggested that they submit a recipe for chevda, an Indian snack made with Post Toasties, to the manufacturer of the cereal to put on the outside of the cereal box. 'If they put it on the box,' remembers Mayat, 'you'd earn some money. So when she proposed this, I said, "Leave the Post Toasties. Let's start a book!" They responded, "What book?" I said, "A cookery book!"'[4] The idea of producing a cookery book brought together some of the divergent skills and interests of Group members, those with talents in the kitchen and those with literary inclinations, where everyone's contribution could be valued.

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It was a project, too, in which the private duties of homemaker could be put to valuable use in the fashioning of a public voice and presence for women in the Group. Moreover, it reflected their generation's own experience of the changing structures and mobility of family. In a letter to Grace Kirschenbaum, editor of *World of Cookbooks*, dated 16 February 1988, Mayat explained that *Indian Delights* was 'the result of a first generation of South African women who could no longer spare the time to teach the cooking to their daughters owing to such factors as the breaking up of the extended family system and mothers having to work outside the home to supplement family income.' Perhaps even more crucially, these women were the first generation to see their own daughters with expanded opportunities for higher education and overseas travel. Zohra Moosa, one such mother, recalls:

> Somebody suggested, 'Why don't we have a recipe book?' because the young girls are all so busy studying, going to university – they don't have the time to learn from their mothers to cook. We didn't have recipe books, so we thought it would be a good idea if we had a recipe book where they can refer to it. And not only the girls, but the boys who go away too, overseas [to study] – they all refer to the book, you know.

Writing in 'Fahmida's World' in 1960, Mayat pointed to another reason for producing a cookery book:

> Indian recipe books from India are out of touch with simplified cooking methods employed here, and also that the lavish use of spices most of our people have discarded in this country. We do prefer more subtly flavoured dishes…The method of cooking employed in these recipes is simplified…The shortcuts suggested certainly take the boredom of tediousness out of cooking but they in no way compromise with the finished result of delicious taste.[5]

Initially, not all the members of the Group were convinced that a cookbook would sell. Few South African Indian women were literate and, in many circles, culinary knowledge appeared ubiquitous and not something anyone would pay money for. There were counter-proposals for a more modest project. But other members, confident in their vision, 'rebelled against what we considered to be scaling down our aspirations. Eventually, reason and common sense

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prevailed.'[6] Nevertheless, the debate appears to have fine-tuned members' analysis and anticipation of a market for such a text. Mayat's introduction to the first edition of *Indian Delights* acknowledged that 'the cookery book, as such, is something that is foreign to Indian housewives'[7] and explained how recipes and skills had long been transmitted across the generations through example. And, she argued, much more than tasty meals were at stake in this training! Young Indian women inevitably faced a specifically female economy of family reputation, in which cooking prowess featured prominently in the arsenal of talents a young bride was expected to deploy in her new marital home, as a demonstration of 'proper' upbringing and her usefulness. Mayat wrote that mothers teach each dish

> over and over to the growing daughter, so that by the time she enters another home as a daughter-in-law the recipe is in her head as well as at the tips of her fingers, and it is with great confidence that she cooks her first meal in the new household. The greatest stigma a mother faces is that her daughter has in some way slipped up in the new home. Therefore, extreme care is taken that no novice is given in marriage.[8]

Yet, all this was changing:

> With the rest of the world, our modern way of life is such that mothers can no longer teach each individual dish to daughters under the old rigid conditions. Girls stay longer at school and manage their own homes sooner than in the olden days, where they still had to serve a term of apprenticeship under the mother-in-law. Under these changing circumstances, one finds the need of a good and reliable cookery book an essential entity; one that will be a boon both to the young initiate as well as the experienced housewife, who will refer to the recipes contained therein as an aid to memory.[9]

Advancing girls' education was a key focus of Group activities and it is notable that the cookbook is matter-of-factly proposed as a practical substitute for the often insular world of extended family relations that these authors were themselves shaped by. Like post-war women in other parts of the world, they saw their generation of womanhood as an advance guard of modernisation. As such, their initiative in producing a book of recipes was an important validation of changes

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in family and women's opportunities, even as it reasserted the figure of the Indian housewife within a gendered and cultural division of labour.[10]

Indian Delights shows itself to be a squarely modern product as an expression of faith both in progress and in preservation. The authors' regard for ancestral mothers' culinary expertise can be observed in their methods of recipe compilation and their sense of urgency in translating memory into print. Khatija Vawda conveys the Group's general confidence in the power of script to archive cultural and gendered knowledge:

> One of the main ideas was to get the old recipes down. As time goes on, people forget; they use modern recipes. We used the old recipes of our mothers. Nowadays it is not mother's cooking. We wanted to retain this – retain how meals were prepared in 'them days'. The idea was to retain the old methods. Do you notice now that papad is a lost art and samoosa pur is bought ready-made? All this is most time-consuming and people don't have time. Most people buy rotis. In time to come, people are bound to forget our lentils mugh-ni-dhal – the youngsters don't seem to prefer it. But what if they want to try it? There may be no granny to show them. That's why we have the book. They can follow it.

Members drew upon the knowledge of senior members of their own families and households to 'get the old recipes down' but they also approached acquaintances and the public at large. This meant that the book's content reflects the compilers' networks and mobility in the community and around the city. Mayat turned to her in-laws as 'the whole Mayat family were good cooks and their extended family were all really good cooks'. This included her sister-in-law, Mariam Bibi Mayat, and her mother-in-law, Hafiza Mayat. 'Foreign' influence came in the shape of Mrs Gori-Apa Mahomedy, who was from Pakistan. Certainly, the mobility of Group members searching for recipes was affected by gendered and religious proprieties, as well as official racial zoning, and, in this sense, members sometimes moved across boundaries in a way that raised eyebrows. Gori Patel, for example, relied on her liberal-minded husband to legitimate her movements through the city for various Group activities in the face of community disapproval:

> You see, I had the habit of not asking the family. I just – I got the permission from my husband, that's all. Because everyone – even my sisters and

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> them – they all were very angry with me. They say, 'Now you going walking in Grey Street…[You have] no shame.' But my father was very modern, too, huh. I know. I tell them, 'If Papa was here, you know, he would have encouraged me to do [this].'

Where Group members did not have family access to grannies, they made contact through neighbours, domestic employees or employees of their family-run businesses. The aim was to produce a book as inclusive of 'Indian' cuisine as possible, and mainly as represented in South Africa. Something of their conception of what this meant can be found in the foreword to the first edition, written by Fatima Meer, which briefly traces the history of Indians in South Africa and underscores the region's culinary heterogeneity. For Meer, whatever the social, economic and political consequences of difference among Indians, it at least 'makes their cooking particularly attractive'.[11] Meer identified four broad groups: Tamils and Telegus from South India; Hindustanis from the North; and 'two groups of Gujaratis, differentiated by religious affiliations [Hindu and Muslim] and food habits'. There were, of course, many other ways of expressing differences, such as those of social class, region of ancestral origin, ethnic or clan identity, migration patterns and language. Even among the Muslim passenger classes there were distinct culinary tastes and methods of cooking between ethnic groups broadly identified as Memon, Surti, Konkani and Mia-bhai. 'The old recipes', the ones existing in memory and practice, belonged to family and ethnic lineages.

Gori Patel notes that they made use of their connections as best they could in trying to achieve inclusivity for what was to be a compendium of 'Indian' (or diasporic) delights:

> We used to go from home to home. If I, you know, I got some old grannies – say my kala is there – so I know them and I tell Mrs Mayat – then they give us recipes. We make an appointment and we take our ingredients, everything, and go there. A lot of people we went to – we went even to Tamil people's house, Parsee people's house, Gujarati Hindu people's house for recipes. Like, I don't know the Gujarati Hindu people, but the other members will know them. So she will introduce us, 'let us go to that house and that'. All recipes – and even for the confinement too – everything is there.

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The cookbook was meant to capture the diversity not only of regional but also of local preparations.[12] Mayat explains that they tried for a spread of 'ethnic' recipes from 'all classes of society'.

> I had even recipes in there from people working in our homes – those are the kalas – and my one sister-in-law, Mrs Aisha Mohamedy, had an Indian girl working for them, Lutchmee, and she virtually grew up with them and she had lots of Tamilian recipes…We've got lots of recipes from Gujarati Hindu people, from the Popatlall Kara family – Indira was a member – from the Dhupelia family – Kharunissa Coovadia, our secretary, worked for one of the Dhupelias and got recipes from them. Parsee recipes came from Tehmi Rustomjee – she was our treasurer – and Nancy [Rustomjee] and Khorshid Ginwala, who was not a member but had a close relationship with some of us and she would suggest some special Parsee dishes.

She concedes, however, that meals 'as cooked in certain strata of Hindu and Muslim homes appear to have been given preference. The simple reason for this is that access to these homes, via our members, has been easier.'[13] Mayat asserts, therefore, that the first edition 'in no way claims to be a comprehensive and complete encyclopaedia of Indian cooking in South Africa'.[14] Meer glosses over this circumstantial bias, however, producing rather a poetic sense of the diversity the book captures under its encompassing title: '[Although] a basic uniformity may be abstracted in respect of Indian cooking in general, each of these groups have so elaborated and distinguished their own repertoire of dishes, as to accommodate in each, distinctive forms of food preparations.' So, while Gujarati cooking may have had 'symptoms of upper-class cooking', the cuisine of the descendants of indentured Indians was 'subdued in the variety of commodities used, [but] enriched in taste by a wealth of knowledge in ways of preparation'.[15]

Shairbanu Lockhat, a second-generation member, recalled the conditions in which her mother prepared meals – with big families and traditional technologies. Her mother, known as Chotima (as the youngest of five daughters-in-law living in the household, she was called 'small mother'),

> was a very good cook, my grandmothers were very good too – my mother's mother [Nanima] was an excellent cook. And because we had the farm in Westville, you see at that time there were no freezers and

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> things. So my grandfather used to bring his friends and say, 'Right, cook this, cook this'. Sometimes my grandfather used to tell her on Sunday morning, 'I'm getting ten people for lunch so you'll have to cook x-amount', whatever. So my mother and them used to go into the garden, go and run up to the fowls, and bring the fowls and cut them, because you know we had to say the word 'Bismillah' (you know, in the name of Allah). They used to cut them, skin them, do it themselves; they used to wash clean, and cook it and serve. There was no such thing of saying, 'I can't do it', 'I don't have a maid', or 'I can't do it today', or something. No, if they said this had to be done, you had to do it.

Mana Rajah also grew up in a time when most people did not own fridges. Thus, 'in Ramadan the samoosas were made every day [as] there was no such things as freezers and the bhajias were made [from scratch] every day'. One result was simplicity: 'We didn't have such a big spread like how you…see all this lovely food [in the present day]. It was basic, you know, the haleem and then one other thing and one chutney.' Even the chutney required manual labour in the absence of liquidisers and grinding machines. 'My mother used to have that black – we used to call it kundi, with a little wooden rod [pestle] and she used to take fresh mint and fresh dhania and [make chutney].'

Lockhat's and Rajah's descriptions highlight another important feature about putting into writing the oral knowledge of older generations of women – the problem of their translation into a language of precision and replicability such that 'no difficulty should be encountered by the average person' in producing a given dish.[16] Clearly, the meaning of 'average person' was changing, as was the social context. Putting into writing the methods of women who crafted meals in a time where it was normative to cook for large numbers, in the Durban heat without benefit of refrigeration – thus necessitating ritual slaughter and preparation just prior to meals – required more than transcribing recipes into print from the verbal instructions of the 'women who cherished them'. It also required that they be 'brought up-to-date and, whenever possible, short cut methods devised.'[17]

In this endeavour, one major challenge was converting the measurements of ingredients, traditionally exercised through habit and intuition, into quantifiable amounts. The older women had not typically measured with much precision. Gori Patel explained:

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> You know that we ask [the] grannies, 'Ma, how much you put this masala in?' They said, 'Put a little bit.' 'And the salt?' 'No, after that you must put your finger in and you must taste.' You see, that's how they tell us, like that, and that's how I also learnt cooking.

Tasting, then, was an ongoing part of transcription from oral to textual record, and it involved the considered judgement and input of Group members. This meant that, to some extent, the Group's own preferences came into play in deciding on the stipulated amounts of salt, ghee and spices. In keeping with an age excited by scientific achievement, cookery from a printed manual offered a kind of popular chemistry for the kitchen. Gori Patel remembers:

> We put [different ingredients] on the scale and see how many ounces (that time [it] was, you know, no gram, no kilo, but pound and this thing, ounces) so that's how [we converted] from [weight] into teaspoon [amounts]. It took a lot of time – I think about one year it took to make that book – because it wasn't easy. We don't just print the recipe in the book – first, we all cook and then we try.

By the time Nafisa Jeewa joined the Group, the revised and expanded versions of *Indian Delights* were being planned and the sources of recipes were more varied:

> It wasn't so much [going to] houses – it was like talking to family members and getting recipes from them and, if you've been abroad and you ate something and you'd, you know, if they were polite enough to give you the recipe then you'd bring that with you and you'd submit that. We'd try it out and if it's feasible then [include it] because every recipe in the book is tried and tested.

A range of local influences, too, is apparent in these pages, as the use of South Africanisms such as the word 'braai' and the use of ingredients such as springbok and gemsbok indicate. Recipes can be found for 'Namaqua Steak', 'Indian Biltong' and 'Cape Frikkadels'. A recipe for 'Chinese Springrolls' and several for 'putu', 'Roast Green Mealies' and 'Mealies with Sour Milk' reveal the cookbook's rootedness also in the South African social terrain. In these recipes, and others, exchanges with various indigenous and immigrant communities make their appearance as 'Indian' delights.

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Zuleihka Mayat acknowledges that the Group's labour in this process often depended upon various women who were not members of the Group. For example, Mayat's domestic assistant, Mildred Mdladla, is the first person to be thanked in the acknowledgements section in the deluxe edition of *Indian Delights*, for 'her quick grasp of [cooking] procedures' which 'spared me many valuable hours which were sorely needed for recording and writing'. The hiring of domestic assistants and cooks was, over the decades, an aspect of change in a growing number of households. Mothers working outside the home found it possible to subcontract some of their own duties of child-minding, cooking and other chores. In some households, as in Mayat's, these assistants were trained in cooking, learning the subjective art of tasting as well as estimating – an especially important skill in preparation for Ramadan feasts, when devout members of the household could not check the flavour of the food they would eat after sundown.

Behind *Indian Delights* is the labour of bridging taste and calculation, of reconciling culinary diversity with a Durban creole conception of 'Indian' cuisine, and of preserving tradition through a celebration of change. Transcription to print, and bringing cooking methods 'up-to-date', meant accounting for innovations in culinary technologies, dietary trends, health wisdom and the daily rhythms of the modern household. While the compilers of *Indian Delights* took it as axiomatic that 'as a cook, the Indian housewife is second to none' and that 'in the handling of food, the Indian woman finds fulfilment for her talents…and this is visible when her labour of love appears on the table',[18] they were eager to account for changes in the labour process. So, for example, *Indian Delights* notes:

> The ancient Indian technique of wrapping fish or meat in banana leaves for stewing, steaming or baking, is rapidly being replaced by the use of tin foil. The contemporary housewife can no longer bother hunting for the banana leaf, even though it may be growing in her back yard.[19]

It is clear that new technologies were welcome. In regard to microwave ovens, which were becoming popular by the 1980s, Mayat wrote:

> The signs are there that they will be increasingly used in the future. For the working mother, this means a more relaxed period with her family once she is at home from work, for she can take pre-planned dishes from

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The South African context of the Indian Delights *series is evident not only in the influences on its recipes, but also in the labour processes represented in its particular formulations of class relations in the home. This photo appeared in the second edition of* Indian Delights.

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> the freezer, pop them in the oven, lay the table and call to her family that dinner is ready.[20]

The convenience of the freezer, the microwave, Tupperware containers and other time-saving technologies are discussed as part of an energy-saving and pro-family economy headed by the modern housewife. Readers are instructed also in how they can save and conserve money:

> Remember the adage: 'A woman's savings are equal to a man's earnings.' To live up to this motto you must learn to make do, improvise and substitute…Don't buy bread crumbs, rather put the stale slices into the oven from which you have just taken out your cake. The remaining heat will make the bread crisp and you can then crumb it fine. Which reminds us, do switch off the element a little before baking is done or the pot of curry stewed. The remaining heat will do the job for you at no cost.[21]

While a special section of the enlarged 'super edition' of *Indian Delights* provides instructions for mass gatherings, such as weddings ('Biryani for 100 People' or 'Gajar Halwa for 800'), most recipes are designed for daily sustenance of a modestly sized household, with proportions to serve six. This is one indication of changes in family relationships and household make-up. Another is indicated in some of the narratives within the text that convey various aspects of disappearing gender etiquette. So, 'Homage to the Serva Curry' (gravy curry), a dish which 'sustains families over lean days without making them feel like paupers', explains that 'males being traditionally the bread winners in the family, growing children, women who were pregnant or breast feeding babies, would be coaxed [by the mother or cook] to spoon off the choice bits of meat and vegetables':

> Mothers were usually left only the gravy to spoon over their portion of rice or to mop up with their bread. Often, when father insisted that mother too must have some meat, the latter would pretend that she had gone off meat or had a current digestive problem…Of such stuff are mothers made.[22]

The inclusion of tributes to idealised womanhood in the figure of the self-sacrificing homemaker/mother might be viewed as an instance of female (self-) disciplining. Yet such praises can be considered as much a reflexive

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acknowledgement of changing ideals of femininity and womanhood as a behavioural prescription, even if the construct of the past is represented as normatively virtuous. Such narratives are often conveyed with a sense of humour and playfulness introduced through hyperbole – husbands described as a 'Prince Charming' or a 'Lord and Master' who is waited on hand and foot by his 'Lady' in 'days gone by'[23]. Parody is mixed with respect for 'them days' – for example, in recounting the many social benefits for women who were part of a clan who regularly joined forces for a full day to multiply their efficiency, creating pickles and rotis to sustain many households and lighten the labour of individuals.

As women sensitive to the trends and new opportunities of their own era, even as they set out to 'preserve' the food traditions of India that could be found in South Africa, their work was necessarily transformative. The text they produced was an influential agent in the formation of a growing diasporic imaginary. Out of a diversity of private-sphere family traditions they created a public, creole conception of culinary tradition. Moreover, their own tastes, sensibilities and specific social circumstances were inscribed into what would become the 'classic' archive of South African Indian cuisine.

From household to public knowledge: publishing and marketing

In recounting the story of how *Indian Delights* was published, Mayat and other members use the kind of storytelling devices that indicate that this narrative has become something of an oral tradition. It is a narrative of overcoming various kinds of adversity, of encounters with villains and unexpected allies, of using their wits to defeat male bigotry. The manner of telling says something important about the experiences of women (housewives, and therefore private-sphere people) making their way into the public domain, the sphere of business, of men. What is clear is that Group members gained valuable skills through these experiences, which they subsequently put to use in their collective, civic life.

Once the recipes had been gathered, tested and written up, the prospect of how to publish them was a new challenge. None of the Group members had any editorial experience and typing skills were in short supply. Zubeida Seedat and Ayesha Vorajee helped to proofread the recipes; Mariam Motala (then the Group's president) assisted with typing, a skill she acquired during her stay in London; the illustrations were sketched by Fatima Meer (then a sociology

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Prominent businessman and community figure, Yusuf Lockhat, is presented with a copy of the first edition of Indian Delights.

lecturer at the University of Natal); while Dennis Bughwan took the photographs gratis. Members prepared the dishes and displays of food to accompany the recipes.[24] As Mayat recounts, once the draft was ready they were compelled to call upon the resources of men within their broader networks:

> We didn't have sufficient money to go to a publisher so I went to Essop Mota Kajee [of the firm AI Kajee]. The late Essop Mota was a manager at that time, and I told him, 'Essop Mota, we need just three of your sponsors, or the firms that you deal with, and we are going to ask them for help'. I didn't ask AI Kajee to give me anything. So he said, 'What? A cookery book – everybody knows how to cook!' I said, 'I don't know how to cook, and there will be people in future who [will not] know how to cook, so we are going to print it, it's ready. Now give us the names.'

Kajee gave the names of three companies, Illovo Sugar, Joko and Nestlé. Mayat and Mariam Motala visited each and stated their case, and were given the twenty-five pounds they asked for (one company even offered them a job, impressed by the way they had marketed their product).

With start-up capital secured, they set out to get quotations from printing houses. The first printer was abrupt and paternalistic: he described their typing as 'atrocious' and did not regard Fatima Meer's illustrations – whimsical Mughal figurines – as 'art'. In designing the sketches, Meer recalled:

> [I took] stick figures and made them run and clothed them and dressed them, trying to show the Cultural Group as an *active* group of women. I wanted to show something light-hearted because the Cultural Group were light-hearted in their approach – I wanted to depict the fun aspect. These women are a breezy lot.

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Fatima Meer's original sketches.

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Mayat confirmed:

> We were very happy with those sketches. They looked so lively. But [the first publisher] says, 'Ja, but there's something very wrong, what do you think? You don't want *those* pictures – I've got some lovely pictures' and he brought us some Indian calendars with those big, curly-haired women with the clips in the hair and so on. I said, 'This is *our* book, *this* is what *we* want. Please, we want you to give us a quotation on *that*.'

His price was 'double what the Group had budgeted' and he wanted to charge an additional amount to correct typographical errors. Worse, when they asked him to return the manuscript in order to obtain another quotation, he would not give it back. They devised a trick to retrieve their manuscript:

> So we phoned one of the members [Amina Moosa], and said, 'Look, okay, we are going back there now for the manuscript, you phone us in exactly half an hour and say that your father-in-law says to bring that manuscript back immediately.' Her father-in-law was Mahomed Moosa [a powerful figure in the community]. He had nothing to do with it. So now we went back to the printer [and] said, 'Look, we really can't come up with this [money]. We will just abandon the whole thing.' And just then Amina phones and he says, 'There's a call for you.' So I said, [mimics speaking on the phone] 'What, here? Okay, alright. No, no, no, I'll tell the printer. No, if your father insists…' and, you know, we made a little drama there, so the man gave us the thing back.

Fortunately Mr Ramsay, the second printer, was more sympathetic and there was no need to use plots and dramas to equalise the imbalance of gender power. He said that his compositors would take care of typing errors, his quotation was substantially cheaper, and he allowed them to run a second edition before he had been paid for the first. Best of all, he 'chuckled at the sketches and thought them enchanting'.[25]

The first delivery of a thousand books was sold out before payment was due.[26] Books were sold through members as well as through Indian retailers like Roopanand's and Taj Company (later Sartaj) in Durban, and Saloojee's and Akhalwaya's in Johannesburg. The Group believed that their market was not in the Indian community alone, so Zuleikha Mayat summoned her courage and found, to her surprise, a female ally:

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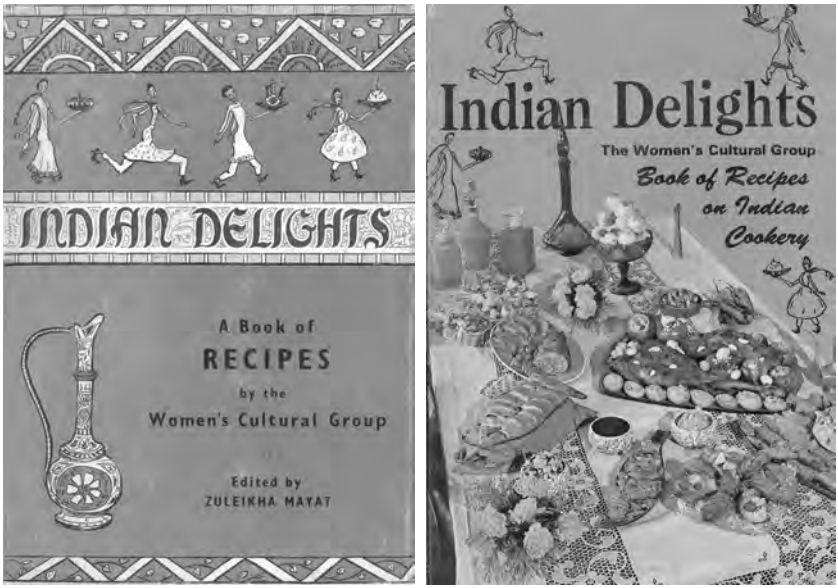

The first and second editions of the book.

> I went to CNA [a national book-selling franchise] in Smith Street. They said, 'No, the buyer is upstairs.' So I went upstairs and there was a woman who was doing something with books and I said, 'I want to see the buyer of the English books.' She looked at me and said, 'I'm the buyer of the English books.' So I said, 'Look, we've got a book here which we have printed – it seems to be very popular amongst Indians but maybe you could also sell it.' So she said, 'You'll have to leave a copy, let me have a look at it', and she took a copy and immediately they bought.

The first, 140-page edition of *Indian Delights* sold at CNA for 19s. 6d.[27] This edition was reprinted seven times over the next nine years – amounting to 17 500 copies in all. The public response was encouraging and new recipes were offered to the Group out of the enthusiasm generated by the book. According to Mayat, ordinary members of the public

> were so excited with our work that they gave us full support. Their home was always open for us. They gave lots of recipes too. Like Mrs Suleman Paruk of Derby Street, we would go to her home, even if it was for a

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> function cooking, we would do it there. If it was anything to do with books they would have it there. They would pick up the tablecloths for the photograph sessions and so on. Whenever we would go somewhere the old ladies would say, 'Oh, have something to eat, this is also a nice recipe', and they would just say it by mouth and I would come home and write it down.

A revised and extended 310-page second edition was published in May 1970. It contained many new recipes and eighty-five thousand copies sold over the next twelve years. Rapid sales of the 1961 edition had resulted in a decade-long delay in getting the second edition on the market despite public interest and demand. In fact, reprints of the first edition included an almost apologetic explanatory note to readers:

> For some time now, we have been contemplating on bringing out a revised and enlarged edition of *Indian Delights*, but pressure on sales remain unabated and we are compelled to bring out yet another impression of this popular cookery book in its old format. However, a firm decision has been taken and work is proceeding on a new, more comprehensive, highly illustrated edition.

It was in the mid-1970s that members fully recognised the scale of *Indian Delights*' print success. The Group placed an order for fifteen thousand copies, a major leap from the previously prudent practice of printing a couple of thousand copies at a time. Delivered in September 1975, every copy had sold out by April of the following year. Their new printer, Robinson & Co., required them to cede investment certificates to the New Republic Bank, which would guarantee payment.[28] Brisk sales meant that the Group did not have to call on the bank, something that members reflected on with pride.[29]

With some nervousness an order for twenty-five thousand books was placed with Robinson, partly because of demand and partly to secure a lower unit cost that would allow them to sell the book at a lower price. This was a 'difficult decision' as members feared that they might be getting into 'something we could not handle'. The books were delivered between August 1976 and February 1977, leaving the Group with a 'colossal' bill of R46 000 that was due in May. As they entered into this deal, Mayat told her group, 'Ladies, our reputation stands high and I have great pleasure in telling you that Robinson

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has not asked for any guarantees from us and has even extended terms of payment from 60 to 120 days after delivery.'[30] At the end of the year, she would record:

> Putting our shoulders to the wheel we started early last year collecting monies from creditors, cajoling merchants to buy more books, putting any cash that came in into safe investments and thereafter, even if it was for short terms, we scrounged around for favourable investment returns. The result was that Mrs [Mariam] Motala and I, with shaking hands, put our signatures to a cheque of R46 000. The cheque was posted the next morning and when Mr Quirke phoned me in the afternoon using a tone one usually reserved for creditors who owe you money and you are making the first call in this respect, I was able to forestall him by saying: 'Hello, Mr Quirke, you must be after your money?' Let me assure you the man was taken aback. He was prepared for an extension of time and here I was telling him that the cheque had been posted to him.[31]

Even without advertising, sales averaged a thousand copies a month in the late 1970s. As bigger consignments of the books arrived – no longer two thousand or five thousand, but ten to twenty thousand – their physical storage became a significant problem. As the Group did not have a warehouse, boxes of books were stored in members' own households. Those with cars transported these heavy loads, others packaged them for delivery. This was the case until a calamity struck one day: Bari Paruk phoned to say that her basement had flooded and the books were getting wet. Zuleikha Mayat and Bibi Mall 'rushed' to the scene. Around thirty books were sodden, the damp remainder were brought to Mayat's house. The Group secretary recorded the work that followed in her annual report:

> About a dozen members sweated for a full day, opening parcels, wiping, drying, dusting with mildew-preventing powder, airing each individual copy and finally making up the parcels again. Robinson's [& Co.] rushed extra dustcovers to replace badly damaged ones and brown paper and tape for the new packaging. The hard labour saved the books.

The incident produced a change in storage strategies, one in keeping with the increasing professionalisation of the Group's approach. Zuleikha Mayat spoke

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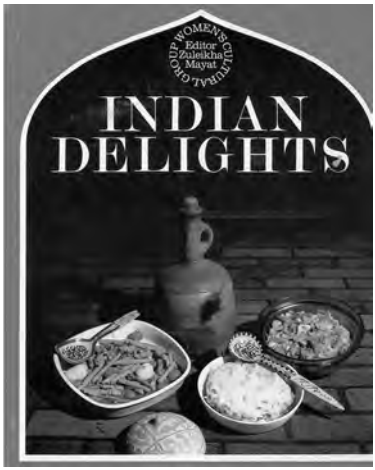
to a local book distributor, Taj Company's AH Khan, who, according to Mayat, 'said, "Fine, you can bring them", and afterwards, when Taj Company closed down and Sartaj opened, he [Mr Gani] continued, and he still stores [the books] for us – ten thousand copies at a time'. From 1977, they negotiated a fee of five cents per book for Taj Company to deliver books to retailers. They also paid an annual insurance premium. Members continued to collect and deliver small orders, however.



The Red Edition*, first published in 1982.*

Meanwhile, recipes continued to be collected and the need for an expanded edition again became pressing, but progress was slow. This was partly because of the continuing high demand for the existing edition, but also because it was during this time that Mayat, who took responsibility for much of this project, lost her husband in a tragic road accident. At a committee meeting in March 1980, Zohra Moosa said that while Mayat had done 'a great deal of work on the new *Indian Delights*, it was time for others to make a meaningful contribution'. With typing assistance from non-member Sabera Desai, as well as members who tested new recipes, Mayat edited a 400-page, enlarged super edition that was published in 1982 and became known as the *Red Edition*. To its editors, this expanded version felt like a new level of accomplishment, both in content and appearance. In a letter to Ahmed Kathrada which he received at Robben Island on 8 May, Mayat expressed her pleasure:

> Congratulate me. The new *Indian Delights* is out and it is a beauty. As my children say, it's no longer housewifey but professional, meaning thereby that [Durban artist] Andrew Verster who had been responsible for the arrangement deserves the credit for appearance. The public that had patiently been waiting for this new edition has just overwhelmed us with orders, and that has not given us time to launch or publicise it yet. Price R10.95+GST.[32]

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The book was launched at the *Natal Mercury* Auditorium with cookery demonstrations and hundreds of sample delectables (such as samoosas) prepared by Zohra Moosa, Fatima Loonat, Fatima Mayat and Farida Jhavery. The *Daily News, Tribune Herald* and *Sunday Times* provided extensive pre-launch publicity, an indication of the Group's marketing savvy. The CNA allowed members to promote the book at its La Lucia branch, and Jane Raphaely, editor of *Fair Lady* magazine, was convinced to run a feature article. In April 1985, Zuleikha Mayat appeared on a television programme to speak about the cookbook.

Of the first twenty-five thousand copies of the *Red Edition*, 18 418 sold out within three months[33] and the rest by the end of the year.[34] The second impression of twenty-five thousand copies was delivered in July 1983. The books 'flew off the shelves', with fifteen thousand copies sold within nine months. By the end of 1983, the Group had paid the printer, set aside money for a women's activity centre they were hoping to build, contributed to their Education Trust, and purchased items like a microwave oven, a tape recorder and a photocopier that were desperately needed.[35] 'Sale of our *Indian Delights* is still soaring due to all Mrs Mayat's efforts in this direction and it is through this that we have managed to give out twenty-seven bursaries,' the secretary recorded in 1983.[36] Within five years, sales of the *Red Edition* stood at eighty thousand.[37] 'There is no doubt,' Mayat wrote in 1988, 'it will become a classic.' She intended 'overhauling it every ten years because it contains not only recipes but a way of life as reflected in our cuisine'.[38] Each new edition was to reflect the changing way of life in Indian South African households.

The 1984 AGM resolved to publish *Indian Delights* under their tax-exempt Educational Trust[39] and, further, produce new editions. 'After these tremendously successful figures,' stated Mayat, 'I am not going to relax [but] propose that we not only reprint the current *Delights*…but as well compile a *Delights* for beginners to fill an urgent need.'[40] Visions of cookbooks to service various tastes and expertise had been floating about for a while. Mayat had earlier written to Ahmed Kathrada of her idea to create a 'Soul Food' version of *Delights*, with the help of Group affiliates Siko Mji and Virginia Gcabashe, which would present an African-Indian fusion 'based on peasant Indian cooking like khitchiri and khuri, pumpkin and potato curries, lentil dhals etc. combined with traditional African dishes – that is, the Indian manner of cooking bhurkoo and the African putu! Similarly the different manner of cooking pumpkin, samp mealies, etc.'

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The proceeds would go towards baby crèches in the townships.[41]

Best *promoted the use of 'time-saving gadgets for modern housewives'.*

This particular dream was not realised but other cookbooks did indeed emerge. In January 1986, the Group got to work on a new book.[42] *The Best of Indian Delights*, even more than other editions, responded to the changing pace of life in South African Indian households. This was to be a book that promoted 'shortcuts' and the use of 'gadgets' as time-savers. As they tell it, the Group began compiling *The Best* in response to complaints from working women that the *Red Edition* had too many versions of each recipe to sift through: 'This [new book] is at the insistence of modern housewives who…just want tried out, best of the litter sort of recipes.'[43] As Mayat pointed out at the book's launch, *The Best* was not 'simply a repeat edition' but had been updated and included 140 new recipes[44] to reflect 'changing culinary tastes'. Where basic recipes were repeated, according to Mayat, 'they have been cut down in labour'.[45] New recipes included casseroles, which could be prepared in advance, frozen, and warmed in an oven or microwave.[46] There were recipes based around 'the humble dhania chutney. If you have this in your freezer you can turn out the most tantalising dishes' with little time spent in the kitchen.[47] Working wives were advised to fry onions in larger quantities and keep them in the fridge or freezer for future use. *The Best* was also syncretic in making traditional dishes using non-Indian products. For example:

> Look at mithais. We used to do the mawa in the old days – it had to be the milk that you had to burn and dehydrate to make a mawa. Nowadays very few people bother with that and they all use…dehydrated milk; and maybe the mawa tastes nicer but people have forgotten those days – they still like this one here.

Another example was the use of phyllo and katayef pastry with Indian fillings in place of the samoosa pur, which required both time and expertise to make.[48]

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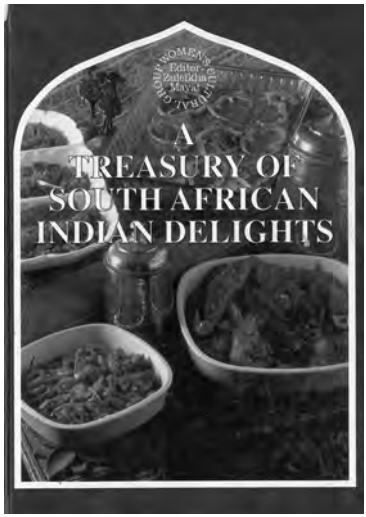
In Mayat's estimation, *Best* was a success because of the 'easier methods, the "face lifting" of old favourites and presenting them with trendy styling'.[49]

Health was also more consciously taken into account. By the time *Best* came out, Mayat explains:

> Some of the doctors had been complaining that, you know, 'you're interfering with the health of people with all your recipes', so this is when I started saying, 'Less oil when you cook'. So we've got a section just on health foods at the back – people's tastes also [changed]. Look, in the olden days if the ghee wasn't swimming there or the oil wasn't swimming there, it wasn't good curry. Nowadays people don't like to see all that oil – so our tastes also changed.



The most recent edition in the series.

The new book, at two hundred pages, was half the length of the *Red Edition*. Again, in its creation, progress was slow and earnest pleas were made at committee meetings to assist Mayat, Zohra Moosa, Khatija Vawda and other stalwarts who took on much of the typing and proofreading. By February 1988, Mayat and Andrew Verster had prepared ninety-nine pages of the book. Yasmin Sabat was roped in to assist with typing. That the typewriter had to be repaired several times did not help the cause.[50] The first thousand copies were received in August 1988. Two hundred copies were exported to the United States and the rest sold by Group members at launches in Pietermaritzburg, Stanger and other parts of Natal. A stall was hired at the flea market on the beachfront on the last Sunday of August where Fatima Loonat and Khatija Vawda sold books.[51] Only one impression of ten thousand copies of *Best* was printed as plans were soon made for something new and different, the *Treasury*.

The most recent cookbook in the Women's Cultural Group stable is the 1999 *A Treasury of South African Indian Delights*, the first one to specify itself in the title as 'South African'. Like *Best*, it was responsive to perceived changes

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in Indian culinary tastes and lifestyle, as well as 'the availability of newer products, the increasing acceptability on our tables for cheese, pasta, etc., lesser use of fats, increased salad consumption and…our growing interests in the cuisine of other cultures'.[52] *Treasury* more conspicuously than ever celebrated cultural fusion, the variety of commercial products that could be incorporated, and the appropriation of global dishes which could be given an 'Indian' taste and appearance:

> See how we utilised the various types of noodles, couscous, coconut cream, cheese and dairy products, and transmuted them from their origins into the Indian look. Taste and tradition have been enhanced and the repertoire enlarged in a way that it can be presented internationally.

The claim that these recipes enhanced not only taste, but also tradition, indicated the flexibility and centrality of change that infused the Group's conception of culture. In contrast to a quest for 'purity' or to claims that authenticity is to be found in a rejection of innovation and blend, the concept of heritage has a more dynamic and cosmopolitan (and, also, much less fragile) meaning for the Group. Mayat would read and compare other cookbooks, mainly Western ones, and with her own experience, seek to produce creative new culinary ideas that were 'Indianised' through the addition of Indian spices and techniques. Uppermost in Mayat's mind was creating dishes that could be popped in the freezer and enjoyed later. *Treasury* conceded that it could not fight globalising consumerism but had to change 'with the times':

> The current trend by busy homemakers is to turn to the market shelves for packets of soup, tinned products and marinades…Our mission statement is that since such recipes are found in magazines or exchanged among friends, they should not be called recipes for they fall in the category of tips. To prove that it is not our intention to put anyone off from utilising these quickmeal measures, we have included some…as a further aid to the housewife in the transformation of a ready product into a unique dish.

During the production of *Treasury*, Mayat reflected on the difficulties and challenges of producing a book. 'You have all been asking why it's taking so long. Members of course have no idea what is involved for with past editions

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I controlled things from my home.'[53] The transition from typewriter to word processor – in another attempt to keep up with the times – did not assist Mayat's otherwise sound faith in progress, but rather created new challenges:

> I roped in Aziza [Mayat] to help input with the word processing. Simultaneously we worked on two discs, one at the Centre and one from home. Often work was duplicated which later presented problems when it came to publishing. It was not possible to go through all the recipes on Aziza's disc with the result that many recipes were given to the printer without the editor's drastic pen having gone through them.

Production of the cookbook involved much more than typing up the recipes:

> Apart from photographs, proofreading, word processing, etc., there is a lot of other work entailed such as getting quotes for the various stages of book preparation; obtaining an ISBN number from Pretoria and the bar code from Johannesburg, and writing to the public library informing them of the new book, working out the costs and selling prices to various clients and so forth.

Mayat's daughter-in-law Shameema would often find her working late into the night 'after sehri and fajr' and into the morning. Her granddaughter Dilshad once had to beg her, at 9am after such a night, to 'please go and get dressed' before the gardener came. Following the launch of the book, Mayat reflected in her presidential report in July 1999:

> After a long delayed pregnancy this book saw the light of day at the end of March 1999. The baby really cost me sleepless nights. It was not only the concern of being long overdue, but also the fact that I relaxed my usual discipline of testing our recipes, and including only those that appealed to me. This time members were given free rein. Working from both home and the Centre added to the confusion and I was afraid that the baby would be disfigured, retarded or stillborn. Alhamdolillah, all my fears vanished like phantoms when our very attractive newborn blue-eyed baby finally arrived. For its attractive appearance thanks go to Andrew Verster and also [daughter-in-law] Shameema, who is my worst critic…Members played a magnificent role in selling the copies. Their relatives and connections spread the word and more orders came from

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Catering for weddings and other joyful family occasions features in a special section in the Red Edition. *Other recipes assume a six-person household as the norm.*

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> faraway towns…So members, thank you once again. In the present economic climate you have performed miraculously.[54]

Production was also hard labour because Mayat was a perfectionist. The photographs are one example. Laila Ally, a second-generation member who was involved in the photographs for the *Red Edition*, explained the process:

> You know, for photographs you can't have fully cooked food, you have to have it half-cooked for the colour to be right, and it's amazing, we had brilliant photographers and Andrew Verster helped us with the layout and the design, but Mrs Mayat is so talented, she just knows what colour the food must be even if it means enhancing it. We sometimes enhanced it with just glazed honey to give the food that little shine for the photographs, you know, and as I said half-cooked food, not fully cooked, because sometimes the colour becomes a bit dark when you fully cooked it. And Mrs Mayat would say, 'Right, we're ready for the next photograph', and lay out everything and then she looks at the plate and says, 'Well, we're running short of' something, then all of us would run helter-skelter to get what we needed for those photographs. A lot of photographs were taken at members' homes and out in gardens and things like that. Many members got involved, whoever was interested, that's one thing about Mrs Mayat, she gave everyone a chance.

Fatima Mayat recalls the photographic process for *Treasury* because her home was used for some of the photographs:

> We had lots of members bringing food here to my home. My daughter-in-law, my daughter, my mum were roped in and we did a lot of preparation. If you open the book, lots of pictures of my dining room and kitchen and everything are in there, and we really had a wonderful time. We had to place [the food] in so many ways, use the coffee table and use ornaments. We had to get in lots of fresh flowers and bright tablecloths and serviettes and napkins and the lighting had to be perfect. Because of my skylighting I get a lot of light coming in so the photographer was happy with that. We had to get into the garden, into the rockery and place our foods there as well – and after that we had a feast because there was a variety of food here. It was lovely.

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The success of this search for perfection is reflected in some of the requests that the Group periodically receives. For example, the Dictionary Unit for South African English, an Institute affiliated to Rhodes University in Grahamstown, was granted permission on 29 September 2003 to use a photograph of Indian food on a table covered with decoratively cut newspaper, and which included orange slices, pumpkin curry, aloo fry and fried okra. The photograph was included in a programme known as the Language Portal, which was part of a project to foster multiculturalism by getting South Africans to learn about the languages and cultures in the country. And, in its 1989 publication, the *Cambridge Encyclopedia of India*,[55] Cambridge University Press included a photograph of Indian spices in a large tray from *Indian Delights* in the food section. Mayat regarded this as a major feather in the Group's cap for 'in spite of the cultures of India, Bangladesh, Ceylon, the University of Cambridge [Press] wrote to us to request one of the photographs from our book. It was also a compliment for us when Time-Life Books featured some of our recipes. Among the chosen recipes was my mother's "sweet potato puree" recipe…It [*Indian Delights*] has crossed the frontiers.'[56]

Into its fifth impression, the *Treasury* remains popular, with forty-five thousand copies sold during its decade of existence. Sales of this book, however, did not diminish those of the deluxe *Red Edition*, demand for which continued strongly into the 1990s and late 2000s, selling an average of six to seven hundred copies per month,[57] suggesting that the search for practical answers to quick meals has not eclipsed the desire for the 'authenticity' now more strikingly associated with the expanded version of the original text. Indeed, globalisation and the availability of new commercial commodities that came with the end of apartheid has paralleled the new, post-apartheid valorisation of ethnic distinction in South Africa.

Transoceanic kitchens

In marketing *Indian Delights*, the Group relied on personal contacts as well as a personal touch. For example, in 1987, when the Group received advance payment for a book from a Mrs Fourie of Kimberley, who failed to include her address, the Group placed an advert in a Kimberley newspaper in an attempt to get the book to her.[58] This personal approach proved successful in gener-

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ating interest not only in South Africa, but internationally as well. According to Zuleikha Mayat, word of mouth and family connections were key.

> Look, we've never really advertised and so on, but we get ideas from all over the world. People buy a book, they give it to somebody, they go to their home overseas, they show it to their friends. Our expatriates have gone overseas, some to Canada, some to Australia, and they would have copies there and show it to their friends and this is how the orders start coming in.

These networks spread across diasporic communities in North America, Australia and the United Kingdom as well as in India and Pakistan. At this time, too, a concept of ethnic cuisines and an appetite for gastronomic exploration was growing in the United States and elsewhere, and so a new market for Indian recipes developed among people who were not of Indian ancestry.

In 1970, a publisher in Pakistan wanted to sell the book and offered to buy the copyright, arguing that it was much cheaper to produce the book on that side of the ocean. This was a 'wake-up call' as the members considered, for the first time, the commercial value of what they had produced, and the possibility of the book's illicit production. Mayat used a family connection in Karachi, Abdul Hameed Dadabhay, to register the copyright of *Indian Delights* in the name of the Women's Cultural Group in Pakistan. In her affidavit, Mayat stated that she had, as editor, 'donated the entire book to the Group and therefore all copyright has been permanently donated to the Group'. A few years later, a publisher in Delhi wanted to print the cookbook in Urdu and English.[59] Unlike Pakistan, where South Africans had relocated and Mayat perceived the threat of copyright theft to be 'real', Mayat did not feel a need to register the copyright of *Indian Delights* in India.

In the mid-1970s, the Group began to receive regular orders from around the globe. The book was then selling for £5 in London and $12 in Canada. A distribution agent in London organised book reviews in newspapers and it featured in a women's magazine. On a trip to the United Kingdom in 1977, Mayat was interviewed on BBC television's Sunday Urdu program, *Nai Zindagi Naya Jeevan*, by Salim Shaheed.[60] In the early 1980s, there was talk from Europe about the book's translation into German and French.[61] An order for five hundred copies of *Indian Delights* came in from Los Angeles in November 1985.[62] The following

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year, six hundred copies were sold in Britain and fifty in Australia.[63] In August 1985, Fuad Elahee in Calgary, Canada, undertook some advertising on behalf of *Indian Delights*. In January 1986 he sent the Group some pamphlets he had made advertising the book and they decided to direct all enquiries from the United States and Canada to him.[64] Later that year, however, he reported that the response had not been that good because of general resentment towards South African products in Canada at this time due to anti-apartheid sanctions.[65] Ghiwalla Stores in London had better success. In early 1987, they placed an order for five hundred copies of *Delights*. In the same year, MA Kurta, also of London, also placed an order. Ayesha Kajee sent a pamphlet showing that her son was advertising the books in the United States: he was sent a hundred books.[66]

Overseas demand for the book increased with the 1988 release of Los Angeles-based Grace Kischenbaum's *World of Cookbooks*, in which *Indian Delights* received an excellent review. New queries followed from North America.[67] In the same year, a Nadia Beekun of Philadelphia wrote to Zuleikha Mayat that she had purchased a copy during a visit to Mauritius. She related that since her

> return to the United States I have not seen a cookbook on Indian cooking that compares in either recipes, ease of use, or presentation and I also find that your delightful book is not available here…*Indian Delights* is not just about food but also a way of life, an Islamic way of life. The small stories, the helpful hints within boxes, running commentaries on spices, history, and human nature are all interesting and informative, and present Islam in a different way to westerners, who only hear the negative aspects of 'Muslim' terrorists. I really believe it will be very successful here as both a cookbook and as a new way to look at Muslims.

Beekun offered to become an exclusive distributor. She described herself as having access to newspapers, her own talk shows and food magazines, and as being connected to the Islamic Society of North America and American Trust Publications. She appeared regularly on radio and television on issues of Islam and Christianity and Islam and women.

Partly in response to Beekun's encouragement, Mayat made a trip to North America in 1988. Her first stop was Canada, where one of her nieces-in-law arranged a few interviews. One was with a Mr Chandrasekhar:

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> I took the book there. So when he saw the book, he shouted to his wife – I forget her name – he said, 'Please come here quickly. You see this lovely book? I'm interviewing the editor.' So she looked at him [and] she says, 'From what book do you think I've been cooking for you all these years?' [*laughs*]

In Philadelphia her niece Leila Lateeb (daughter of her sister Bibi and Dr Mall) had contacted a few radio stations. Mayat also visited Mrs Beekun to promote the book. The Group had sent two hundred books in advance but because of the political sanctions 'the whole consignment had to be diverted' and there were no books when she arrived. She managed to get hold of a few copies from friends and family for promotional events. One was at the Islamic Society of North America's centre in Washington, where she was interviewed for television. Beekun did eventually purchase a consignment of several hundred books.

Mayat also appeared on the 'Focus on Islam' channel run by a Pakistani couple in the basement of their home. They were wary of the 'Indian' in the title because of tensions between India and Pakistan and decided rather to feature another of the Group's publications, *Nanima's Chest*, which featured clothing and traditional attire.[68] Mayat lectured to several organisations and Zuby Haffejee, a past bursar, donated $100 to the Group. 'The people there were very impressed with our book but the only problem was the sanctions because no banks wanted to handle transactions from South Africa.'[69] In January 1989, letters were received from Mauritius and Belgium requesting that *Indian Delights* be translated into French. Mayat declined because it would have meant finding a translator and printer and developing a whole new market.[70] In August 1990, an order was received for four hundred and fifty copies of *Indian Delights* and eighty copies of *Best of Indian Delights* from Ghiwalla's Stores of Leicester. In December 1999 the Group gave permission to Shaban Pathan of Surat to publish recipes in Gujarati in the newspaper *Hilal* during the period January to March 2000.

The Group eventually negotiated a deal with a distributor in California, Tariq Rafeeqi of XC'lent International. Rafeeqi wrote to the Group on 14 July 1998:

> Your cookbook *Indian Delights* is an extraordinary book containing delicious recipes. The cover and inside printing and graphics show impressively well, and it uses a good quality paper for printing. My wife

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> is a good cook, like my mother. She also takes pride in using your book to find new and delicious recipes. I would like to market your book in the United States. The main reason is to make the book available to as many people in the world as possible; because a lot of hard work has gone into this book and the product is impressive.

In her reply of 3 August 1998 Mayat specified the terms:

> As a charitable organization, operating on voluntary help from members, we do business on a strictly cash basis. We have an agent in the UK who purchases almost 200 copies each year, and the basis is that we send him a pro-forma invoice, and when we receive his draft, we ship the books to him. Our organization is over fifty years old so your money will be safe with us. Also with the currency overwhelmingly in favour of the dollar, you will benefit as other buyers have been selling copies at $25.00.

Rafeeqi agreed to buy a minimum of two hundred copies per annum.

Besides those interested in commercial distribution agreements, requests for *Indian Delights* have been received from readers all over the globe. Vic van der Merwe of Port Elizabeth wrote that 'after experiencing the spicy taste of Biryani…I wished to establish which ingredients are actually involved in the making of these dishes. The mother of one of my pupils, Mrs R Pillay, lent me this wonderfully practical book of cooking and I now wish to own a copy of my own.' Janet Laval of Morley, Perth, 'recently had the pleasure of reading your cookbook *Indian Delights* and I would dearly like to own one.' Thecla Danton of Mississauga, Ontario, was certain that the Group would be 'surprised to get this letter all the way from Canada'. She had seen the book when it was given as 'a wedding present to a friend. I have tried to obtain this wonderful book here in Ontario, unfortunately without success.' Aziza Mayat thanked her on 14 October 'for your lovely letter regarding the *Indian Delights*; however, we are not surprised as we receive many requests from all over the world very regularly.' There was another request from Canada when Michelle Leroux of the Office of Francophone Affairs, Toronto, wrote that she had 'recently come across *Indian Delights* and was most impressed. Your cookbook, from beginning to end, is an ocean of absolutely divine recipes. Would it be possible to order two copies from you?' Zeinab of Makkah, after reading *Indian Delights*, wanted to know if she could 'be a member of your Group? I'm originally Indian, but

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born and raised in Saudia! And I read, write and speak three languages Arabic, Urdu and English beside accents like Memon and Hindi.'[71]

Hari Narayan of Noku'alofa, Tonga, began her letter, 'Well, I guess you will be surprised to receive a letter from a total stranger thousands of miles away from an Island in the Pacific Ocean. I recently sighted a booklet on Indian cookery titled *Indian Delight* by Zuleikha Mayat. Being a person of Indian origin naturally I find the book very interesting.' Elizabeth Smith wanted to know whether the Group 'still have any of the books for sale, *Indian Delights*. Guess my old man was an Eastern soul in his last life, as he is crazy about exotic curry dishes.' Basil Dickson of Sydney had 'four daughters, two daughters-in-law and my wife also has an *Indian Delights* book, one of my girls has an earlier edition of the books I bought for my wife in Durban sixteen years ago. Now looking through the book I see the 1st edition was published in 1961 so I am very keen to know of the latest publication if there is one, also the price.' Mrs MV Hlazo wanted a copy 'irrespective how much the book and postage will cost me. I desperately need the book.' Ghazal-e Tirmizey of Zumikon, Switzerland, after having had the 'pleasure of looking through the book', wanted a copy, which 'will help a non-cook like me become capable of producing mouth watering meals for any occasion.'[72]

Shahzia Harunrani of Nairobi, Kenya, was 'a Kenyan lady of Asian origin aged 23 years' who 'came across your book and was very impressed by its contents. I am writing in the hope that you will assist me in acquiring this very wonderful book…I will be anxiously waiting for your response.' Annie G Banda of Lusaka, Zambia, was, 'very happy to write to you. I am a Zambian aged 28 years…I have seen your book from my sister. How much is the book?' Dana Falletti, an American who had just moved to serve in the Peace Corps in Blantyre, had borrowed a copy from a Malawian friend. She described it as 'one of the finest cookbooks I've ever read…May I order one from your office?' Rafiqunnissa Iqbal of Colombo, Sri Lanka, wrote for three copies; Mrs Kanta Surti of Leeds, England, put in her order on 6 October 1996; Debbie Chaudhary of Valdosta, Georgia, USA, sent her request in January 2000; Aidan Gotz of Phalaborwa wrote for a copy in January 1999; Mina Sisodraker of North Vancouver ordered five books in May 2000; Mary Ann Davis and Betty-Jayne De Vos of Chicago ordered copies in 1994.[73] Rashida Usman of Chicago, USA, wrote that she used *Indian Delights* practically every day of her life:

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> I own two publications. *Indian Delights* and *The Best of Indian Delights*. I have seen someone with the newest *Indian Delights*. I would like to buy one so therefore I would like to know how much would it cost for me to buy including air freight shipping to America. If possible also would like to know how you would like to get paid…In 1978 I owned the very older version of *Indian Delights* (it was a thick small book). That book had great recipes. I lent it to someone and never got it back. Then in 1982 I received the *Indian Delights*. Then in 1988 I received *The Best of Indian Delights.* If so, how much for the older book?[74]

One of the most complimentary letters was received from an Estelle Malan on 9 December 1993. Her letter provides pointers to changing social relationships as apartheid was ending, culinary fusion, and the recipe book as a repository of history.

> Two years ago, when Indian friends appeared in my life, I purchased a copy of *Indian Delights*. Since then I have derived only pleasure and (of course!) many delicious meals and sweetmeats from it. Today while paging through it to find a murku recipe (my first attempt), I suddenly feel to write to you; to thank you and many, many others – all those involved in the creation of *Indian Delights* – for this excellent book; not only for the recipes, but also for the informal, chatty and encouraging way it has been put together. I grew up in an Afrikaans home in Pretoria, and from time to time, when visiting my parents there, I take along a curry or a dessert or some item that comes from the book – always a smash hit and my mother usually begs me to show her how, and to bring the necessary spices or ingredients (somehow easier available in Johannesburg than in Pretoria, unless one is prepared to travel to Laudium). I have several other Indian cookery books, some by local cooks, but none so complete, so comprehensive and so fascinating – even just to page through it and read little extracts here and there, is interesting. I remember when making vadde for the first time, I did not even know for sure what the finished item should taste like but your recipe and the photograph got me there, and earned me several compliments from the Indian people who were surprised and delighted that an Afrikaans girl should take an interest in traditional Indian food. What a great idea to gather in all the

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> typical Indian recipes, adapted to our local circumstances, and to compile a whole book of culinary favourites – I cannot thank you enough. Unfortunately the gadgets don't come with your book, so I'll be off to the Oriental Plaza in Fordsburg in search of a murku machine!

While all this correspondence points to the popularity of *Indian Delights*, it also suggests that word-of-mouth advertising was the most powerful engine for its promotion. And while few, if any, South African publishers could claim to have sold as many copies of any of their trade titles, it seems likely that the book's full income-generating potential might have been greater if advertising or an alliance with a larger publishing house had been pursued seriously, particularly since the book was already a going concern before the local and international explosion of cookbook publishing really took off. Mayat concedes that 'we were really not professional enough in marketing [the book]…We've never really followed up these big things because we only have this half-day staff. Earlier everything came virtually to my table. If somebody had really taken that up, it would have been wonderful.'

Yet, as a fundraiser for local charity projects, the book most certainly succeeded beyond all expectations, rippling across oceans and cultural boundaries into many kitchens. And it continues to sell widely, clearly inviting multiple uses and readings from its varied and global publics.

Kitchen publics

Clearly, the Group's dream of making a literary impact was not far-fetched. The book has served the Group and others in many different ways. Journalist Judy Desmond wrote in her review of the original edition that it was 'not even necessary to try out the recipes, just to read over and imbibe them, for that is what one does if one really likes recipe books.'[75] And a columnist for the *Natal Mercury* commented that the 'guide to the art of Indian cooking including, among many other traditional dishes a comprehensive chapter on curries, is the latest contribution of Durban's Indian community to achievements marking the centenary year of the arrival of the Indian immigrants in South Africa.'[76] Ranji S Nowbath, a columnist known as 'The Fakir' when writing for the Indian weekly newspaper the *Leader*, was also full of praise (conveyed with characteristic chauvinism):

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> Do you know (or does your wife?) how to make ghawla? You don't know what it is? Come on, you silly, why it's an Indian pancake, of course… Cooks, it is said, are not born but made. With a cookery book like this one, any girl would like to be a cook on the make. The recipes are precise and simplified though they include all the finest delights of Indian cuisine…This is a marvellous book containing hundreds of recipes with some lovely illustrations of prepared foods. Some of the photographs also show off some lovelies to good advantage. This is a book well worth having…There's only one section with which some chaps I know may quarrel with. The authors imply that the male Indian masseurs are better than the maiden masseurs of Japan![77]

Writing an Afrikaans review, Kobie van der Merwe observed that, with the book, food knowledge crossed more than one kind of threshold and that, indeed, it was geared to a national public: '*Uit Zuleikha Mayat se* Indian Delights *sal die Suid-Afrikaanse vrou dus baie van die dinge kan leer wat tot dusver net in Indierhuise bekend was. Die resepteboek is by Suid-Afrikaanse omstandighede aangepas.*'[78]

Newspaper reviews provided one kind of public feedback; another, which reveals a different kind of reading, came to the Group through written correspondence. Over the past five decades, while hundreds of complimentary letters have been received about the book, there have, according to Zuleikha Mayat, 'been around twenty complaints about mistakes – that the measurements are not accurate or it doesn't come out as nice as somebody else's and so on. Like the jalebi recipe – we had quite a few complaints and we said, look, we'd rather leave it out because jalebi is really for professionals.' A Mrs S Singh, for example, complained on 29 May 1987 that

> many recipes tried by me and many others…never turn out right. They try step-by-step following the recipe and flop it goes when baked or fried, whatever the recipe calls for…Please look into this matter as now we are beginning to think that this is a money making scheme…I would like you to ask this Zuleikha Mayat to try her recipes first before publishing in books just to make money and getting rich overnight.

Mayat responded with a lengthy and conciliatory reply on 5 June 1987, explaining that 'each week we receive orders from throughout the republic,

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Zambia, Fiji, Europe, Canada and even India and Pakistan' and gently suggesting that perhaps the problem did not lie in the recipes: 'Please, I am not saying that the recipes are so perfect that they cannot be improved upon. I constantly overhaul them and try and make it simple for the young housewife.' She also assured Mrs Singh that

> to the last cent, all the money goes for bursaries to students at various universities and we give vast amounts to organisations such as Natal Indian Cripple Care, Blind Society, baby crèches, etc…Not only do we not make a single penny but all ingredients used for testing and photographs, the members pay for out of their own pockets…If you would like help with any of the recipes, just phone.

The Group's personal approach, as demonstrated through its replies, and also apparent in the conversational tone of the book, has clearly gone a long way towards effecting the aims stated in the first edition of *Indian Delights*. While the book invites varied readings and uses, and – as a text – therefore has many 'publics', the Group endeavoured to provide 'modern', young women with the culinary skills and cultural, diasporic knowledge that they felt were being lost through changes in society and family. A letter, dated 15 September 2008, demonstrates that, even after half a century, they continue to succeed in these specific aims. Farzana Jawaheer Khan of Circonstance, St Pierre, Mauritius, wrote:

> Respected Madam,
> Ten years back I came across one of your editions of *Indian Delights*, then I was a teenager. But although very young I was very interested in your book and I jot down some recipes. But now I'm a housewife and mother, I came across your book again, a new edition, a new look. Believe me, I know what a treasure your book is. 'An invaluable jewel that all and every housewife loving Indian cuisine will want to possess.'…Once more I want to compliment you for the colourful and lively photos, setting and layout of the book. You successfully disclose…hmmmm, no, no, but I would rather say you opened the doors of many recipes which make this book a unique masterpiece, un *chef-d'œuvre*. Your frankness really touched me. You must be a woman with a golden heart, golden mind

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> with golden ideas. You not only shared recipes but a whole culture. I want to write much more Madam. But I'm very busy. I have twin babies, and I have little time. I hope you will understand or else I would have talked much more about your book…I believe good work, hard work performed with heart and so much dedication really needs all these compliments.

Letters and published books are an aspect of transoceanic print culture. This letter points to *Indian Delights* as a text that has generated a public situated within the private, gendered spaces of kitchens, a public that – through using these recipes and understanding them to be 'Indian' delights – share and pass on an idea of diasporic identity.

Indian Delights as cultural representation

Behind the creation of *Indian Delights* was an ethnographic motivation, an attempt to 'get the old recipes down' and to 'preserve the richness of a well-established culture'. It is a text rich in narratives, its recipes intermingling with cultural anecdotes, stories, poetry, proverbs, illustrations, and claims about the past. According to its editor, it was 'never intended to be a primer of Indian cooking.'[79] But, of course, it is used as that too. It contains an instructive, encyclopaedic glossary of ingredients, careful instructions and advice for the novice. It was produced to cultivate skill and cultural knowledge and has become a gift given to many brides.

Hajira Omar, who joined in the 1990s, is among the younger generation in the Group. She regards *Indian Delights* as a retainer of her cultural heritage, which she hopes to pass down to her daughters:

> I think [the book] is extremely important because it's a way of preserving the culture. I mean we are all now eating differently because of health reasons, we are starting to eat baked fish and grilled meat and that sort of stuff, and this book in a way preserves [food history]. Even if you don't use the recipes, it's a good way of knowing how people did prepare food. So it's a preservation of culture. And whether, I mean both my girls hardly ever use it but they have the book, you know. I think that every family gives it to their daughter as a gift.

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Nafisa Jeewa also believes that this is one of the reasons why the book continues to appeal:

> We sell a lot of books to people overseas as well. And it's a book that anybody can follow. You know, you have recipe books, and you have recipe books, and you find that with the new books, every housewife doesn't have all the ingredients. But with our *Indian Delights* everybody has all those ingredients in the home, so it's easy. You're not rushing out all of a sudden to buy something. That is why it's a very popular book. It's a lovely book to give as a gift and I think most brides – new brides – want it as well. Whether they use it or not is another matter.

Omar's and Jeewa's suggestion that *Indian Delights* has value even if it is not actually used as a cookbook, highlights the way in which it is perceived as a book of food history, a cultural archive. Some feel that this comes from the recipes themselves; others consider the informational text boxes arranged around the recipes to offer insights into the cultural past. Mayat herself saw the book as a repository of history and culture. In response to a query from a Professor Alfredo Cabacungan of the Department of Food Service at Kapi'olani College, Honolulu, Hawaii, Mayat described the book as

> considered locally and internationally [to be] the encyclopaedia of Indian cuisine. It not only has recipes, but it surveys the scene from the cultural and historical aspect. Furthermore many anecdotes and stories accompany the recipes which help to fill in the history of Indian cuisine. A whole section deals with home remedies alone.[80]

This was valued by many readers. In May 1985, for example, the Ananda Kutir Yoga Association in Cape Town requested and was given permission to publish extracts from *Indian Delights* on vegetarianism and honey in their bimonthly magazine, which 'provid[es] advice on yoga, health, etc.'. Occasionally readers expressed reservations about these added narratives. In 1982, Leila Badawi of *Arabia: The Islamic World Review* lavished praise on the *Red Edition*, but felt that the folk tales, homely asides and anecdotes of family life made 'outsiders' at once feel charmed and excluded:

> excluded because they often seem so distant and so foreign – and because they present a remorselessly idealised picture of life in South Africa's

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> Indian community in the same way that some of the books on 'home-making', written in America in the 1950s, idealise the American way of life, or the American family. The impression one gets is of an intelligent, hardworking, astute and yet rather naive community.

Mayat confessed to being 'disappointed' by this characterisation even though the review was positive. She felt that it missed the crucial point that 'this is part of our history'. She points to a section of the book that describes the use of tablecloths made from newspaper, with the accompanying illustration showing a simple but elegant arrangement with a water jug and some basic, well-presented dishes. The setting and text was intended to show readers that lavish wealth was not needed to create a beautiful and festive table. When she says 'this is part of our history', she is referring to times of economic hardship, with racial exclusion and job reservation translating into socio-economic scarcity. '[Paper tablecloths are] what we had at every wedding at one stage,' she points out. Mayat is adamant that 'the way our books sell speaks for itself. What is antiquated about folklore? Aesop's Fables, Haji Baba stories are classics. No child must be deprived of its own folk stories.' Similarly, Laila Ally observed that on the back cover

> of the third book [*Best*] we did a photograph…I don't know if you noticed, but Mrs Mayat's brilliant idea was that we have a modern recipe book, but she still wanted the old to be there. So I'm sitting with a grinding stone to remind people, even our own children, of our roots and where these recipes all came from. Basically it's all our mothers and grandmothers. That's something that can never be forgotten, it's so ingrained in me and my daughter.

Ayesha Vorajee also regarded the bits of 'history' as being of great importance:

> There are some lovely little snippets and stories and photographs, and [history of] the origin of spices and so on. My niece who qualified as an optician, she says, 'You know…I just go through *Indian Delights* reading all those little snippets, about how this came about and how that, and about the North Indian curries'. She's not cooking [but] going through the recipe book reading up those little…[*laughs*] Yes, it's history and Mum [Mayat] is very good at that.

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The ethnographic aims of the Indian Delights *series were given visual expression through images like this one, which appeared in the* Best *edition.*

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Some of the book's representations of culture have caused controversy. In 1990, for example, there was a polite complaint from a Fatima Lorgat of Yorkshire, England, that *Indian Delights* contained an Arabic inscription and she questioned whether it was permissible for members of the public to hold the book without wudhu. The cover carried a photograph of a Turkish spoon with the word 'Bismillah' inscribed on it. Mayat replied that while the Group appreciated and shared Lorgat's concern, the spoon had been purchased in Turkey, where they were sold widely in bazaars to tourists, whether Muslim or not. Further, she added, printers all over the world produced Islamic books and there was no guarantee that they made wudhu before handling them.

> These things are necessary and even if we are disturbed by their handling, until the whole world turns Muslim, we will not be able to avoid it. An American architect was so attracted to Islamic calligraphy that he left his work and went to Morocco to study it. He converted to Islam. Today he goes around – Muhammad Zakariah – showing the beautiful tughras and manuscripts he writes and paints. Hidayat to him came through Islamic writing.[81]

The Group weathered these and other complaints and took heart from the reality that the responses have been overwhelmingly positive and have enabled them to continue with their community work.

The Group's own conception of culture is clearly one that embraces change and flexibility. *Indian Delights* is not a quest for an elusive cultural essence or purity. Rather it celebrates appropriation and adaptation, fusion and short-cutting. While the book conveys a strong plea to readers to value (even idealise) the past, it is not retrogressive or reactionary in relation to promoting that past, and innovation and invention are held to be equally important aspects of culture. While ensuring that old classics like samoosas and biryanis were not compromised, the cookbooks have 'added to our repertoire categories of dishes not dreamt of by our elders'. Mayat's explanation is worth quoting at length:

> Any culture, anything develops – it doesn't remain static. If you go to a new environment and there are new products, then you take it on and it becomes part of it. Like the original Arabian and Persian recipes that we had, like biryani, samoosa and so on – if you eat our Indian biryani and then you eat the biryani in Persia, there's a world of difference because

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> we've used the products of India and that really changed the biryani to something new. Biryani in India, in Gujarat, it's the one with the masoor, if you eat it in Kashmir, it's got no masoor. So it becomes an Indian dish afterwards. In the pasta, sometimes you just put a dollop of your own thing and it does change. Nowadays we are using a lot of fusion foods. On our tables especially, when young children are there, you've got to give them burgers. Our burgers are stronger [more spicy]…an Indianised version. And what is a burger? It's a type of kebab really. Food is changing [but] haleem is still very much Indian; dhal is still very much Indian… you get a hundred thousand types of curries, but if you talk of a curry it's an 'Indian' curry. Food is evolving all the time. Even appetites, tastes are evolving. You have to accommodate that because we use less sugar now, we use less oil and ghee and yet, I mean, the authenticness of the dish doesn't change. [The new dish] becomes the authentic dish – it's still an Indian dish.

The Group has nurtured their own expertise in a philosophy of fusion in terms of culinary knowledges and this has, interestingly, increased their market value as consultants in an increasingly cosmopolitan, commercial South Africa. For example, from November 1999 to April 2000, the Group earned around R30 000 for its charity projects when a leading fast-food franchise contracted them to concoct a distinctively 'Indian' selection of fare, 'formulating methods that could be applied to all halal outlets to prepare the items at the pace that they are used to [while] keeping the Asian palate in mind'.[82] Taking up this challenge, the Group marshalled a team of tasters, males and females of various ages, to visit the restaurant anonymously. The tasters sampled various dishes, noted their findings and observed what was involved in a normative dining experience. Thereafter they obtained par-boiled chops, chicken breasts and steaks, as well as sauces, marinades and spices, from the food chain to experiment with in the Group's kitchen. They then reformulated the spices and provided the restaurant with several sauce recipes to complement its commercial range of sauces, and proposed that some products be renamed. For example, they suggested that 'Hot Rock Chicken' be changed to Chicken Sultani or Sultani Tava Chicken so that 'the name will be understood by Muslims from Durban to Timbuktoo. To elaborate, all languages, English included, religious and racial groups of Muslims will recognize it as the King of grilled chickens.'

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Advice was also proffered on interior design, since 'many Indians had negative remarks about the dark exteriors and interiors'.[83]

Creating a balance between foods that carry a specific cultural identity or meaning and those that are products of expanding markets in taste and product availability is a challenge that the Group welcomes. Their ideals around this make an important claim for the value of the *local*, the variations made possible by local produce and ingredients and the influence of flavours made possible through inter-cultural encounters. In one of the Group's Eid newsletters from the early 2000s, they note the agency of women in creating and catering to shifts of taste.

> In a fast changing world that threatens the core values of our cultures, the celebration of our festival days assumes increasing importance. It is a vital cog that binds a community. As mothers constantly battling against the erosion of our lifestyle we attempt to regain lost ground via tempting dishes on the Eid table…[But] reality has to be faced. The old must give way to the new. Christmas puddings and turkeys have given over to fare more in keeping with the South African climate. Accordingly we too have to adjust our menus to suit the appetites that are getting accustomed to fast food. Mothers must take this into consideration and rack their brains not to sacrifice tradition to the demands made by the addicts of junk food and jeans culture and therefore the menu devised for Eid gives your traditional dishes a new guise. Instead of chicken biryani, there is seafood paella, whether the housewife can incorporate scampi, calamari, oysters in addition to what the recipe states. In place of dahi the moulded cucumber ring is not only very attractive but in our hot climate a most appetising dish. Fruit juices and here you can 'go to town' with strawberries, pineapple, peach, mango, mix and match and see what delightful results are achieved. Agreed, what is Eid without its offering of mithais but all you health and figure conscious persons, you will put something on the table that may not be exactly diet fare but will be less time consuming!

Khatija Vawda, too, suggests that changing preferences are not necessarily good or bad but are about individual taste: 'It depends on one's palate. If they like it, then it's good.' The idea of taste as a criterion for what constitutes 'good

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cooking' is, somewhat ironically, much more aligned with the largely oral, traditional knowledge of the grannies who shared their recipes fifty years ago.

Indian Delights has preserved, but also altered, the flavours of diaspora. Khatija Vawda is old enough to remember when foods prepared by South Africans of Indian ancestry belonged to family lineages of oral knowledge, before this was collated into a compendium of 'Indian' cuisine, and remembers above all the variety of distinctive flavours prepared at different family tables.

> In the past, when you went to people's homes, whether they were Memon or Surti or Kokni, Gujarati Hindu, or even Tamilian, there were very distinct tastes. They used different spices and methods and you could see and taste the difference – even the aroma was different. Nowadays they are all similar.

Indian diasporic identity in South Africa has been formulated out of difference as a political reality, but it is also a culinary reality, the result of literacy, changing relations of gender and labour, and global commercial trends in food production and representation. In this story, *Indian Delights* has played a small but very significant part. Like other texts that are regarded as repositories of culture, it constitutes a common household referent of diasporic identity and material culture. *Indian Delights* has its publics in the gendered spaces of kitchens, spaces in which the flavours of Indian heritage can be similarly and simultaneously savoured in Durban, Dehli or Toronto.

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4
FAHMIDA'S WORLDS

The curtain opens. Mira, a Hindu seamstress, sits sewing in the flat of her Muslim neighbour, Hajira, when in struts an arrogant, impatient woman followed by her cowed daughter-in-law, Ayesha. The angry woman is Gori-Khala Nagina, the wife of Hajira's husband's boss.

Gori-Khala Where is the owner of the house?

Mira Behen She has gone down to the tearoom to deliver samoosas.

Gori-Khala OHH! Why did she not send it down with a servant! How unbecoming for a daughter of respectable parents to frequent a tearoom filled with men!

Mira Behen (*With a wry smile.*) Poor woman, where does she have a servant? She does all her own work.

Gori-Khala Waah! For housework, one employs someone. Her husband works, she herself undertakes sewing. What nonsense that she cannot afford a worker!

Mira Behen Sister, there is the rental for the flat, phone and light accounts, food and clothing, with three children to boot – reflect on the hardship this entails! With a meagre salary of twenty pounds and the pittance she gains from sewing and selling samoosas,

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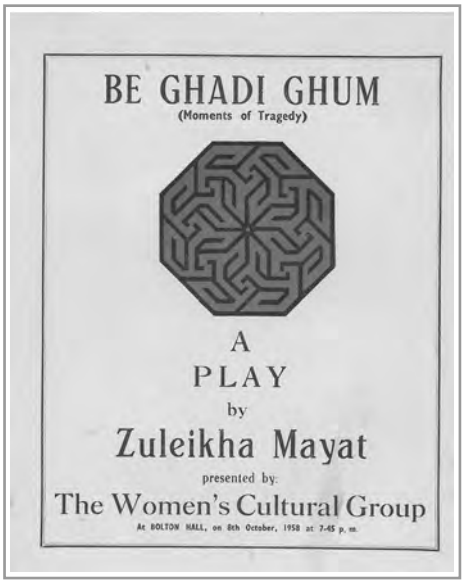

there is hardly enough to keep body and soul. And you talk of employing a servant! (*Very fed-up tone.*)

Gori-Khala You seem to know a lot about our people! You tell Hajira that if she needs help she must speak to us, for that will be of some benefit to her![1]

Translated into English, these are the opening lines of *Be Ghadi Ghum* (Moments of Tragedy),[2] a theatrical production written by Zuleikha Mayat and performed in Gujarati by the Women's Cultural Group on 8 October 1958. It played to an all-women audience in Bolton Hall, the headquarters of a textile trade union. According to several informants, Bibi Mall 'stole the show' in the role of the bossy mother-in-law, Gori-Khala Nagina – a woman whose superior attitudes and class prejudices brought onto the stage a number of issues familiar to all who were seated in the full house: class prejudice, ethnic chauvinism, the dynastic economic power of certain families, the issue of purdah, the power of mothers-in-law in a gendered world, and the problem of religious self-right-

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Two plays staged by the Group in 1957 and 1958 were hailed by the Leader *as 'unique and unheard-of' and 'a brave effort to fight purdah, and enable Muslim women to act on stage'.*

eousness. The playwright's enjoyment of irony is highlighted by the naming of the caricature mother-in-law figure as 'Nagina', which means 'gem' or 'pearl' in Urdu.

The plot centres on the changing fortunes of its protagonists. There is the hard-working, dignified Hajira and her husband, Yusuf, who decline to accept charity from a boss whose unjust wage pushes them tragically into poverty, even after they pawn their jewellery. There is Ayesha, the downtrodden daughter-in-law who slowly gains some confidence and independence through learning to drive and standing by her own views and values. And there is the formidable Gori-Khala, who, though tyrannical and proud, is portioned some redemption in the final scene when she agrees (grudgingly) to take care of a Tamilian baby whose mother has been rushed to hospital and finds genuine joy in the child; she is finally even able to crack a joke at her own expense.

According to playwright Zuleikha Mayat, this production was 'not a skit: it was a serious probe into the prevailing lifestyle of wrong values, wrong interpretation of Qur'anic guidance':

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> The play reflects the attitude of a certain class, their lifestyle, their indifference to the plight of others; others to whom they would give large sums of zakaat and charity but would deprive of regulation salaries. It also examines the class of people who had been reduced to begging as a livelihood. They seem to prefer begging instead of taking up dignified employment, and the smug donors appear to relish that, for it gave them a sense of piety.[3]

The play used parody and irony to highlight moral failings. In a memorable scene, Ayesha organises a driver to take Gori-Khala to the hospital to visit a dying friend. According to Islamic practice, visiting the sick is meritorious, but in this scene it is clear that the crowd collecting in the hospital room – busily engaged in the gossip of the town, finding fault, making comments about the sexual promiscuity of nurses – is mainly concerned with the trappings of 'good acts' for which they expect recognition. Mayat was aiming for a hyperbolical scene that would both invite laughter and convey a suffocating hypocrisy:

> As the patient's health deteriorates, she attracts more and more visitors and, when the death bells begin to toll, the sick room is so crowded with visitors who are all well-armed with rosaries and prayer books, that they effectively deprive the patient of the last few breaths of fresh earthly oxygen.

The performance was a great success. On stage, Bibi Mall could feel her effect on the audience, reporting later that 'when halfway through the second act, I saw two tears on [a] woman's cheek, I realised that the impact was made. My co-actors, too, had become aware of the rapport with the audience. After that we never looked back but gave the performance everything that we were capable of.'[4] According to Mayat, the serious themes of *Be Ghadi Ghum*, which 'tried to project the ravages of poverty and the malaise of "apartheid" within Indian society itself, called for introspection on the part of the audience.'[5]

Moments of Tragedy was, in fact, the second play performed by the Women's Cultural Group and it demonstrated the capacity of its membership to give public expression to the political and private-sphere issues affecting them. But their first play, too, although described by Mayat as 'one great bit of hilarity' represented a serious intervention in the world that these women themselves inhabited. Performed in September 1957, *Be Ghadi Moj* (A Few Moments of Fun)[6] was a light-hearted skit, yet a newspaper review in the *Leader* – under

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the headline 'All-Women Play Makes Muslim History in Union' – praised it as 'a unique and unheard-of thing' and 'a brave effort to fight purdah and to enable Muslim women to act on stage'. While determinedly 'non-political', the Group still felt 'that traditional prejudices against female performers would have to be overcome'. Originally, in an attempt to avert criticism, they had worked on a quite different play as their theatrical debut, a production with heavily religious themes. It was to be performed in English rather than Gujarati. 'This was a mistake, as we were later to learn', they explained in 1972:

> The parts were allocated, rehearsals undertaken and the night of its only performance advertised…True to prediction, there was a hot reaction from certain quarters. A 'friend' phoned to say that we had better abandon the project for there was talk of picketing by fanatics who were determined to stop the performance. Not to be intimidated we carried on with the arrangements.[7]

Yet a sudden death in the family of a performer indeed interrupted their plans and, after much delay and with input from their critics, they changed tactics and went back to the drawing board. 'Being wiser, we opted for a play in one of…the vernacular [languages] so that the more conservative element would understand what it was all about.' This new skit was *Be Ghadi Moj*, which they performed with much acclaim to 'a sensitive, critical [female] audience amongst whom were our grannies and aunts. They were laughing at their own foibles.' The *Leader* reported that Bolton Hall was packed 'to capacity'.[8]

The controversies surrounding the first play, and the critical content of the second, demonstrate an early desire to engage in debates about civic virtue and conceptions of the social good. Importantly, too, they indicate the linguistic worlds of first-generation Group members, the languages in which key concepts and ideas, as well as humour and parody, circulated and were linked to vernacular manners of speech. Their themes highlight ways that divisive issues of class, ethnicity and generation were both experienced and engaged within the gendered world of women. As Mayat argued in her *Indian Views* column, 'Fahmida's World', women's worlds were not encapsulated in the space of the domestic, but rather an apex for social being itself. In her view, it was crucial to dismantle the boundaries between constructed notions of public and private life as gendered domains. 'Were it the intention of our creator to make of women

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cooking and childbearing automatons, then why were we given the faculties of independent thought and reasoning power? No, friends, a woman's world is the central point around which society and life revolves.'[9]

Cultural expression was an important proof of this view, and the Group positioned itself in three ways: firstly, as critics and moral commentators, weighing in on issues that concerned Muslim womanhood within their own social class, as well as broader issues affecting society; secondly, as ambassadors of culture, bringing the tastes, fashions and practices representative of home and community heritage into a national public domain; and thirdly, as practitioners of language and the arts, keeping inherited cultural forms alive through active involvement. These various roles and approaches point to the elasticity of the social space that the Group created through its eponymous interface with cultural forms and definitions. Many of the women, with some exceptions, were from a similar middle-class background and shared certain values and meanings, which, as this chapter shows, were neither primordial nor permanent. Members were active in transforming their cultural lives. The involvements of the Group highlight how, over fifty years, changes in society and global markets have impacted on the meanings of culture and identity, shifting the balance of their gendered reproduction from private to public sphere.

'Mainly for women'

Theatrical productions were written for and played to 'insiders', a medium for critical reflection on familiar worlds inhabited by mainly middle-class, Muslim women in Durban. Zuleikha Mayat's voice as a satirical playwright was clearly becoming polished through regular submissions to her lively newspaper column, 'Fahmida's World'. Its editors billed the column as 'mainly for women', but this did not limit the reach of its readership. Mayat's writing for *Indian Views*, though not a Group activity, provides a sense of the identity claims and sensibilities of its membership in relation to the public world. The cultural form of the newspaper was an important means of expressing a vision of social and moral good, in which women figured as active and involved in the 'chow-chow pickle jar' of South Africa and in the larger world. The newspaper offered a space to comment on topical issues – social, political and religious – as well as express an outline of the gendered subjectivity that was being both reaffirmed and reimagined.

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When, for example, on Wednesday, 7 January 1959, Fahmida provided a checklist for 'the housewife' to consider her clarity of conscience and, more specifically, whether she 'rate[d] a certificate of citizenship *par excellence*', she was also asserting a criterion for feminine civic morality that went beyond the home front:

> Now as housewives, have we done our work conscientiously – to the best of our ability? Besides our domestic chores which naturally include housework, shopping, washing, child-rearing, good neighbourly relations, social outings, and the thousands of other things we are called upon to do, have we also participated in some community activity or social programme where the aim was aid to others? Have we during the whole of last year given a helping hand to just one person – unobtrusively and minus publicity – so that our name will be recalled by that person with kind thoughts? Have we in any way improved ourselves mentally or learnt some new craft or have we allowed ourselves to wallow contentedly in conceit? Have we maintained and improved relations with the other communities and races resident here? Have we in some way helped one of the other communities, less privileged in some respect and have we joined hands with others in order to make a better South Africa for our children?

While the flow of this manifesto initially seems to confirm an association of women with household and maternal labour, it quickly changes gear to assert social and political roles as being essential to housewifery. Fahmida emphasises that a total package is required. 'If our consciences are clear on *all* these issues, then we have lived wonderfully alive every moment and rate a certificate of citizenship.'[10]

Fahmida's voice is vocal about the interface between the world of housewives and the national political questions of the day. For example, on 20 June 1956, she made a sharp jab at liberal, race-relations progressivism, asking:

> Why is this so called love and better understanding between the races expressed always at the table of an Indian host and never at the expense of the European? Should they not reciprocate and further bring about this friendliness?...Why are leading members of the African community not invited to our functions and why must love only be fostered with the white ruling class?...Let us admit our guilt to colour consciousness.

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Racial politics, South Africa's most visible political problem, are in these brief lines observed in relation to the supper table, the province of the hostess and cook. Mayat's disapproval is directed not merely at white liberals but also at the attitudes of many Indians who, while speaking out against apartheid, harboured racial prejudices against Africans.

In the same issue, under the heading 'The tyranny of colour', Fahmida further comments on the entrenched colour prejudice informing ideals of Indian feminine beauty and draws attention to the pressures of marriage for women, in a single story-sentence: 'Wailed a mother with dark skinned daughters: "My two dark daughters are much more intelligent and industrious than my fair skinned daughter, but there are three proposals for the latter and none for the elder dark skinned ones".'

Beteille, in his discussion of caste in India, notes that an indication of the importance of physical differences among Indians is that 'fair' and 'beautiful' are used synonymously in most Indian languages, while folk literature emphasises fair skin and virginity as the two most desirable qualities in a bride.[11] Colour is related to caste, class and region: generally northerners are fairer than southerners and upper castes fairer than lower castes.[12] In the local context these prejudices were played out in the hierarchies that existed among South African Muslims.[13] Significantly, Fahmida's light touch brings these divisive attitudes, expressed in sexual and gendered terms, into the same moral field as apartheid.

Much of Fahmida's commentary uses the device of quick, witty observation. When the future president of Botswana returned from exile in 1956 as a private citizen, she wrote, 'Seretse is back where he belongs. Oh how can our Nationalist Government tolerate a black neighbour of royal blood with a [white] wife and coloured children. Really their tender feelings should have been taken into consideration.'[14] Yet sometimes Fahmida's comment on politics was not so breezy. Often, her aim was to invoke human emotion and compassion for the struggles and suffering of individuals meted out by the social engineering of the state. 'The Story of Flora Mkhize', which ran as a three-part serial in August 1957, portrayed the dilemmas of a young woman from Zululand who arrives in Durban seeking work, her difficulties with domestic employers, and the trials of gender power between African men and women; 'When the Law Takes Hand', which ran on 29 February 1956, told the emotional story of 'Sabera…a young girl just out of her teens dwelling in a little village in the environs of Surat who

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marries Rafiq with plans to join him in Natal once he is established, and who becomes a statistic of the 'banning of wives' Act of 1956. Fahmida's semi-autobiographical story about the Group Areas Act, headlined with a question 'Where did we Err?', ran as a serial between 21 November and 19 December 1956.

Indian Views was read widely and became the centre of interlinking forums for discussion and a means by which local community was linked to events across the Indian Ocean, and in other regions of South Africa. Mayat reflected that *Indian Views*

> really got the community together. It told you about your old regions in India, what was happening in India, what was happening on the political level in India, the social level. It also dealt with the Transvaal things, there will be articles from the Cape – so you would get a sense that you were part of a big community and you were linked to it and, you know, friends used to gather together to discuss the paper. Now, although women were not part of this discussion, my mother was always hovering in the background, serving and so on, so she would hear something and later on talk to my father about it, so even if we hadn't been present, we would hear the conversation afterwards.

Zuleikha Mayat's identity as a woman writer, and the content of what she wrote, appear to have invited little overt controversy. Indeed, she can only think of one serious objection to her column and this was related to a comment she made about the new decor at the Orient Hall. As she recalls, 'There [had been] this beautiful calligraphy and they put blue tiles there. So I said, "Now there is this beautiful calligraphy, this building is beautiful, but these *bathroom tiles*!" [*laughs*] I used the words "bathroom tiles".' This merited a complaint to the editor of *Indian Views* from the male trustees:

> I'm sure the letter must be somewhere – and there was a very angry response from them, actually calling me a blatant liar, or something, [though] I don't know where the lies would come in. Mr Moosa Meer called me in and he said, 'This is a letter from them, what do I do?' I said, 'It's your reader, you've got to publish it', and so that letter with me a 'blatant liar' was published.

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On another occasion, she invited her readers to submit letters and critical feedback but was disappointed to report a few weeks later that only one letter had come in – seemingly from a young man whose views were not entirely coherent. Mayat dutifully printed the letter in its entirety, and used the opportunity to school the upstart with her wicked humour. The letter is too lengthy to quote in full, but the following portion of it demonstrates some of the contestations around culture and gender that percolated just below the surface in relation to the Group's activities during this decade. Mayat's response to the letter was interspersed in brackets, thus:

> Chuck it up, dear Fahmida, your column is lousy. (Said my better half in between gusts of laughter: 'What I had always wanted to say but never found the courage to.')…It seems apparent to me after reading 'Fahmida's World' that you are a member of the Women's Cultural Group. (My closely guarded secret is out.) One day, perhaps, you will tell me their exact function. Till then I believe that all they are trying to do is anglicize the Indian Women. Remember, Fahmida, that Indian Culture, codes of morals, etc. are not to be despised. (The Group promotes just that, Indian culture, but it does not despise the cultures of others.) From the large advert stuck under your column (Wednesday 28 August, 1957.) it seems that the Cultural Group is staging a play. (Many other things besides.) Why is it exclusively for females? (Respect of Culture, Codes of Morals, etc.) I do not blame Dr Verwoerd if he keeps some human beings out of certain places and shows. The Cultural Group is doing the same thing. (There are subtle differences I assure you.) I know you have great influence in the group. (You don't say.) Furthermore, you are a good speaker. (You make me blush so.) Surely you could have persuaded those responsible for the production of the play to make some accommodation for men? (Is that what has been biting you all along?) 'O, no, silly boy, Indian men go crazy at the sight of women!' (One cannot really differentiate between the emotions of Indian men and others.) will probably be the retort of the members of the group in mention. (Some of the girls want to make you the leading male star in their next production. Will you consent?)…Criticism in this letter has been plenty. I do not know if it will be of any use to you. I don't think so, women never admit their faults. (Another fault of females is that they must have the last say. May I

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Fashioning heritage: Group members, including Tehmina Rustomjee (right) modelling Indian fashions at a private (then 'white') girls' high school. Upon request, the Group had organised a two-day event to teach learners about Indian culture.

> conclude that it is a thousand pities that one so young knows already the weak points of women.)[15]

As Fahmida, Mayat reported regularly on women's activities, those of the Women's Cultural Group and also of other groups, like the Mehfile Khwateene Islam and the Reading Circle of the Indian Women's Association. The Group's cultural activities, its sponsorship and involvement in plays, musical performances, poetry recitals and fashion shows, were sites that produced and negotiated cultural imagination, spaces in which the meanings of communal identity could be proposed or contested. Like their cookbook *Indian Delights*, with its sequential editions informed by a dynamic and contextual understanding of food traditions, other cultural forums also celebrated heritage in a way that invited multiple interpretations. Besides plays, cultural activities in

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the early life of the Group included lectures on artistic or religious themes; musical and poetry recitals; as well as suppers and symposiums. In 1979, the Group was involved in the making of a film for television called 'They came from the East' about Muslim motherhood, with documentation on mendhi application and cookery. Over several years, the Group made and sold Eid cards. In 1973, when Eid and Christmas coincided, they created joint Eid/Christmas cards, a festive acknowledgement and celebration of holiday multiculturalism. In 1967, at the 46th South African Medical Congress, the Group gave a demonstration of Eastern costumes, an event that was photographed by Dennis Bughwan and written about by Fatima Meer.[16] This was one of several fashion shows, which the Group presented as

> educational and enjoyable to the Indian public and meaningful to non-Indian audiences. In an environment where the youth is fast shedding tradition and custom, we have endeavoured to regain their interest in these by enacting ceremonies, which become alive with the aid of authentic costumes.[17]

In August of 1973, the Group offered two evenings themed around Indian culture with a demonstration of clothing and music for (then white pupils only) Durban Girls' College high school. Nafisa Jeewa recalls that event:

> The girls [today] have a different outlook to life, right. A lot of people don't appreciate tradition. They don't appreciate the old cultures because they want to move with the trend. There was a time when the Durban Girls' [College] had a function at school and wanted us to have a cultural evening, meaning modelling traditional clothes, Indian clothes. They wanted a little bit of Indian music just to set the scene. We had a little bit of sitar playing – basically tabla and sitar. We had 'Sitar' Jamal – he loved being in with the ladies as well. And then some of us modelled clothes that belonged to grandparents. It was somebody's bridal gown but, of course, not the 'traditional' bridal gown – 'tradition' meaning the bridal gown of today. It was beautifully embroidered with gold and silver threads and beaded, that kind of thing.

This and other fashion events were a precursor to the Group's more ambitious project themed around feminine adornment and Indian textile history, with a

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focus on the antique garments that travelled across the sea to South Africa with mothers and grandmothers. This project involved fashion demonstrations and a formal museum exhibition, and culminated in the publication of the book, *Nanima's Chest*.

Nanima's Chest

In September 1981, even as the Group was working on the expanded 'Red' edition of *Indian Delights*, a new and completely different book was published. This one also represented the collective labour of the Group and was launched at the Durban Art Gallery. It was called *Nanima's Chest*, inspired, as Zuleikha Mayat explains in its opening pages, by a silvery zinc trunk (once shiny but since darkened) that had captured her imagination since she was a girl: 'Beyond the veils of childhood memories, lingers the vision of mother's chest – or peti – as we called it.'[18] She had become reacquainted with the peti during a visit to the Transvaal when, paying her condolences after the death of her aunt, she found it sitting in storage – a lone survivor in a world in which so many things had been lost or replaced by newfangled fashion.

> [My aunt Amina's] beautiful brass bedstead, her horse-hair sofa, her almirah (box-shaped cabinet) and sideboard with their recesses and niches filled with miniature marble and silver ornaments, her bead curtains in the doorway of her lounge that jingled a tune each time the passage door was opened, her maroon and green velvet tablecloths, her pin-tucked and stiffly starched white cushion covers – all these, at the insistence of a younger generation, [had] made way for modern kitsch. But in the storeroom behind the shop of one of her heirs, unwanted and neglected, stood the *peti* of my dreams.[19]

The book is about the garments, textiles and other treasures found in such chests, the pleasures of memory as well as the cultural history that they constitute. The two-week-long gallery exhibition of these articles that accompanied the book's launch afforded the public a chance to become acquainted with the tactile qualities of this artistry before taking a copy of *Nanima's Chest* into their own homes.

The volume was crafted to be eye-catching in the spirit of its thematic content. Mayat, who after some petitioning with the prison authorities managed to

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The book Nanima's Chest *showcased the treasures of women's cultural history and, simultaneously, pushed the boundaries of convention by featuring young Muslim women, such as Bushra Ansari, modelling beautiful outfits and cloths.*

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post a copy to Ahmed Kathrada on Robben Island, joked in her letter to him that 'you can't miss *Nanima's Chest*. It's bound in Coolie Pink cloth with the title and chest in gold foil.' The book's subject matter lent itself to a dazzling presentation: fabrics, weaving, embroidery, block printing, gold-threaded motifs; shawls, dresses, bridal wear, children's Eid clothing; sequins, cloth, colour, design and technique. It ran to about a hundred pages, with almost thirty colour plates amongst many other photographs. In addition, it sported two transparent pages, each etched with an intricate design in gold ink; a large paisley, printed from an antique design block, and the graphic outline of a mendhi-decorated hand. These and other design features, including the whimsical, illustrated capital letters used to begin each chapter, reflected the expertise and applied hand of Durban-based artist, Andrew Verster.

Verster also wrote the book's introduction, observing that *Nanima's Chest* was 'the first catalogue of Indian heirlooms in private homes and…it makes this heritage accessible and in a small way helps break down barriers and counteract[s] the notion that culture can be divided. Emphatically, it says that these are ours, for us all to enjoy.'[20] Verster here points to two important aspects of the book's social significance. The first is that it drew upon existing resources and histories from within the membership of the Women's Cultural Group and from among their peers; the second was that it brought these home-based resources out into a broader, public light. In other words, the intimate, often hidden, contents of a grandmother's trunk were now engaging the universalising discourses of the art world.

The title itself draws attention to the private-sphere familiarity that the book invokes – precious things from maternal lineages – each one representing some important occasion or personal moment in the life of the woman who possessed, preserved and transported it across the ocean or ordered it especially from India. Along with the value of their component materials and the skill with which they were so colourfully designed and crafted, the emotional value of these articles is rendered tangible to the reader. For example, in explaining their antique origins, Verster points out that although 'woven and embroidered cloth is fragile', these objects 'have survived because they have been loved'.[21]

In working on this project, the Group made successful and efficient use of its gendered composition, securing a mostly feminine range of clothing for show. Group members had recognised that most of their homes and those of their

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friends contained a bounty of textiles – some folded away and unused, others created for special events – that were valuable representations of ancient craft traditions as well as of their own lineage, ethnic identity and immigration history. Bringing these private resources and treasures into the public domain claimed a space for them outside the context of their use. The shawls, frocks, blouses and gowns featured in these pages are celebrations of cultural heritage but also carry the poignant significance of constituting a wealth that was retained or retrieved by women (and in some cases passed on to daughters) within conditions of social or personal upheaval. These items were nestled in the luggage of women, some of whom travelled by ship to join husbands in an unseen land, transported from the Durban port on overland journeys of different distances; these were among the items repackaged when the Group Areas Acts remapped the city and Indian families were removed from their homes. Presented to the public within this grid of historical knowledge, these beautiful objects were offered up to the making of multiple meanings and for collective and individual appraisals. They were educational and could simultaneously inspire admiration and celebration.

Making the most of these existing resources also meant, more directly, deploying the Group's own talents. A committee comprising Zuby Shaikh, Laila Ally, Zubie Ganie and Farida Jhavery was tasked to procure the material for the book's cloth cover. Group members appeared in the book and as models in the fashion shows attending its launch, to give the garments life and demonstrate how they were worn. While detailed and close-up photographs display the intricacies of craftsmanship, and images of draped or folded cloth showcase motif and design, the photographs of models adorned in a lustrous kurta, kanikar or shining misar reveal these as items of lived fashion, created for warmth or weddings. Posing in photographs for *Nanima's Chest* meant that it was not only the garments that were being drawn into the public eye, but the women also. The production is remarkable too in that many traditional ulema from the Indian sub-continent, who predominated in KwaZulu Natal, regarded photographs as haraam. Ahmed Kathrada saw it as a progressive sign of the times that Muslim women were, without too much controversy, able to make such an appearance. He wrote to Mayat:

> What a delight to see the lovely young models. I assume these days one can find Moslem girls who are professional models. Many years ago, Mrs IC

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> brought along a musical show to Jo'burg. If I remember correctly it was advertised as 'Maglis-e-Rung-o-Raag', and included a Mannequin Parade headed by Miss Priscilla Rowley, I think. There were no Moslem ladies among the Mannequins: I suppose at that time it would have been too radical an expectation.[22]

That Group members themselves appeared in 'traditional' wear was surely one reason why their appearance was met with no ripples of controversy.[23] By the early 1980s though, the Group had been going strong for over a quarter-century and the publishing of *Nanima's Chest* was also a display of their confidence in the mandates of their mission statement. Some of the 'lovely young models' in the book were among the youngest Group members: for example, Shameema Mayat makes appearances in bridal wear, a red garara and kameez made in Pakistan and a rose satin dress from Surat.

Tragically, their youngest model, Bushra the daughter of Group member Sayedah Ansari, died before the book was published. In a letter to Ahmed Kathrada in 1981, Mayat related the sorrowful circumstances:

> The very beautiful [girl] opposite the mendhi-designed hand died in a car accident just a week before the book came from the publishers. Her Mona Lisa smile haunts me. For one so young she was so serious, soft spoken and reflective by nature. She appears on pages 12, 57 and 73. [She was] Bushra Ansari, granddaughter of Mawlana Ansari of West Street Mosque and, from her mother's side, granddaughter of Mawlana Siddique (Safee Siddique of Radio Truro's sister's daughter).[24]

The antique costumes appearing in *Nanima's Chest* also made an appearance in several 'mannequin shows'. Zubeida Seedat explained that these occasions had a binding effect on the Group:

> We did a couple of fashion shows and that was always very good because you took out all the old clothes and, you know, there was a feel about what was happening and how they dressed in that period. And I found my grandmother's beautiful clothes – still got them in boxes. I think it bound [us] together – it also gave you a sense of identity and also of the richness of our culture.

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For Laila Ally, these fashion shows were important to her conception of culture:

> Culture I think is to retain the kind of upbringing that we had. It's to keep things alive, even if it's music or entertainment or whatever. I know it's taboo to a lot of people, music and things like that. But I think you have to be broad-minded where that is concerned. The clothes, I think, would appeal to any female…[For] the fashion shows we used to have traditional clothing. And the girls modelled these clothes and it was from the family. The clothes were not bought especially for the fashion show. It was what you had in your wardrobe and what somebody else has got. And we used to sift through the clothes and think, 'Hey, this would be beautiful if it was shown or displayed'. The jewellery, things like that. [The participants] thoroughly enjoyed it, absolutely. [At] that time, for Muslims to sort of be exposed to something like this was quite rare. Now, of course, younger people are exposed to those kinds of fashion shows and things like that…

Nanima's Chest endeavours to convey this sense of dipping into the cupboard of memory, of a threshold which the reading public crosses as it enters into a specific cultural home life. One means of conveying this feeling are sets of pages covered in black and white photographs, family photos laid out as if in an album or (since many are shown in their frames) as if hanging on a wall in a home. Most of these are uncaptioned except for a generic endnote denoting, for example, 'Little girls dressed for Eid' or 'Grandma in Burqa greeted by relatives on her return to India'. While these images are indeed the family photographs of Group members and their associates, in the book they are used to communicate the collective experience of immigrant life from which these textiles derive their use and situational meaning. Some of the images are studio photographs: serious-looking children standing alongside seated adults. Some reveal the effects of time and repeated thumbing, with creases and folds interrupting their smooth surface, showing their history as personal possessions. Others are snapshots of people around town or in groups at special functions: a vintage car in front of AH Moosa & Sons, a collection of Gujarati dignitaries looking grandly at the camera, a house on Mansfield Road lost in 1966 with the implementation of the Group Areas Act.

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Cultural inheritance: a child's outfit in a vintage family photograph is modelled anew in Nanima's Chest.

Most of these photos are, above all, images of families: families whose stories are linked to India and to South Africa, but also linked to a creolising local history of the South African Indian diaspora. A chapter titled 'Great-Grandfather's Arrival' tells of the Natal sugar barons' quest for labour and of the solution they found in the system of indenture, mediated by the British imperial government in its Indian colonies. It speaks of the exploitation, poor pay and abhorrent accommodation assigned to the workers that arrived – often as victims of poverty, famine and land taxes imposed by the colonial authorities in India. Notable here is the use of the possessive pronoun to describe ancestral settlement: 'In spite of the harsh terms, our grandparents torn from their moorings put down new roots.' Despite the particular lineages of the textiles pictured in the book – with their class and ghaam origins – *Nanima's Chest* aims for an inclusive reading of identity. Thus, though the text moves on to explain that 'free

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passenger Indians' arriving a decade or so later 'unlike their earlier compatriots… took much longer to settle down', the text identifies itself with 'Indian' ancestral flows in South Africa. This historiographical approach aims for a much wider reading of the particular heritages featured in the book's pages. It renders the garments in *Nanima's Chest* 'Indian' in addition to being 'Surti' or 'Memon', a unification of identity that reflected a broader tactic of minority politics situated within the racialised hierarchies and segregations of apartheid South Africa. Nevertheless, precisely because of the complexity of cultural politics in this context, the cultural work done by *Nanima's Chest* is ultimately ambiguous in relation to its tracings of histories – particular or generalised – as well as in relation to a potentially universalising aesthetic impact made by the beauty of its subject matter. Like any cultural production, the politics of interpretation is multiple and does not lie passively in the intentions of authors and artists.

Affirming images of a particular heritage within a national context where cultural difference was part of the state's ideological arsenal of control could not be done without concern, as Kathrada suggested to Mayat when he wrote: 'One of the reviewers of Nanima's Peti thought there would be an adverse reaction among some "radicals" to such a "sectional" venture. I'd be interested to hear what sort of criticism, if any, was levelled.' After seeing the book for himself, he expressed satisfaction that '*Nanima's Chest* should give no cause whatsoever for any anxiety about its possible uses for promoting sectionalism'. What his letter highlighted, however, was the sensitivities within many political circles about showcasing difference when a front of solidarity seemed crucial in confronting apartheid. Serial publications by the state, such as *Bantu World* and *Fiat Lux*, geared towards encapsulating the concerns and activities of apartheid-classified racial groupings, were dedicated to the politics of division. Meanwhile coffee-table books, pitched to a global market, reified homeland ethnic groups as 'The Zulu' or 'The Xhosa', expressing an idea of cultural groups as hermetically sealed entities, bounded through colourful practices, histories and beliefs. When Andrew Verster wrote in his introduction to *Nanima's Chest* that 'the past is not easy to get along with', he was referring to the political uses of historical and cultural representation, the way that culture often substitutes for history through assertions of timelessness that mask change and rupture. But Verster asserts a positive, practical alternative to this

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view, which reintroduces both the realities of historical change and the agency of human beings in crafting and recrafting culture:

> Without understanding and loving the good things that people have made before, one cannot hope to be able to make good things today. The past is a reservoir of skills and ideas, as well as standards…Simple ideas can be reworked a thousand times with as many different solutions as there are people, because imagination is limitless.[25]

Nanima's Chest is a book that emphasises pleasure, a regard for tactile beauty and a valuing of old things. Like *Indian Delights*, *Nanima's Chest* honours the flowering of taste produced out of the gendered worlds that make up home, family, festive events and is affirming of the centrality of women within them. It renders customary femininity visible, with aesthetic qualities to be appreciated as positive and enjoyable. The book's disclosure of lovely things hidden away – in trunks, within homes, but also rendered secretive because of legal-political divisions – fulfilled the constitutional objectives of the Women's Cultural Group to 'develop and inculcate in the public of the Republic of South Africa a meaningful interest in and understanding of the culture, the arts and crafts…of Indian South Africans in particular and of other communities; [as well as to] undertake projects and programmes of interest in the Cultural and Educational fields among women in particular and the public generally'.[26]

The Group derived much pride from this publication and copies were handed out to visiting guests and even sent overseas. For example, when Akber Badi spoke to the Group in September 1981, he was presented with a copy of the book. A copy was also sent to Professor TB Irving, a Canadian-born convert to Islam who published widely on Islam and translated the Qur'an into English as *The Qur'an: First American Version* in 1985. At the time when *Nanima's Chest* was sent to him, Irving was dean of the American Islamic College in Chicago. Visiting poets who participated in musha'iras were also given copies of the book. *Rooi Rose*, an Afrikaans monthly magazine, reviewed the book in October 1982. The minutes of the Group's monthly meeting for that month noted that 'there was a good write-up'.

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Culture from the podium

The marital connection between the Arabic Study Circle and the Women's Cultural Group, with Bibi Mall as the latter's first president and her husband, Daoud, as a founding member of the Circle, meant that their cultural resources could be shared. Visiting scholars, religious figures and dignitaries hosted by the Circle often provided a separate lecture for women, hosted by the Group. Altenatively, the Group would host a meal for the visitor. The importance of these events lay in the fact that most of the visitors were seeking rational principles that were distinctively Islamic as well as appropriate for modern scientific societies – as opposed to many local ulema who tended to be mired in a more ritualistic form of Islam. It is for this reason that organisations like the Arabic Study Circle and the Muslim Youth Movement, and members of the Women's Cultural Group often fell foul of the ulema.

One of the early figures was Joseph Perdu, who stayed in Durban and Cape Town during the mid-1950s. He proved a great inspiration to younger Muslims because of his modernist interpretation of Islam, but he was also a source of great division when it was alleged that he was a Baha'i missionary. Dr Mall was instrumental in inviting Perdu to give a series of lectures and Bibi Mall and other women were involved in the programme.[27] Perdu was followed by the likes of Yusuf Ibish, a professor of philosophy at the American University of Beirut (1966); Pakistani educationist Abdul Quddus Hashemi (1966); and Pakistani judge Sir Muhammad Zafrullah Khan, who was at the time based at the International Court of Justice (1967). In April 1973, the Group invited Zuhar Sakr (the wife of Lebanese scholar, Dr Ahmad Sakr, who was a guest speaker at the youth camp held by the Muslim Youth Movement at the time) to the home of Zohra Moosa, where she spoke on 'Muslim Women in Chicago'. Dr Sakr was a founding member and president of the Muslim Students' Association of the United States and Canada (now the Islamic Society of North America), first director and representative of the Muslim World League to the UN, and in 1987 he set up the Foundation for Islamic Knowledge in Chicago.

One of the most influential visitors was Palestinian-born academic and activist Ismail al-Faruqi, who visited in late 1971. Al-Faruqi was a professor of Islamic Studies at Temple University and assisted in establishing a Department of Islamic Studies at what was then the University of Durban-Westville. Zuleikha

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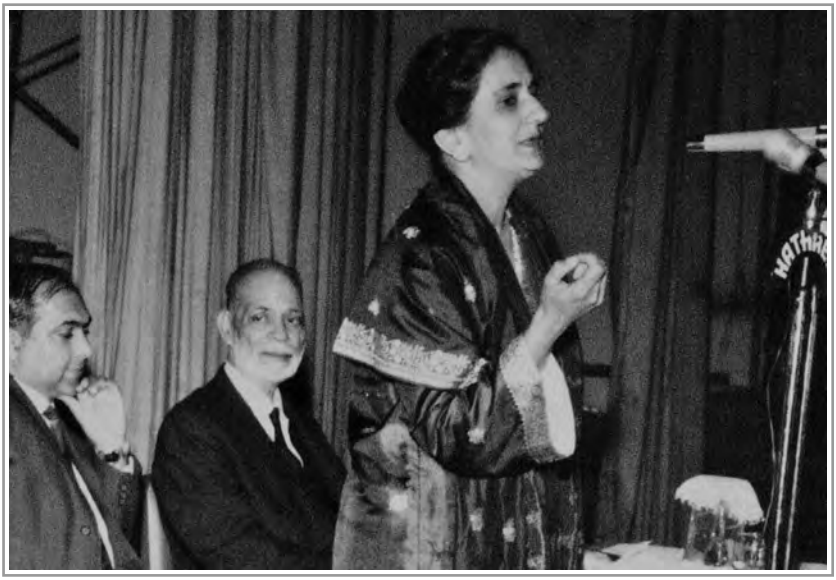

Zuleikha Mayat introduces Sir Zafrullah Khan when the Group hosted him during his visit to South Africa in 1967. Khan was president of the UN General Assembly from 1962 to 1963 and was made president of the International Court of Justice from 1970 to 1973.

Mayat, who was also involved in negotiations with the university, arranged for the Group to host Professor al-Faruqi. Following the brutal murder of al-Faruqi and his wife, Lois Lamya, a scholar in her own right, at their Philadelphia home in May 1986, Zuleikha Mayat wrote a letter of condolence to the couple's children on 7 June 1986, which, among other things, pointed to the impact of the visitors who were 'modernist' in their approach to Islam:

> Cut off from the main streams of the Islamic world, our estimation of ourselves was so low, that we did not consider us worthy of even a tiny dot of the Muslim Ummah. In our efforts to belong, we had a constant stream of Ulama from the Pakistan and the Indian sub-continent who, though they inspired us, left us clinging to our Indianness rather than a member of the International Community. With the arrival first, of Professor Ibish from Beirut, and later others, we did shake off this 'Indian mentality' but it was only with the arrival of Professor al-Faruqi that we established ourselves as part and parcel of the Islamic community.

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> His lectures propelled us into action and he coerced us to march with the rest of the Islamic World. He shared with us his vision of the Islamic Brotherhood which he was bent on re-forging, bringing together the weak links and reinforcing the stronger ones. His involvement in our affairs was total. Firstly, he bullied the authorities here into starting an Islamic Studies Faculty at the University and himself pressurized two professors [Salman Nadvi and Habibul Haq Nadvi] to come and head the department. This at a time when no one was prepared to come and teach in a country suffering the Apartheid disease. Secondly, he urged us to train our children at Temple University so that they could return and help us. He started the ball rolling and obtained a scholarship for our first student. The manner in which your father and mother looked after the foreign students has become a legend.

The Group was also involved in hosting Muhammad Asad, who was brought to South Africa in 1978 by the Arabic Study Circle. Asad (1900–1992) was born into the Jewish faith as Leopold Weiss, and after embracing Islam, wrote prolifically on Islamic culture and law. His most famous works were *The Road to Mecca* (1954) and his translation of the Qur'an into English. He worked with Muhammad Iqbal (1876–1938) in the mid-1930s as they chartered the independent Muslim state of Pakistan. Asad's visit was controversial because some of his interpretations were at odds with those of local ulema. Ahmed Deedat, Zuleikha Mayat, Daoud Mall, Ismail Manjra and Ebrahim Jadwat were involved in distributing Asad's translation of the Qur'an. The Islamic Council of South Africa (ICSA) objected in particular to Asad's view that Jesus died on the cross.[28] Ibrahim Bawa, secretary-general of ICSA, issued a statement on 16 September 1978 that since Asad's view was contrary to that of the majority of Muslims, his translation should 'not be distributed to the general public as it will unjustifiably create doubts and confusion'. Dr Mall responded on 4 October 1978 that the committee distributing the Qur'ans was 'deeply shocked and perturbed' by the statement. ICSA, he felt, should not 'assume the status of a board of censors for the Muslim community. Islam knows no priesthood and no matter how learned a body of ulema, they have no right to prescribe to the Muslim Ummah what it should read and what it should not.'[29]

In 1981, Jamil Dehlavi, director of *Blood of Hussain,* attended the Durban Film Festival and the festival's director, Ros Sarkin, asked the Group to enter-

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tain him. Nafisa Jeewa organised a dinner reception for Dehlavi, whose film about an autocratic ruler was banned by Pakistan's military ruler General Zia ul-Haq. Pakistani economist Professor Khurshid Ahmed was entertained in February 1984. Professor Ahmed, who is one of the most respected figures in Islamic economics, was president of the International Association of Islamic Economics, Leicester, UK, at the time. The minutes of the monthly meeting for March recorded that the ladies-only 'lecture turned out to be very informative'. In October 1987 the Group hosted Judge Tanzil-ur-Rahman of Pakistan at the Orient Hall.

There was much fanfare when Yaqub Zaki (formerly James Dickie), an expert on Islamic art and architecture and chief adviser to the World of Islam festival in London in 1976, visited Durban in April 1978 at the invitation and sponsorship of the Women's Cultural Group. His tour included a reception at the Westville Community Centre; an art exhibition at the University of Durban-Westville from 19 to 25 April, set up in conjunction with Professor Cassim Lakhi of the university's Fine Art Department; a screening of the BBC series *Traditional World of Islam* at the Shiraz cinema; a dinner held in honour of Dr Yaqub Zaki at the Elangeni Hotel (co-ordinated by Mariam Motala); and a seminar at the University of Natal which was organised by Fatima Loonat. The Group co-sponsored his trip together with the Arabic Study Circle, the Department of History of Art at the University of Durban-Westville, and the Muslim Youth Movement.

The involvement of the Group in this tour was typical of its involvement in the visit of many other overseas visitors. A circular to members from Zuleikha Mayat carried detailed instructions on the reception that the Group was to hold at the Community Centre. Members were warned: 'whether you come to the dinner or not, you will be required to help make samoosas, pies, chutneys or arrange flowers or help at the tables, etc.' Twenty tables were laid out, with two members required to serve at each table. Starters and drinks were to be placed on tables before guests arrived and members had to serve guests before seating themselves. Two members were in attendance at the exhibition in the morning and two in the evening. Dr Zaki was accommodated at the home of Zuleikha Mayat and was available for discussions with the public at the homes of various members. This called for special culinary arrangements, as Mayat's memorandum made clear:

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> This will mean that your hostess will need help with baking. Those of you not involved with 'Jamboos' are asked to bring either biscuits or a cake and deliver it to your hostess. Gori Patel will phone you three days before your turn comes. Should you not be able to bake yourself on that day, then it is up to you to get a friend to do it for you. No one, not even Committee Members, have been exempted from any of these chores. Everyone is given a fair share of duties and let it not be said that you let the Group down.[30]

Often, formal speakers were either affiliates of the Group or local professional women. In November of 1958, Dr K Goonam gave a talk on family planning and Fatima Meer addressed them on several occasions, including giving a lecture on Gandhian philosophy. Devi Bughwan spoke about speech and drama and Yasmin Dinath about anthropology. On other occasions, Group members themselves made an address on a field of interest or expertise: Zubeida Seedat spoke on Rabindranath Tagore in December 1954; Zuleikha Mayat spoke on Pakistan in June 1955. Other speakers came from outside Group circles and spoke on issues of Indian arts and culture: Zainub Reddy's lecture was on Indian crafts; Dr Tirapurisundari spoke on Indian dancing; Professor Cassim Lakhi on the Indus Valley excavations. A play reading by Alan Paton and Devi Bughwan took place in 1966; Khurshid Nadvi gave a talk entitled 'Shiah and Sunni Muslims: Differences and Similarities' in March 1980 and one on 'Evolution: The Islamic Perspective' in November 1982. They were also shown slide shows of members' travels and there were outings to factories, schools, and other places of interest.

Most of these lectures and field trips were aimed at female audiences. Lectures and educational activities followed the philosophy of 'learning from cradle to grave', whether it was learning Urdu or English, swimming or tennis, or improving their social skills. Even food demonstrations were a learning experience, according to Zuleikha Mayat:

> The members would then interact with the guests there, with the people who came to listen and, you know, get into little talks with them; they would also pass on tips to us on certain things and so on. Members would come back at a meeting and we would collectively talk and discuss

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> this. It was always a learning thing – both sides…whatever you give, you somehow get back in some other way.

Aside from the educational value of such visits, association with visitors sometimes placed Group members in opposition to local ulema. Many of the visitors, as Mayat pointed out in her letter of condolence to al-Faruqi's children, often provided an alternative and, from the point of view of members, a more enlightened interpretation of Islam. This 'window of opportunity' for a more liberal interpretation of Islam probably peaked in the decade from the mid-1970s to the mid-1980s. The authority and influence of the ulama has grown over the years as reformist Islam has taken root. On the other hand, with the opening up of educational opportunities for girls and women, there has been something of a cutback in lectures and forums with 'serious' themes, except on those dealing with contemporary issues such as the application of Muslim Personal Law in South Africa or South Africa's Anti-Terrorism Bill of 2002.

Musha'iras and qawwalis

In a letter dated in September of 1979, Zuleikha Mayat asked Ahmed Kathrada whether he had ever attended a musha'ira, which, she explained, was a

> gathering of the bards where each poet either reads his or her own composition or gets one of the professional reciters or singers to do it. Seated on the floor in good old nawaabi style, the reader asks for permission from the Mir-e-Musha'ira and here Safee Siddique, of Radio Truro fame, is tops. Incidentally his poetry too is tops. When the Mir and the audience concedes him the permission then the poet proceeds couplet by couplet waiting for the awful silence or the high acclamation of 'Wah wah' or 'Do baare' or 'Subhan'Allah'. When thus encouraged the poet proceeds and draws the audience into the orbit of his own imagination, allegorical and symbolic meanings or sheer eloquence of word play. At times, the majlis is so carried away that some of the excitable ones go into a haal and the couplet has to be repeated over and over again till the emotions are pacified again. Are [audio] tapes allowed on the island?[31]

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Local poet Safee Siddique and an international guest at a musha'ira. The Group regularly hosted such events until pressure from local religious clergy proscribed them.

The first musha'ira, according to Sayedah Ansari, was held in Durban in 1936 in honour of the Indian Agent-General, Sir Raza Ali, following his marriage to Miss PV Sammy of Kimberley, and remained a vibrant fixture on the local cultural calendar until around the early 1990s. The Women's Cultural Group hosted evenings of songs and music, and musha'iras were sometimes arranged at Mayat's home. When musha'iras and qawwalis were organised at private homes, the host would usually empty his or her garage or lounge, cushions would be scattered around and the invited audience would sit huddled together on the floor.

Public musha'iras were organised under the auspices of the Buzme Adab, a group founded in 1959 by Sayedah Ansari's father Mawlana Bashir Siddique, her brother Safee Siddique, Alif Meer, Hoosen Kharwa and Faruqi Mehtar to promote musha'iras and qawwalis. Musha'iras were initially held at the Pine Street and Anjuman schools. The hall was partitioned to separate men and women. Later, the Buzme Adab organised quarterly musha'iras at large venues like the Orient Hall in Durban or the Truro Hall in Westville. These poetry recitals drew as many as a thousand people in the 1960s. As was the tradition, sha'ers had a pen name. Prolific female sha'ers from Durban included Sayedah 'Sayedah' Ansari, Zuleikha 'Fahmida' Mayat, Hawa Bibi 'Hijab' Meer, and

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Razia 'Razia' Jeewa. From Johannesburg, regular sha'ers included Amina 'Naaz' Soomar, Fatima 'Nargis' Hassan, and Rookeya 'Shama' Khalil. Pen names were meant to intrigue. Naaz means 'elegant', a nargi is a type of flower, shama means 'candle', and hijab, while commonly used to refer to head coverings worn by women, literally translates into 'curtain' or 'covering', and could well have referred to the purdah that separated men from women. The works of these sha'ers were published in 1978 in a 400-page anthology, *Janubi Afrika Urdu Sha'er*.[32]

Sayedah Ansari mentioned her fascination at the fact that, aside from herself, the home language of all the women was either Gujarati or Memonese, even though they composed their poems in Urdu. When a musha'ira was held on a long weekend, participants would attend from as far away as Kenya, Botswana, Cape Town, Lesotho and Swaziland. At other times they would mail their contributions, which were usually rendered by Safee Siddique at the musha'ira. There were regular contributions from India and Pakistan as well. In addition to her poems, Razia Jeewa also published two novels in Urdu, *Anoki Aaan* (Unsual Pride) and *Anoka Pyaar* (Unusual Love).

While living in London in 1962, Zuleikha Mayat had taken the opportunity to study Urdu at the School of Oriental and African Studies and upon returning home studied further under Farooqi Mehtar, who encouraged her to submit poems to the local musha'iras. Founding member Zubeida Barmania was also deeply steeped in the ghazzal tradition. She acquired this love at Aligarh in North India, where she was sent to study as a young girl.

> I speak very fluent Urdu because I learnt it as a child. When I first came back from Aligarh, Ismail and Fatima [Meer] would have me over, and other people would come and I would sing for them ghazzals…[With regard to] my Aligarh experience, what saved me is that I sang, and the older college students would spirit me away from the junior side of the boarding school and place me next to them and then they would teach me ghazzals. They were all going through their romantic phases so I'd sing these songs and, of course, they just thought that I was out of this world. I had the very fortunate experience of being with families [who] had very refined tastes in music and so they would introduce me to very good music and I picked up very fast…Whenever I visited, they'd bring

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Fatima Mayet (sister of Group founder-member Khatija Vawda) and Zakiya and Munira Ansari (sisters of Sayedah) reading a Moulood at a function organised by the Buzme Akhwanus Safaa. The two men seated on the left are ME Paruk (fez) and Mawlana Abdul aleem Siddique (the brother of Sayedah's father, Mawlana Bashir Siddique). Before reformist Islamic traditions sought to eradicate such practices, performances by girls singing and reciting poetry before mixed audiences were part of the Islamic public sphere.

> people around and say, 'You've got to listen to her sing and listen to her sahi pronunciation'…When I speak Urdu now, and if I am in India, they think I'm either from Lucknow or from Hyderabad. Aligarh based me in a culture.

Sayedah Ansari comes

> from a poet family and my father was always, you know, he used to like music and qawwali and…we were brought up like that. In fact, when we used to chat at the table, many times myself and [my brother] Safee and my father, we'll compose sentences too. We'll talk in that way [poetically]. Like if we want pani [water], we'd sing, '*Zara muj ko pani pilado*'.

Poetic composition was such a normative part of family communication that at an early age Ansari's daughter, Rizwana, also became savvy about the way forms of expression could transform a moment or bring about favourable results. Ansari recalls an interchange between Rizwana and her Dadabajee,

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Mawlana Ansari. Rizwana 'was a little child, about four years old and she knew that her grandfather was a hot-tempered person.'

> There was a watermelon and he cut it. We were all sitting there. His favourite was Rehana, his youngest daughter. Rizwana, she, I don't know how, she made out that Rehana got a bigger slice of watermelon and [she] got a smaller slice. I suppose, you know, she was small so that's why she got less. So she finished her watermelon [and] after that she was sitting and then she was composing. She sings, '*Tarboos mera dil he or dil me Rehaana he*.' There was a film song and she took that tune and she's telling her Dadabajee, she's not telling [directly but] actually she wants Dadabajee must hear that. 'I love watermelon – it's in my heart – and I got Rehana there as well', and Dadabajee was so thrilled with that he cut a big slice of watermelon. He said, 'Rizwana there's it, have it', because she made him so happy. So this is how we learnt, it's in the blood. So we started our composing from that age, you see.

Sayedah Ansari was a regular participant in local musha'iras and we reproduce one of her contributions below. The poem, which she composed in Urdu in 1975, indicates a thematic concern with mysteries difficult to articulate. Ansari stressed that the beauty of Urdu and much of the meaning is lost in translation but it is nevertheless worth reading:

> Pitter-pattering
> Divine rain of mercy
> Every atom of this town glittering
> Do not ask
> Was the attraction a feeling of sincerity?
> Or a sincere voice from within my heart?
> Why, how and when did I reach out?
> Do not question me of those moments
> In the shadowy light of the midnight moon
> The distant shimmering lights were seen
> Like a lightning strike set the heart ablaze
> The state of my emotions
> Do not ask

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At the break of the Dawn
The Green Dome appeared
Wishes and pent up desires bloomed fragrantly
The closeness felt
Do not ask
Sighting the Golden Grill
The shehnai of the heartbeat
The tinkling of the anklets
The moment of the meeting
The night of Me'raaj
Do not ask
A beggar prostrated again and again
On the sands of Madina
Hiding behind a veil of tears
What opulent gifts she found
Do not ask
Gradually the burning passion
Exposed the innermost feelings
What comfort and blessings the heart found
Do not ask
Your presence at the doorstep
Of the Respected One
Look at this miracle of love
So from this place, Sayedah
What rewards you received
Do not ask

Asked about the inclusion of her name in the poem, Ansari explained that one of the practices associated with ghazzals is for the sha'er to place his or her takhallus in the final verse in order to secure credit for the work.

In her letter to Kathrada, which he had to read between lines cut out by censors (though it is difficult to imagine what the politically sensitive material might have been), Mayat was clear that 'in so far as audience participation is concerned it has to be total, otherwise it becomes it becomes deadpan'.[33] A brochure marking the 18th anniversary of the Group in 1972 explained that as far as the 'Oriental arts' went, Durban was a cultural desert and so the 'classical

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Nafisa Jeewa observes a performance with 'Sitar' Jamal (right) in one of many musical performances hosted by the Women's Cultural Group.

atmosphere' created during these evening functions was designed to inspire. Participants had to submit their contributions prior to the event and could read their poetry on stage or, if shy to do so, get someone to read on their behalf.

The first musha'ira sponsored by the Group was held in July 1965. Some of the major musha'iras included one in 1971 at Orient Hall, featuring Asim Randeree, a visiting sha'er from Rander. The secretary's report dated 13 June 1973 noted that in November 1972, the Group organised an Eid/Diwali function where guests read extracts from their works in Urdu and English; there were talks on Indian music and dancing, and schoolgirls from the Juma Musjid Madrassah sang qasidas. At the December 1972 monthly meeting, members 'entertained themselves with readings in English, Urdu, Gujarati, and ghazzals.' In 1973, a qawwali by Chote Saleh Adam and Salma Begum was held at the Westville Centre. This was followed in July by a ghazzal evening given by local schoolteacher Maya Devi and her husband, Ramschander, who were very popular on the local circuit. In May 1978, the Group organised a musha'ira to commemmorate the death of Mahir ul-Qadri, an outstanding poet and journalist from Pakistan. Sayedah Ansari organised and chaired the function, which included talks on various aspects of Indian Muslim culture followed by shairs by Buzme Saheb and local sha'ers. Organisations like the Arabic Study Circle, Buzme Adab, and the Iqbal Study Group were invited.[34]

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The Group hosted Indian ghazzal singer, Rajendra Mehta, in August 1984 with Zubeida Barmania as compère. There were two musha'iras in 1985, one for Mujeeb Ansari and another for visiting Pakistani sha'er, 'Peerzada' (Pirzada Qasim Raza Siddique), an academic who held a PhD in physiology from Newcastle University in England, and later became vice-chancellor of Karachi University.

The Group hosted the internationally renowned Pakistani group, the Nizami Qawwal Brothers, led by Jaffar Hussain Nizami, in March 1988 at the Orient Hall. In October 1987, a musha'ira was held at Orient Islamic School in honour of poet Raghib Muradabadi, who attracted a large audience as he had been active in the Muslim League with Mohammad Ali Jinnah and Liaquat Ali Khan in the 1940s.

Mohammed Rafi, the legendary Hindi playback singer who was a dominant figure in the Indian film industry from the 1950s until his death in 1980, was hosted at the Maharani Hotel in December 1978. Sayedah Ansari organised a 'dignified function' in September 1978 to commemorate the death of Mahir-ul-Qadri, (editor of *Faraan*, a monthly magazine from Karachi), who had visited South Africa in the mid-1970s as guest of Suleman Tootla. This turned out to be a 'grand function' at the Orient Hall, which was packed to capacity. During the first half of the tribute, local sha'ers recited their composition in tribute to the great poet. Sayedah Ansari, Razia Jeewa, Farooqi Mehtar, Dr Yunus Meer, and Safee Siddique were among those who paid tribute. In the second half of the show, Mahir-ul-Qadri's kalams were sung by local singers. Mariam Motala, president for many years, recalled these musha'iras:

> You see, we used to work quite closely with Buzme Adab, so we used to have a lot of musha'iras, cultural type of sing-songs but poetic sessions. And Safee Siddique used to be quite involved with us. All overseas artists who used to come over were invited by the Buzme Adab but automatically we would take over in the evening or something like that and have a dinner or have a session. That was great fun, great fun.

By the end of the 1980s interest in musha'iras and qawwalis began to wane though older members of the Group tried to keep this tradition alive. Reformist Islam, which was proclaiming music and certain kinds of artistic expression to be taboo, was one reason for a decline in poetic garage gatherings and the

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more formal cultural performances held in large halls. Another was the ascendancy of English as the first language of emerging generations of Durbanites, which rendered the classical arts much less accessible to younger people.

Of mother tongues and cultural voices

A notable attribute of *Nanima's Chest* and *Indian Delights* is that they were written in English. Most of the educational lectures were also delivered in English but *not* the theatrical productions *Be Ghadi Ghum* and *Be Ghadi Moj* or the musha'iras and other poetic compositions. The targeted readership of the books and lectures was clearly a 'general' public. The anglophone nature of this imagined general public was, however, rooted both geographically in Natal as a former British colony and in the more recent and contested history of language following Union. Speakers of Zulu constituted a majority in the province, and within Natal there were also speakers of Afrikaans, Chinese, Greek, Gujarati, Pedi, Portuguese, Sotho, Tamil, Telegu, Urdu, Xhosa and many other languages. However, given missionary education and the official linguistic profile of local government, literacy in this region had come to be equated with English literacy. For speakers of Gujarati, Urdu and Memonese – as was the case for other mother tongues – the advancement of literacy, particularly through the education of girls, meant that spoken and written vernacular lanaguages faded from prominence over the course of a few generations from the 1950s.

The diversity of languages and dialects of Indian origin was reproduced in South Africa within the networks of family relations and community associations, as well as through newspapers like *Indian Views* and *Indian Opinion* (which had sections both in Gujarati and English) and through religious education. For people with origins in prosperous trading families, regular travel to India and fresh contacts with family members, educational institutions and business associates across the Indian Ocean provided additional linguistic continuity. Most of the original Group members were literate in two or more languages, with different combinations of fluency depending on home language and geography. Most Indian children grew up speaking Gujarati or Memonese at home. As Sayedah Ansari points out, communication was a problem when she arrived from India able to speak only Urdu:

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> For a while I really missed my Indian home. Because of my language I couldn't speak to anybody although, you know, my father enrolled me in the Madrassah Pine Street. But I just couldn't make friends. And, because remember in them days you know, here the community, the girls, used to speak only Gujarati – no English. Today everyone speaks English. So I found it very very difficult until I learnt a little Gujarati. That made a little bit of difference.

English, Zulu (or rather Funagalo)[35] and, for families from the then Transvaal, Afrikaans were common additional languages for many Group members whose mother tongues were Gujarati or Urdu or Memonese. Speakers of Gujarati and Memonese were usually also familiar with Urdu, while those who spoke Memonese had to read and write in Gujarati as Memonese is a spoken language only. Until the 1960s those who attended the Crescent School in Pine Street learnt Urdu, English and Arabic.

Second-generation Group member Fatima Mayat, growing up in the 1950s and 1960s, studied English at school and Urdu and the recitation of the Qur'an at Mawlana Bashir's madrassah. 'I did a bit of Urdu because I used to love the language,' she remembers. As was common for most Gujarati-speakers, there was no formal study of the language, just what was learnt through conversation with parents.

The Arabic Study Circle's annual speech contest was held in both Urdu and English, and in 1956 Sayedah Ansari won first place in the Urdu section. When Khatija Vawda went to university at the end of the 1970s, she majored in languages: 'Well, I did my majors because Urdu was my favourite subject all along, musha'ira and those things, so I majored in Arabic and Urdu.' Zohra Moosa and her husband studied Urdu at the ML Sultan Technikon in the 1970s, though her frequent trips to Canada meant that she does not regard herself as proficient. These classes were conducted by Sayedah Ansari, who remembers:

> There was so much demand, especially when the poets used to come from India and Pakistan. And they used to enjoy it. When I am sitting in the hall and Mariam Motala is sitting, she says, 'Sayedah, what does it mean? Tell me what it means.' When you tell them, they are stunned and enjoying themselves, you know, and thereafter they'll go look for the meaning, where they can learn Urdu. And the late [Dr] Yunus Meer

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> came to me. He say, 'You know, I'm trying to arrange [Urdu] classes in ML Sultan', so I used to run the classes at Tech. Now all the professionals were there, in class. My late brother used to take one class and I used to take another class.

Because of her mastery of Urdu, Ansari appeared on BBC Urdu on a couple of occasions, reading out recipes from *Indian Delights* for an international audience. She was aired via telephone from Zuleikha Mayat's home.

Languages were thus both a medium of expression and a means of accessing knowledge – often specialised knowledge – as young Muslim girls and boys learned at madrassah through recitations of the Qur'an and hadiths. Languages were a living form of heritage and identity, since speech – in a land of many tongues – often signalled ancestral origins and a common cultural frame of reference. For men, language could be regarded as a resource, used to express or appeal to fraternal feeling, when seeking patronage or favour in business or politics. Vernacular language newspapers like *Indian Views* created reading publics in southern Africa across a broad geographical landscape, sufficient to imagine itself as a community with a specific set of interests (though subject, always, to debate).

English, meanwhile, was by no means universal. Sayedah Ansari and Gori Patel were certainly not alone in expressing a lack of confidence in their command of it. Indeed, the idea of having to communicate in English could have put Patel off joining the Group, but she was encouraged by other members and agreed to assist at a fundraising cookery demonstration at the University of Durban-Westville where an important medical conference was taking place. She remembers: 'Mrs Mayat say, "Now you must stand by the sutherfeni." I'm telling Mrs Mayat I've got no English so much good. She said, "No, you will see it: they can't talk better than you." So, that made us brave.'

Ironically, language may have been one of the factors that, inadvertently, kept non-Muslims and some Urdu-speaking Muslims out of the Group. Nafisa Jeewa, for example, points out that some

> joined the group and then they found – I think this is a common thing amongst Indians; when you speak an ethnic language, you'd be talking in English to everybody else and then suddenly you'd say something in your home language. So the others that are sitting there feel, you know,

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> 'What's happening here?' They feel left out. So if that happens regularly, then they decide, 'No, this is just Muslim women doing their thing'…If you are amongst your own people, you tend to just say something, even if it means, 'Pass me the sugar', but you would say it in your home language. You know, even if you're sitting amongst your own contemporaries, you would talk in English and then suddenly you would say something in Gujarati. Actually it wasn't meant to hurt anybody.

For members of the Group, vernacular languages were not only a means of communicating but also a source of expressive and aesthetic pleasure, both as spoken words and as scripted texts. Early members, especially, involved themselves in those cultural activities in which language constituted not merely a medium of meaning but the formal centre of its expression. Poetry festivals and musical events, musha'iras, ghazzals and similar forms have, over the decades, faded from the Group's repertoire and are now no longer a normative component in the skill base of its younger membership. This is partly because fluency in languages has been lost over the generations and English has been adopted for the creole expression of South African 'Indian' culture.

There was an important discussion around language when the Orient Islamic School was being established in the late 1950s. The school's trustees debated the medium of religious instruction and the representative of Natal's Jamiatul Ulama on the committee, Mawlana Abdul Haq Omarjee, insisted: 'Religious education, apart from the Holy Qur'an, should be taught in the Urdu language. We already have a great cultural connection with India and Pakistan and the Urdu language is a medium through which all our religious instruction has been imparted for generations.'[36] The Orient Institute rejected the Jamiat's position and opted to provide religious instruction in English. Sayedah Ansari described the decision as 'unfortunate':

> Unfortunately, I must repeat that word, unfortunately, when the Orient School was opened they said, 'No [Urdu]', and that was the worst thing, you see. Today I see even government schools have got Gujarati classes, they've got Tamil classes, they've got Hindi classes, but unfortunately, you know, we said Arabic. No doubt Arabic is our language, but Urdu was stopped and it should be our first, first priority. Orient, they said: 'No, Urdu out.'

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Interestingly, despite speaking and writing fluent Urdu herself, Zuleikha Mayat did not favour the incorporation of the language into the curriculum:

> Now Urdu is a beautiful language, one which brings us nostalgic fragrances of a classical past, and Urdu literature can stand comparison with the other refined languages such as Persian and French. It is a pity that our children should grow up without the honey sweetness and heady smells to which Urdu can transport us, but let us look at it from this point of view: In South Africa it is important for us in order to keep apace with the other races here, to know English and Afrikaans and in the future it will be imperative to know one of the Bantu languages as well. As Muslims most of us see the necessity of knowing Arabic and these together with the other compulsory school subjects are already far too many for a child to cope with…and the net result will be a poor knowledge and perhaps even hatred for languages.[37]

There was a deeper divide than just the choice of language, however. The Jamiat's memorandum linked language to the very content of the Islam that would be taught:

> There are a few persons with sound English knowledge who have studied the religion of Islam through their own initiative, but such persons are invariably of the 'free-thinker type', who, we believe, are not suitable to instil the correct feeling of respect and reverence towards religion which is so very essential for the children to learn in their early formative years.[38]

These 'free thinkers' included the likes of Abdullah Deedat, Suleman Omar and Ismail Timol, whom the Arabic Study Circle had sponsored to study at Al-Azhar University in Egypt between 1954 and 1956, and who had begun teaching in local madrassahs and schools upon their return.[39] Urdu remained the language of instruction in religious seminaries (Darul Ulooms) and was offered at some schools. In 1991, 558 students were studying Urdu at school level while 5 667 pupils were studying Arabic.[40] In the post-apartheid period, where Muslim schools have flourished, Arabic, not Urdu, is mandatory at all such schools in KwaZulu-Natal. However, the use of Arabic remains at a very elementary level and the Circle's vision of allowing Muslims the opportunity to directly access the Qur'an has not been realised.[41]

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As Indians had greater access to education in state schools from the 1960s, where the language of instruction was English, and where the children were brought up reading the works of William Shakespeare, William Wordsworth, William Blake, and DH Lawrence, and learnt to sing English songs and act in English plays, the vernacular disappeared rapidly. When a university was established for Indians in the 1960s, in line with apartheid ideology, the rector SP Olivier opined that 'the Indian community has something which identifies itself as Indian or Oriental. This is a fact which cannot be argued or wished away.' To this end, he continued, the university had decided to 'introduce courses in those languages which have special significance for the members of the community…These include Arabic, Urdu, Sanskrit, Hindi.'[42] However, the number of students interested in taking these courses tended to be low and the languages were eventually phased out.

Language over the last five decades has thus implicitly influenced the Group's changing cultural activities as well as its conception of culture. In dialogue around this question during our interview, Zohra Moosa and Khatija Vawda described this change in language and posited an explanation:

Zohra Our children don't talk our language now – we are to blame because we spoke English to them.

Khatija Our children speak. I think your children speak, don't they? My children speak.

Zohra [But] our grandchildren not at all.

This brief exchange is interesting in that it also reveals the interplay between communal and nuclear notions of family that operated in effecting generational changes in culture and its medium of discourse. Zohra Moosa's initial use of the phrase 'our children' was clearly meant in a communal sense, that is, the younger ones in 'our' community. Khatija Vawda objects, re-interpreting 'our children' in more literal individual terms and confirming that both Zohra's and her own offspring *do* speak and understand 'our language'. Responding to Vawda's reconceptualisation of 'our children', Moosa finds it easy to agree, clarifying that it is their children's children who 'don't talk our language now'. This does not, however, override her original assertion that the use of English is responsible for the loss of their vernacular fluency, and Vawda does not reject that view. Mana Rajah concurred with this assessment:

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> The children today don't speak Gujarati at all. In fact, my grandson Shahid, he doesn't speak Gujarati. I try to teach him words. I try to – and the madrassah that he's going to only teaches Arabic, which is so wrong. We learnt Urdu as well, you see. When we were young our madrassah used to teach Urdu and Gujarati and Arabic.

From an era in which few women spoke English, half a century of institutional and political promotion (by Indians and non-Indians alike) has produced a generation who speak only English. The same pattern has been replicated in immigrant households all over the English-speaking world in the post-war period. Hence the amazement when Khurshid Nadvi (who arrived from Chicago with her husband, Professor Salman Nadvi, and her children in the 1970s) joined the Group: they discovered, according to Khatija Vawda, that the Nadvis' 'children were young and they could speak, you know, fluent Urdu, and my husband used to ask Salman Nadvi, "How come your children speak?" He said, "No, no, no, I pretend, I tell them I can't speak English, I don't know English, you have to speak [Urdu]" [*laughs*].' This was a struggle that local Indians had given up by this time.

Ayesha Vorajee, a second-generation Group member, grew up speaking Gujarati, English and Zulu at home. Her children speak 'a little' Gujarati but not enough to transmit this language to their own children. 'It's mostly English, but my sons tell me, "Mum talk to [your grandchildren] in Gujarati so at least that is not lost".' Vorajee enjoys this role:

> I try to introduce them to Indian culture as well, because I suppose you must have noticed that today its only western, everything western, western music. So, recently there was a classical Indian music show at the Playhouse and I took the three granddaughters with me, and I told them, 'Initially you won't [like it] but let me just introduce you to it and perhaps you might like it'. You know, you have got to introduce them to everything, we take them to the theatre and so on, and it's all part and parcel of life.

Not everyone has Vorajee's tenacity. Fatima Patel, for example, advocates a more practical 'move with the times' approach, maintaining that 'the young generation won't enjoy it [musha'iras and qawwalis]. You have to accom-

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modate them. And there's no such a thing as you're going to revive it because this young generation don't want to do all those things.'

Vorajee's experience indicates a common trend, which hints that not just language, but the nature of socialisation into an Indian cultural set of references, has changed for Durban families over the last half-century. Particularly with the opening of global markets in the post-apartheid era, vectors of Indian identity cross the threshold of a household as easily from the public to the private sphere as from the private into the public, reversing the directional flow of earlier decades. As women's educational access has increased and as wage work and professions have opened up to Indian women, it is often grandmothers rather than mothers who are looked to as wells of deep cultural knowledge and linguistic expertise. Cultural identity takes on a different meaning in this modern, middle-class context. In the post-apartheid era, the fragmentation of struggle solidarities ubiquitously noted by scholars and journalists has been experienced by the Women's Cultural Group as a lack of motivation for cultural interchanges and sharing. Identity, it seems, has new uses for political and economic gain as well as new exclusions. At the same time, at an individual level, new spaces have been created for the fashioning of the self. Cultural belonging can also be a pleasurable accessory of self-distinction among markers of identification, its various aspects embraced, set aside or mixed to various degrees. The vast new market in food, music, fashion products and Bollywood culture has brought new global visibility to the panache of things Indian: bhangra and biryani is ubiquitous in Durban but has also established itself around the globe, including in American truck-stop diners lining the freeways of California.

In keeping with their mandate as a cultural group, the Women's Cultural Group engaged in many and varied activities – plays, musha'iras, lectures and the production of books, to name a few. As Zubeida Patel mentioned:

> Mrs Mayat was a visionary and she made attempts to incorporate other aspects than cooking. I remember we made a trip to a radio station and had a tour of the radio station. They explained to us how they made their little plays and – but the plays were all set in Britain – again, the colonial aspect of that. We used to have fêtes where we invited the public to participate in various activities and we had a fashion show.

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In participating in these many activities, the women sought to challenge, in a guarded way, the notion of Muslim women as trapped in a patriarchal system that did not allow for public expression. The various activities that they involved themselves in allowed them to negotiate their plural identities as middle-class Indian Muslim women.

The lives of Muslims, including Muslim women in Durban, have transformed dramatically in the last half of the 20th century. Since the 1970s, the reformist ideas of the Deobandis and Tablighis have won over large numbers of South African Muslims. Mayat noted this trend in a letter to Ahmed Kathrada on 29 June 1986:

> These days, the priests are back in power and the younger generations hang on to their every word. Apart from the Cape Sheikhs, the rest of the Mawlanas seem so anti-progress that it is frightening at times. Some of them are my friends and I discuss this with them.[43]

The end of apartheid (and of the Cold War) ushered in additional uncertainties. Mayat pointed to the changing landscape in her presidential report to the Group's AGM in July 1990:

> With the new political trends imminent in South Africa, our lives will have to change drastically. In education, economics, social and religious spheres we will have to adapt in order to survive. It remains not only a question of surviving, but doing so with dignity, with our values on the outlook of life remaining intact so that we can face created and Creator. Not only must we survive but help our Community to adapt and go along with dignity into the future.

The post-apartheid period has been witness to many visible changes. There has been a marked change in gender relations, attempts to (re)confine women to domestic spheres, and the prohibition of aesthetic pleasures like music and theatre, while in many homes the nikah has been stripped of most of its festivities. The attraction of musha'iras and qawwalis was reduced when music was declared haraam.[44] Qawwalis have not disappeared altogether, however – they continue to have a role during all-male gatherings to celebrate the birthdays of saints such as Badsha Peer, whose tomb is located in Durban's Brook Street cemetery.

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The theme of loss emerges when some members of the Group discuss their interest in heritage and culture. Much of the debate seems to centre on the 'authenticity' or 'artificiality' of events in terms of the founding objectives of the Group. Mariam Motala is saddened by the loss of some of the cultural activities. Nowadays, she said, 'the younger members would find it very hard because they find it difficult to understand the Urdu…[But] I feel that I've, I've lost out a lot on my cultural activities – I miss out on those sort of things, you see.' Sayedah Ansari, one of the earliest Group members, feels that much has changed and been lost in the process:

> Initially they used to have functions…[when] any sha'er come then the Group will participate. Mahir-ul-Qadri came, Bekal-ud-Sahi came, other great poets came; they used to participate. Now it is altogether totally different. Now they focus more on fundraising, lots and lot of fundraising, dinners and breakfasts, dinners and breakfasts. I am still a member but [in the] old days as I mentioned, you know, we used to participate in everything. I liked that. I used to enjoy that very much. While Buzme Adab was alive, the people were so interested, so keen in this and everybody wanted to go. They'll go and see a movie twice and thrice just to learn little bit words. [We've lost] the main culture, I feel. You know, it's an asset that we lost, a great asset, you know, because Urdu is such a sweet language. And we're drifting away from there and from that time.

Hajira Omar, a third-generation member, also points to transformation in the ethos and orientation of the Group:

> When I first joined the group…Mrs [Khurshid] Nadvi did Urdu classes and some Qur'anic classes, and that's also what attracted me: because it was an older person, because I missed the older people passing on knowledge and what have you. And that has stopped…[Now the forums feature] some make-up artist coming to show you how to do your make-up or somebody coming to talk about what colours to use. But then there are members in the group who enjoy that. But that wasn't the reason that I joined. Auntie Julu [Zuleikha Mayat] used to give little talks, she's stopped doing that now; Mrs Nadvi coming in – it's not happening as much as it used to. I don't know if it is because that is now

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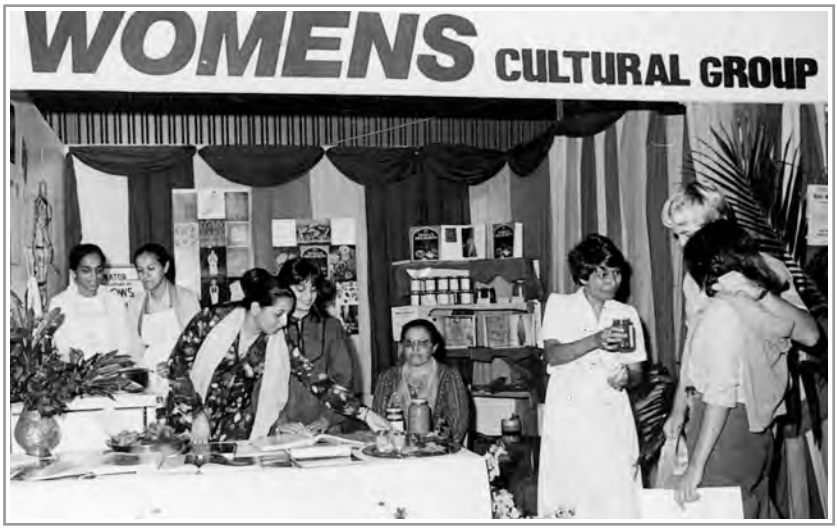

Culture for a cause: Shairbanu Lockat, Fatima Mayat, Nafisa Jeewa, Shameema Mayat, Gori Patel and Khatija Mall promoting masala and recipes to fund their charity work.

> more widely available – you know, if you want that kind of interaction you can find it somewhere else.

Changes over the past two decades especially, due partly to religious proscriptions and partly to education, economic mobility and changing tastes and interests, have heralded a shift in the meanings of culture and in the social relations, spaces and infrastructure that produce them. There is a seeming open market of culture, with the modern domestic sphere a consumer rather than a producer of culture. Purist ideals of culture and religion, both in South Africa and across the globe, declare themselves as 'authentic' voices under threat of pollution. In this context, the Women's Cultural Group's attempt to continue with its open approach to culture – fusion, adaptation, change and agency – is severely challenged.

Over the past decades, members have witnessed enormous change, even within the Group; in dress, with more women fully veiled and wearing loose-fitting black garments; more women participating in taleem classes and dhikr sessions, which were once the preserve of men, and which are becoming repositories of a new religious identity; nasheed artists such as South African Zain Bhika and international groups such as Raihan of Malaysia who tour regularly,

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have replaced musha'iras and qawwalis; affluent Muslims travel regularly on pilgrimage to Saudi Arabia but also go on organised tours to places of historic interest to Muslims in Palestine, Iraq, Jordan and Turkey; while media in the form of radio channels like Channel Islam and Radio Islam and the London-based television station Islam Channel (DSTV 347), with its slogan 'One world, one Ummah', are linking local Muslims globally through their focus on women, fashion, food and politics.

There is a strong consumer-culture aspect to this Islamic identity. Hajira Omar's comment above about make-up artists reflects an important trend in the changing culture of many middle-class Muslim women as a result of the global cultural flows in the post-apartheid period. Their consumerism is reflected in things like the demand for and availability of prohibitively expensive abayas imported from Dubai, with designer clothing and extravagant jewellery all worn underneath, as well as smaller things such as designer perfumes, health products, soaps and health teas. Mana Rajah observed:

> In [earlier] days people were going for hajj when they turned fifty or sixty because it was a once-in-a-lifetime event – it was such a big thing. Now it's like an everyday thing. You hear a lot of people making eleven hajjs and people making twenty umrahs and it's not compulsory. You need one hajj. Why don't they send people who can't afford to go for hajj? And some, they make it like a holiday. There they go and see these Arab women wearing all these designer clothes and they buy it from [them] there and then. Now there's competition with the girls. Recently, I asked this girl wearing a cloak, 'Where's your cloak from?' She says, 'I only buy in Dubai.' And, you know, this is what's happening – they all carry Louis Vuitton handbags and all that.

Most of these products are accepted unconsciously. While there seems to be a contradiction between their religiosity and this rampant consumerism, especially given the poverty levels in South Africa, Schulz suggests that

> a growing number of believers around the globe feel compelled to pursue and express their religious convictions by partly relating to a globalising market of media images and religious goods. Rather than take for granted an antinomy between people's engagement with religious commodities

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> and the essence of religion, scholars should investigate the complexities and possible contradictions that result from believers' search for spiritual atonement in a world permeated with commodified representations of religious orientation. [We] need to move beyond the contrast between 'superficial' mass culture and 'authentic' religion by exploring the mutually constitutive relationship between individual religiosity, enterprise, and consumption in the contemporary moment.[45]

Culture is, of course, a never-ending process. As Group member Zohra Moosa's aunt Zulekha Omar Jhaveri wrote to the newspaper as a teenager in 1938: 'Our culture, like every other culture, is a living organism, which has never yet met with "death and decay". Throughout the centuries it has lived and moved on, passing through hands both strong and weak.'[46] Culture is neither fixed nor homogeneous and, as has happened over the lifespan of the Group, what may be identified today as its core elements will continue to transform.

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Indians march through Durban in 1959 to protest the lack of schools and educational resources.

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5
IQRAA

The Muslim belief is that the Prophet Muhammad received his first revelation in the Cave of Hira in the Mountain of Light (Jabale-Noor), a few miles outside Makkah, when he was around forty years old. There the Archangel Jibril (Gabriel) instructed him, 'Read!' When the Prophet replied, 'I cannot read', he was commanded twice more to read before he spoke the very first words of the Qur'an: 'Read in the name of your Lord, the Creator…Read in the name of your Exalted Lord. He brought to humans what was transmitted using a pen. He taught humans what they did not know.'[1] In emphasising the importance of education, several members of the Women's Cultural Group referred to this verse and to the fact that the Qur'an contains many verses calling on human beings to exercise intellectual curiosity, which, in the past, resulted in Muslims developing a strong tradition of mathematics and natural science. The Prophet also emphasised the importance of knowledge on many occasions. Several informants reminded us that one oft-quoted hadith calls on Muslims to 'Seek knowledge, even as far as China'.

Opportunities for education were limited in the 1950s and the Group's members, according to Mayat, were concerned that 'the education level of girls was very low. Our endeavour was to raise the level of education among the disadvantaged, especially women.' This was due, in part, to the failure of the state to provide adequate facilities and, in part, to the attitudes of Indian

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parents. In Durban, during the preceding decades, reluctance to educate Muslim girls had been linked to imperatives of women's seclusion but, in the emerging climate of progressivism, there was a competing worry that long-term economic community advancement of both the individual and the collective required educated women.

Arguments in favour of girls' education, like the one advanced in *Indian Opinion* by Zohra Moosa's aunt Zulekha Omar Jhaveri in 1938, linked women's opportunities to more general concerns about the 'destiny of our race', suggesting that these concerns grew in tandem with a sense of (Indian/Muslim) community. Jhaveri must have been fifteen or sixteen years old when she wrote – under the heading 'Muslim Culture' – that men need not fear that the education of Muslim women would break through the bounds of purdah but, rather, that Islam and women's intellectual liberation were quite compatible:

> Education is not as you imagine a definite prelude to moral decadence. Indeed not. It is something finer in quality than the purest gold. In short, education is anything that elevates the moral, physical, social, intellectual and spiritual development of a people, and though there is today the ludicrous belief that the woman who observes 'Purdah' is, unlike her more fortunate and liberated western sister, deprived of the opportunities of intellectual development, Islam at all times has examples to the contrary… Just as dormant volcanoes become active as a result of the forceful powers from within, so our minds too are becoming active and are waking up from their lethargy.[2]

Yet, well into the 1950s, prevailing attitudes and lack of resources and facilities continued to be among the reasons for repressing this seismic intellectual awakening. Women were quick to take what was offered, however, and informal instruction and training opportunities in women's organisations were fully utilised. Mayat frequently voiced her praises for her peers' intellectual achievements when writing in 'Fahmida's World', unable to resist comparing the performances of men and women. For example, about the Arabic Study Circle's annual speech contest held in 1956, she observed:

> The standard this year has been very high in both the delivery and the subject matter, which is an indication that the participants have benefited

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> greatly from the tafsir classes and by discussions held by the Indian Women's Cultural Group at their monthly meetings. All the winners in the English section were members of the cultural group and also the winner of the first prize in the Urdu section. I cannot help but contrast this with the men's contest held a month ago. The men suffer so much by comparison that I just cannot view the two in the same light. Not one of the men can hold a candle to any of the women. The latter spoke with authority, confidence and charm…Well done girls. Fahmida is proud of you all and takes off her downie to you as a mark of respect.[3]

Mayat emphasised that this was the 'Indian' Women's Cultural Group so as not to exclude non-Muslim Indians even though she was reporting on a Muslim event. Members of the Group expressed a uniform passion for education, often citing the religious dictate of lifelong learning – 'from cradle to grave'. Many of the Group's first-generation members, such as Zuleikha Mayat, Gori Patel and Khatija Vawda, who grew into adulthood in the 1930s and 1940s, had experienced the frustration of thwarted educational ambitions. In their case, this was largely because of social pressures among Muslims against girls attending school beyond a certain age. What emerges in the narratives of other members of the Group is that education was possible where there was the strong support of a male family member – a father, husband, grandfather or other, who deployed his benevolent, patriarchal authority to overrule complaints about gender propriety and who promoted the education and scholarly development of a daughter, wife or granddaughter.

Certainly during the period from the 1940s to the 1960s, for most women, one could echo Metcalf's sentiments on India that ultimately men 'remained the actors: it was they who granted women education; they who were called upon to be generous to women'.[4] In some cases, wealth created openings for families to create their own rules – often associated with exposure to travel and the confidence to weather reputations of eccentricity by virtue of community power and general worldliness. The family of AI Kajee was one of these and Zubeida Barmania, as his granddaughter, was its beneficiary. The stories of Gori Patel, Mariam Jeewa and Zubeida Barmania demonstrate with special clarity how the presence or absence of a supportive male could result in widely divergent fates for a girl's prospects.

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Gori, Mariam and Zubeida

Hawa Bibi 'Gori' Patel was born on 10 October 1922 in Durban, where her father, Ahmed, owned a retail store in Field Street called Fiji Outfitters. She had three sisters and a brother. Gori attended St Anthony's School in 'Victoria Street next to the ematsheni'. Although the school was run by the Roman Catholic Church, her father 'wanted to give me education – "You must go to school, you must become a doctor" – and I was interested in all that too, I used to take newspapers, read…'

There were separate classes for boys and girls. Gori was the only Muslim girl at the school. Her male contemporaries included future community leaders like Ebrahim Moosa and Ebrahim Haffejee, as well as Zuleikha Mayat's future husband, Mahomed. Gori's three elder sisters did not attend school. They were educated by an 'Indian lady staying next to our Derby Street house – she was a teacher so she used to come and teach my sisters, you know, a, b, c, and that' [*laughs*]. And the girls also learned from their mother, Aisha, whom Patel describes as 'very modern, not like an old woman, you know, and she educated us. She give us Urdu, Gujarati, Arabic and that time, they did Moulood…so they teach me too Moulood.' In 1934, just as Gori finished Standard 4, her father died and the 'trustees and the family, they took me out [of school] and even [the staff] from St Anthony's School they came to ask, "You must see her, she's very intelligent, uncle; why you want to tell her to leave the school?" But [my uncles] said, "No, our Muslim girls don't go to school".' So she 'learnt to cook and play with the neighbours and all the girls and went to madrassah' until her marriage.

The story of Mariam Jeewa is similar to Gori's in some ways but the outcome was different. Mariam was the daughter of Ebrahim Jeewa, who was the proprietor of *Indian Views*. Ebrahim was born in Surat, where he was educated to Standard 4 before emigrating to Natal. He was a keen reader and opened the Union Printing Press and a bookshop in Victoria Street, the first in Natal to stock Islamic books. Mariam described her father as 'religious-minded but liberal-minded too. He believed in girls' education – he didn't believe that now the girl is becoming mature, she must be kept indoors and be taught cooking and get them married.' Mariam was born in 1929 and attended the Madrassah Anjuman Islam in Pine Street. She completed Standard 2, studying English, Arabic, Urdu and 'very little Gujarati', when her father decided to take

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Nehru (standing centre left) visits the cosmopolitan University of Calcutta, where Mariam Jeewa graduated with a medical degree. (Mariam is in a white sari on the right.)

her to India. Jeewa was keen to educate his daughters but faced community opprobrium if he sent them to high school in Durban. Mariam, her parents, elder brothers Mehmood and Moosa, and sister Fatima went to India in 1939 just as the Second World War broke out. Mariam recalls that in

> those days it was against our tradition – Gujarati (Muslim) girls mustn't go out for further education. Moosa Meer defied that rule and he sent his daughter Fatima for education. She studied in Durban, and I think Johannesburg, and see what she is today – a famous person and I'm very proud of her.

Ebrahim Jeewa rented a house in Aligarh, where his children enrolled separately at the boys' and girls' high schools. While their English was good, 'we were poor in maths and things like that but with the help of tutors we caught up.' An additional problem was that Urdu was the medium of instruction. 'We had grown up speaking English and Gujarati. When we used to communicate with the other schoolchildren, they used to laugh at our pronunciation. In the beginning we were very embarrassed.' After matriculating, Mariam completed a BSc at Aligarh Muslim University College, while her brothers, Memood and

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Moosa, studied medicine at Bombay University and her sister, Fatima, qualified as a teacher at Aligarh. Mariam was given a place at Calcutta Medical School after completing her BSc degree.

> When my father informed my nana and my uncle here in South Africa that 'she's got admission and I'm sending her to Calcutta', they were very much against the idea: 'You sending your daughter to Calcutta, Calcutta is the second-largest city in British Empire so you must consider your daughter lost.' But my father followed his gut feeling and instinct and he told me – he used to read the letters to me that, 'Look, your uncle has written this, your nana has written this – that I mustn't send you, what do you say?' I said, 'No, I want to go for further studies.' So he said, 'Okay, Bheti, you go. The only thing is that Calcutta is a very big city – you'll be staying in a boarding house there [as] there are not many people you know.' We knew Mr Vaid. He was from Gujarat and they had a very good business in Calcutta. So he was my local guardian there. I coped. It was a nice life there, free life, I must say, but we knew where to draw the line. Before going, my father said, 'Look, everybody's against the idea of me sending you to Calcutta but I want it and you want it, but you must remember that' – in Gujarati he used to say – 'the respect of my beard is in your hand, so it's up to you how you behave', and that stuck in my mind all along.

Mariam began her medical training in 1951 and completed it in 1958, despite her father dying of a heart attack when she was in her second year. She returned to South Africa and did her internship at McCord Hospital, qualifying as a doctor in 1960. She married Dr Ismail Sader of Ladysmith and practised medicine for the next four decades.

Mariam Jeewa's educational path crossed with that of a future Women's Cultural Group member, Zubeida Barmania. In 1943, when she was just eleven, Barmania's grandfather AI Kajee sent her to Aligarh High, where she initially stayed with Mariam Jeewa's family. After almost four years she had to return to Durban following the death of her grandfather. She matriculated from the Durban Indian Girls' High School and had her mind set on studying law. She enrolled at the Non-European Section of Natal University and did a few pre-law courses (black students were excluded from studying law), before going to London in 1959 to continue her studies and where her contemporaries included

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Zubeida Barmania (front row, third from right) singing Christmas carols with fellow university students in Beirut, 1967.

Fatima Meer's brother Siddique Meer. She returned to South Africa and served articles with Ismail Mohammed, who was later appointed Chief Justice in post-apartheid South Africa.

She found Durban very confining. 'It didn't matter what I had done, getting any kind of position, you know, even as a junior lawyer or whatever, I think the attitude was, "Ah, she comes from a rich family, she doesn't need to work, she'll be married, have six kids" – that sort of thing.' In 1966, Zubeida was on holiday in the Middle East and fell in love with Beirut, and returned there to do a master's degree at the American University. She remembers meeting the Canadian Consul in Beirut. 'I said to him that I was looking for a country where I could practise and I could be myself. You know, in a way it was self-exile though I didn't consciously call it that at the time.' She subsequently moved to Canada, where she completed another LLB at the University of Western Ontario and got a position with Ontario Hydro. She returned to South Africa in 1994. Barmania describes her life as 'a mosaic of different cultures, countries, education and rich influences. It has been quite wild, beautiful and deeply fulfilling, even if not always.'

Although the lives of Zubeida Barmania and Mariam Jeewa intersected at certain points, their Durban family backgrounds were different and the trajectory of their lives reflected this. Both grew up in an atmosphere of books and

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reading, but Jeewa's father faced massive family opposition to sending his daughter to school. Barmania's grandfather, AI Kajee, faced no censure from those around him. He was probably the best-known Indian in South Africa in the 1940s, wealthy, cosmopolitan in his personal and political associations, with an acute mind and a reputation for reading a book a night. His granddaughter embodied that free spirit in every way. Recalling their days at Aligarh, Mariam described Zubeida as 'a very outgoing person [*laughs*] – she used to sing and dance and we all used to enjoy ourselves'.

Path-breaking into the professions

Women such as Mariam and Zubeida were exceptions in being able to study abroad. A few Muslim girls remained in Durban and braved community censure in pursuit of higher education: Zulekha Jhaveri was one; another was Amina Butler, Fatima Meer was a third and Fatima Mayet was a fourth. All attended the Durban Girls' Secondary in Dartnell Crescent. The school for Indian girls was opened in 1930 and had sixty-four students by the end of the decade.

Zulekha Jhaveri matriculated there in 1941, and her schoolmates recall that she arrived in school in a rickshaw that was covered with a purdah in order not to flout decorum. Amina Butler was the first Muslim woman to qualify as a teacher in 1951 and her burning passion to educate Indian girls is remembered by many.

Fatima Meer, born in 1929, was the daughter of Moosa Meer, who was the editor and, later, proprietor of *Indian Views*. Her extended family was heavily involved in politics and she herself addressed a mass rally at Red Square as a teenager during the passive resistance campaign of 1946.[5] Fatima attended the University of the Witwatersrand for a year and then the University of Natal, where she completed her BA and later joined the Department of Sociology.

Fatima Meer's classmate from Standard 4 until she matriculated, and also a contemporary of Amina Butler's, Fatima Mayet qualified as a medical doctor. Fatima and her sister Khatija[6] grew up in Newcastle, where she attended St Oswald's School until Standard 4, and then transferred to Durban, where she matriculated from Durban Indian Girls' High School. Khatija, the elder sister, left school at the end of Standard 8 because of pressure from her extended family. Fatima continued with the support of her 'parents [who] were very enlightened – when they realised that I was serious about my studies, they

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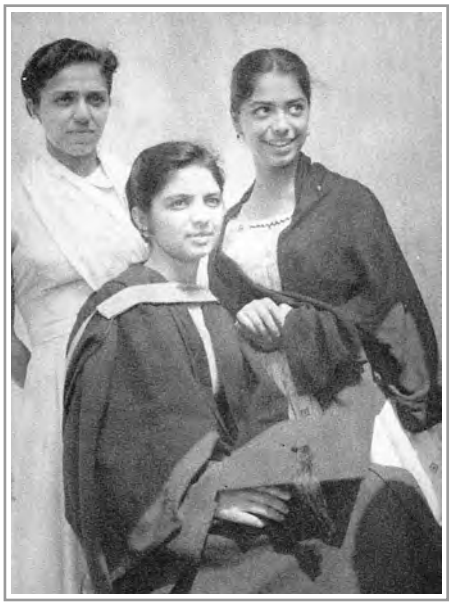

Left: Fatima Meer delivered her first political speech during a passive resistance campaign rally, 1946. Right: Fatima Mayet graduating (attended by sisters Khatija and Hawa).

support[ed] me despite the fact that the greater family in Newcastle was very much against it. They didn't think that girls should be educated.'

Fatima Mayet applied to do medicine at the University of the Witwatersrand in 1947 but legislation gave preference to white soldiers returning from the Second World War. She completed a BA degree at the University of the Witwatersrand with the intention of later entering its medical school. However, a medical school was opened in Durban in 1951 and the authorities refused her application to remain in the Transvaal.[7] Fatima then enrolled at Natal Medical School, as one of just fifteen students in 1952. She qualified in 1957. In 1958, a jalsa held by the Mehfile Khwateen Islam became an occasion to celebrate Dr Fatima Mayet as the first Muslim woman to qualify as a medical doctor in Durban. Fatima Meer spoke at the event, about changing views on the matter of educating girls, and Zuleikha Mayat, reporting on the speeches in her newspaper column, noted Meer's pointed observation:

> when Dr Mayet proceeded to university, people who now come to pay homage to her had at that time criticised her parents for this revolu-

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> tionary step. Dr Mayet, in her reply, mentioned that 'people are in the habit of confusing religion with man-made customs and I thought that was putting the situation in a nutshell'.[8]

The state of education for Indian girls

In his 1954 study of the economic position of Indians in Natal, CA Woods described the 'very great break with tradition' in relation to girls' education as 'remarkable' but

> even so, many parents limit schooling for girls and expect it to end when puberty is reached…The ultimate influence of a girls' school with its class work and its dramatic societies will no doubt have far-reaching effects on Indian women. At present however, there are still the twin barriers of parental opposition and lack of accommodation with the result that the number of boys who attend school is still much larger than the number of girls.[9]

MG Pillay, Durban Inspector of Schools, reflecting in 1967 on why Indian parents had in the past been reluctant to send their daughters to school, said that they feared that 'the girls might not pursue learning but might learn pursuing'.[10] Zuleikha Mayat was critical of parents not educating girls and argued in 1958 that their education should be prioritised. 'Boys as well as girls are moulded and influenced more by mothers than by the best and cleverest of fathers and, if the future generations are to amount to anything, then it is imperative to see to it that our daughters are given a better if not the same education as our boys.'[11] Writing as a teenager from Potchefstroom in 1944, aspiring to an advanced education of her own, Zuleikha had linked girls' education to material advancement for the family:

> The rich man may be able to afford bringing up his daughter without an education (of course, no person can for the sake of his children afford this) but can the poor man do so without feeling the stings of his own folly? Consider the material gains, if a man educates his daughter and has her skilled in such a humanitarian profession as nursing or if she takes up commerce, domestic science or dressmaking courses, whereas the unwise decision of parents compels the girl to stay at home, and,

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The opening of the Fannin Government-Aided School in Wyebank. Indians had to pay for half the cost of school building.

> instead of helping to alleviate the task of earning money, which falls solely on the shoulders of the male members of the family, she passes her time in envying her richer neighbours.[12]

Community attitudes were one set of factors that prevented some girls from obtaining a formal education, but poverty and the shortage of schools were equally important impediments. For the first few decades after the arrival of indentured Indians, neither the government nor employers made any provision for education. The first schools, established by Christian missionaries from around 1880, were handicapped by insufficient funds and facilities, poor attendance, language difficulties and a dearth of capable teachers.[13] The 1909 Natal Education Commission noted that the government was seriously lagging behind in providing schools for Indians whose 'contributions to the revenue entitle them as our fellow subjects to elementary education at least'. In 1926, only 9 913 of an estimated 32 000 Indian children (30.9 per cent) were in school.[14]

Education was given a great boost by the 'upliftment clause' in the Cape Town Agreement of 1927 signed by the governments of India and South Africa, which specified that Indians should not 'lag behind other sections of the

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population'.[15] The number of pupils rose from 8 250 in 1925 to 35 397 in 1946.[16] However, the increase was mainly in so-called aided schools – a scheme whereby Indians had to buy land, build a school and pay for its upkeep while the government reimbursed 50 per cent of the building cost. In 1949, 84 per cent of Indian schools in Natal were 'aided'.[17] In contrast, 83 per cent of white schools were government-run in 1945.[18]

There are many examples of the Indian community's involvement in enhancing educational facilities. When working-class parents from the Magazine Barracks complained in 1941 that there was no place for three hundred children, AI Kajee offered to provide two-thirds of the cost of a school from the Hajee Moosa Charitable Trust on condition that the Durban City Council made land available.[19] The same Trust built the Fannin Government-Aided School in Wyebank in 1941 on land donated by the MA Motala Trust. AI Kajee stated at the opening ceremony that merchants did not see education as 'merely a sort of learning; its greatest task was to abolish poverty'. ME Lakhi of Greytown donated desks and Ismail Jooma provided cupboards for the school, which was for working-class children of all religious persuasions.[20] Sastri College, the first high school for Indians in South Africa, was opened on 14 October 1929 with funds from Indian merchants and made no distinction in pupil intake on religious grounds.

In a social climate in which segregated schooling was taken for granted, the educational needs of 'Indian children' were tallied as a discrete statistic. Official reports describe the state of education of Indian children as 'inadequate'. The Broome Report of 1943 stated that 'what has been achieved in Indian education cannot yet be considered adequate or satisfactory', while the Corbett Commission of 1944 stated that 'the Natal system for Indian children falls far short of adequacy'.[21] In 1936, for example, 15 594 of 21 000 boys (74 per cent) and 5 762 of 19 000 girls (30 per cent) of school-going age were attending school.[22] Most children dropped out in primary school. In 1939, for example, for every hundred children in Standard 1, fewer than two matriculated.[23] By 1941, 27 449 of 50 900 children were in school.[24] However, as we note from the 1936 statistics cited above, more boys than girls attended school. In 1942, the Director of Education in Natal reported that 'the demand for accommodation is still far in excess of the supply and hundreds of Indian children have to be turned away each year because the existing schools are full'.[25] In 1951, the Natal Indian

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Teachers' Society called for a collection of £150 000 to build schools. Teachers themselves agreed to pay a levy of 6 per cent of their monthly salaries and by October 1954 had raised £11 000.[26]

The education that was provided was neither compulsory nor free. Indian pupils had to buy books and materials while these were provided free to their white counterparts. Another feature was the platoon system whereby schools were used twice each day for different pupils. As late as 1971, thirteen thousand primary school pupils were taught in 'double sessions'.[27] Zuleikha Mayat captured the trials that parents faced in their pursuit of education for their children when she wrote in 1956:

> The long queues of parents and children outside all Indian schools during the first few weeks of each term has become a common sight. Some of these parents have been trying unsuccessfully for years to get their children admitted. Said an elderly gentleman: 'Let me initiate you in this struggle with which I am conversant by now. First you fight and say angry words that something should be done about this intolerable situation. After several days of wandering around the schools with your child you eventually get him admitted to some school, that is if you are one of the lucky ones. After a respite of several years comes the time he has to go to high school. Then you start following the headmasters or those with some influence like a puppy, begging them to consider your child.'[28]

In 1959 the Education Department decided that one way to overcome the shortage of Indian schools was to raise the entrance age from five to six. Many Indians were unaware of this and Mayat reported:

> Some parents booked schools well in advance. But this was to no avail. They were told that they could not admit children under six years. The children who had already been mentally prepared for school going were too small to understand this hitch and looked as pathetic a picture as the parents who begged and cajoled and threatened the harassed school authorities. Yes, everyone seemed aware of the fact that European school children were admitted at the age of five, but surely that is nothing new. An early start is assured them and maintained for ever afterwards as this is *their* South Africa.[29]

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By the end of the 1950s there seemed to be little respite. Fahmida sarcastically condemned the authorities whose attitude seemed to be: 'What are you people complaining of? Each year you have more and more schools going up… compare your position with that of your compatriots in other countries.' According to Mayat, Indians were seen to be 'bordering on High Treason if [they] dare to compare [their] situation with that of whites.'[30]

Still, there was a dramatic increase in the numbers of Indian children attending school. In 1952, there were 57 060 students, of which 22 669 (almost 40 per cent) were girls. Most pupils were clustered in the primary levels: only 771 students were in Standard 8 and 302 in Standard 10.[31] By 1959, the number of younger schoolchildren was estimated at 100 000, including 42 000 girls. There were 16 high schools in the province.[32] MacMillan wrote in 1961 that 'few Indian parents deliberately keep children away from school, but there are those who do not keep the children at school long enough for the youngster to benefit adequately, due, frequently, to poverty and reasons arising from this.'[33] As more girls began entering schools, 'Fahmida' of *Indian Views* urged mothers to get involved in their children's education, admonishing:

> Have you wondered why these school committees are known as Parents' committees, when it is more appropriate to call them Fathers' committees, especially in our Indian schools. These men have proved themselves most inadequate for the responsibility given them…Night and day it is drummed into us that a woman's job is to look after her children. Does looking after them imply just food and clothes?[34]

Among Indians of Muslim faith, children had historically received formal education from a very young age at madrassahs that were attached to mosques. For example, the Anjuman Islam School, attached to Durban's West Street Mosque, was opened in 1909 with an enrolment of one hundred and fifty, including fourteen girls, in response to a decision of the government not to allow Indian children over the age of fourteen into government schools.[35] Similarly, a madrassah attached to the May Street Mosque had an attendance of seventy-nine in 1920.[36] In addition to the tenets of Islam, madrassahs taught the Gujarati, Urdu and Arabic languages.[37] It was only when merchant leaders like AI Kajee and AM Moolla came to the fore that Muslims attempted to combine religious and secular education. The South Coast Madrassah State-Aided School (1947),

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Sayedah Ansari's first day at Crescent School in Pine Street. She is dressed in black, seated in front of her father, Mawlana Bashir Siddique.

Ahmedia State-Aided Indian School (1947), Anjuman Islam State-Aided School (1953) and Orient Islamic High School (1959) were built for this purpose. The language of instruction was English.

The establishment of Orient Islamic High in Centenary Road, Durban, resulted in women becoming formally involved in school governance and decision-making. In February 1958, a Woman's Committee was formed to collect funds for the school's hall. AM Moolla's offer to Zuleikha Mayat and the Women's Cultural Group was announced in *Indian Views* as follows: 'For each thousand pounds collected the women will be entitled to elect a member of the board of trustees who in turn will be eligible to stand for elections on the General Committee of the School.'[38]

According to Mayat, Moolla did not need their assistance but saw this as an opportunity for the members of the Group 'to prove that they were serious and responsible' about participating in public life. Moolla, chairman of the Orient Trust, put the proposal in writing on 16 January 1958 to 'Mrs Mahomed Mayat':

> In efforts like this the community needs the help and co-operation of our better educated Muslim ladies in the interests of the education of

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> our children. In this I am quite sure you could take a most helpful and fruitful part, in association with Mrs [Bibi] Mall, Mrs [Hajra] Seedat and a few others. What I would like to see is an active Muslim Ladies Committee under your initiative and guidance. You three ladies would be making a most valuable contribution to the progress of the school if…you could make the school's needs known among the women of our community. I am also taking the liberty of asking you to do this for another reason. The School is not only to be the best and largest Muslim school ever attempted, it is to accommodate girls as well as boys and I have long felt that Muslim ladies of your attainment should be invited to take an active part in the governing body of the school…I know that you have many duties to perform but it is only to such as you that I can appeal in this worthy cause. The school needs our Muslim ladies. Its full success, in fact, cannot be assured without their help and interest.

A group of women met at Hajra Seedat's to discuss Moolla's proposal and thereafter a committee of six women met with him to get an assurance that there would be no opposition 'from the community' to their presence on the governing body. With verbal assurance secured, twenty-four women launched the fund on 21 February 1958 at the Mayats' Mansfield Road home. A vigorous collection drive was led by Zuleikha Mayat, Khatija Vawda, Bibi Mall, Fatima Loonat, Hajra Seedat (mother of Group member Zubeida Seedat), Amina Meer (wife of MI Meer of *Indian Views* and mother of Fatima Meer) and others. They had raised £2 800 by 12 December 1958, when Moolla told them to stop as he would grant them three representatives.

Despite the assurances that there would be no barriers to women's involvement, opposition from certain male quarters did indeed lead to a delay in the women joining the board. The Women's Committee, which consisted mainly of members of the Women's Cultural Group, wrote to Moolla on 6 June 1959, 'lest there be a misunderstanding, we would like to recap the fact of our basis of association with you'. They reiterated the terms of the agreement and asked for finalisation:

> Realising that you are being kept busy with various affairs of the Indian peoples here, yet we cannot let this matter ride along as we too are committed to our ladies committee as well as to members of the public

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Farewell for Miss Pauline Morell (holding flowers), principal of 'Girls' High', who was dedicated to the education of Indian girls in Durban.

> who responded so generously to the fund and to whom we had specifically mentioned the basis of our understanding with you.

Moolla granted them the seats but persistent opposition made some of the women reluctant to be represented on the board. Moolla set Mayat's mind at ease when he wrote on 7 November 1960 that

> there is really no need to slow down in your duties and responsibilities to serve the educational cause of our community. The writer assures you that the number of people in the Institute who have some dislike for this approach of making it possible for ladies in our community to serve in welfare work is very small and you and your colleagues should not become sensitive to its existence.

Zuleikha Mayat, Amina Meer and Khatija Vawda became the three representatives, and this has opened up avenues for the involvement of the Women's Cultural Group in the school ever since. 'Whenever Dr Moolla needed something, he would approach me, and I would get the Group involved,' Mayat explained, 'and if we needed something from the community, I could phone Dr Moolla. There were always open lines.' Mayat is adamant that Moolla 'never used us as a rubber stamp. We were outspoken and our views were respected.'

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Fatima Loonat replaced Amina Meer as trustee in February 1974 and Hajira Omar replaced Fatima Loonat in 2004.

Secondary education

Mabel Palmer noted in 1957 that Durban Girls' Secondary in Dartnell Crescent was 'at first badly attended owing to the prejudice of Indian parents against educating their daughters, but this has now been overcome to some extent.'[39] In fact, as shown earlier, by the end of the 1950s the demand for education could not be met. Mayat observed in 1959 that 'there are two new high schools in Durban and yet the story was the same, "Sorry, no more, we are full". Girls, boys and parents went from school to school begging that they be given preference, this education meant everything to them…they could see no future…but the same old story'.[40] 'Fahmida' pointed out that racial integration of schools was the clear solution for overcoming the shortage. Her impatience with prejudice in the following passage also indicated the extent to which schooling was bringing Indians from different backgrounds together:

> The obvious answer is to integrate the schools. I can see that the greatest objectors to this state of affairs will not be the whites but us Indians. Heavens! Already we find it difficult to reconcile the situation – that is, to sit in the classrooms with different Indian groups – so how gallish the idea of sharing schools with a chow-chow mess of Africans, Indians, Boers, Jews and perhaps even one or two whose ancestors were aboriginals.[41]

Increasing opportunities for education are reflected in the experience of second-generation members of the Women's Cultural Group who, during the later 1950s through the 1960s, were allowed to go as far as Standard 8, sometimes even to matriculate and, in a few instances, go to university. Fatima Mayat and Laila Ally were among those who completed high school.

Fatima Mayat was born in Camperdown and grew up in Victoria Street and later Cato Manor. The family shop 'AM Mayat Wholesalers' was in Field Street, just around the corner from their home. She spoke 'a lot of Gujarati because I had my dadi and my nani all living with us so, you know, we weren't allowed to speak English and we lived in a communal family – all five brothers with their wives and about twelve children in one house.' She has fond memories of this extended family:

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> The atmosphere in Ramadan was fantastic because at that time there were no freezers and, as a child, I remember so clearly that every day samoosas were made, including the purh, and we had such a big table – dining table – that we used to all sit together and eat. We also used to study together. We had a room where we had typewriters – no computers at that time – but each cousin used to help the other one with homework and we had a driver who used to pick us up in the morning and take us to school.

Mayat attended St Anthony's School in the 1950s, by which time there were a 'good number' of Muslim girls. In the afternoon the children in the family attended a madrassah in Umgeni Road run by Mawlana Bashir, father of Group member, Sayedah Ansari. Her friends included future Group member Laila Ally. At school they spoke English with friends and teachers. The family also read the *Natal Mercury*, *Daily News* and *Indian Views*. Mayat was a keen student who enjoyed school very much, but her schooling came to an abrupt end in Standard 8 when

> my granny just won't hear of it, no schooling – Standard 8 and that's it. I was very, very upset but then it was home schooling, you know, you do things at home – cooking, domestic work, sewing, embroidery, all sorts of things. Initially I was upset but we had no say in the matter. My future father-in-law was quite liberal and my sister-in-law Fatima went to university and to Howard College. They allowed her because there was a lot of pressure from my father-in-law [even though] my grandmother wasn't happy at all. We had ladies coming home to teach us how to sew, how to do handwork – we weren't deprived of all that, but no, no to school. Most of my other cousins were the same as well.

Laila Ally was the daughter of AK Rajab and grew up in the landmark Rajab residence in Clare Estate with no less than forty members in the household. Her grandfather Rosendeen Rajab had a great love for Persian poetry and was an ardent admirer of the cultural and artistic achievements of the Mughal Empire. His homes and businesses reflected the artistic and cultural achievements of the Mughals. His first cinema, the two-thousand-seater Shah Jehan in Grey Street, was named after the fifth Mughal emperor, while other cinemas were named Isfahan (after the former capital of Persia) and Shiraz (a city in Persia). His Moorish-styled home overlooking the Umgeni River was named

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Laila Ally's extended family made their home here. The Rajab household was featured in South African Panorama *magazine in August 1968 and described thus: 'High on the knoll of a hill overlooking the Umgeni River valley just outside Durban, stands a great house of Spanish-Moorish design, marble white against the green jade of the subtropical Natal vegetation. The 32-roomed mansion is home of one of South Africa's most remarkable Indian families, and also houses the nucleus of one of the most comprehensive and valuable family collections of Oriental art in the world.'*

'Salaamat' and housed one of the finest private collections of Oriental art in South Africa, including Ming vases, tapestries and Persian carpets. Ally grew up in a home where, according to one description 'we are brought forward to the splendours of the East in no uncertain manner'.[42] The Rajab family also opened the first Indian-owned interior design company in the country . Ally attended St Anthony's school and subsequently Durban Indian Girls' High School where she matriculated in the early 1960s. While her family was considered 'liberal in many respects', with their cinema ownership and trendsetting interior-design business, there were limits as far as her education was concerned. University education, for example, was out of the question:

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> Considering I come from that kind of a family background, my father, my parents were very orthodox, they wanted women to progress, but to a certain level, you know, maybe being very good housewives but as far as education was concerned, matric was as far as the girls, I mean all my cousins, could go, but the boys continued their education. Even as far as the driver's licence was concerned, my father said, 'The day you get your marriage licence you get your diver's licence'. That was the kind of process I suppose at that time but, you know, because we were, I suppose, brainwashed into thinking that 'Okay, fine, you're not going to go any further', we really didn't mind.

The experience of Fatima Patel shows both the newfound opportunities for girls as well as the limits to what they could achieve. She lived in an area known as Isipingo Rail, where her father, Moosa Jadwat, ran a retail store. After completing Standard 6 at the local primary school, she proceeded to the only high school in Durban.

> Before they never used to educate the girls, you know, Standard 6 was just enough, but my father says, no, he wants to send us to high school. So we used to travel by train every morning to Durban Girls' High. There were six girls – two Hindu girls and four Muslim girls – we used to travel by train but we had our own compartment in the train just for us. My father made arrangements with [the Railway Department] so we used to travel by train and then get down in Berea Road and take a walk right up to Girls' High…We all used to travel in the train together… [But] when I was in Standard 9 I got proposed and they wanted the wedding so I had to leave school and get married [1962]. I didn't finish my matric and I was very upset about it…Then my husband and them had a shop in Cathedral Road so I used to help him with his books and things like that.

Sisters Ayesha Vorajee and Mana Rajah had difficulty completing high school following the death of their father, Suleman M Paruk, in 1956. Paruk had himself been forced to leave school in Standard 8 following the death of his father. He was well connected in local politics as a member of the Natal Indian Congress, where he worked with prominent Muslim leaders like AM Moolla, AB Moosa and AI Kajee. He also had a taste for the finer things in life. Photographs show

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him impeccably dressed in the latest suiting with a pocket handkerchief, while all the family crockery was imported from England. He also taught the children, Mana Rajah recalls, 'how to set the table with the knives and forks and all that'. While unable to complete his education, Paruk subscribed to *Time* and *Life* magazines and the daily newspapers and was generally well informed. Rajah emphasised that

> we weren't allowed to read any trash and he also introduced us to the library. In the apartheid days we weren't allowed to go to theatre but he just somehow managed to take us and sometimes they used to have non-white days so he used to make sure he took us to theatre. He also used to take us to the movies.

For Ayesha Vorajee, their father 'felt that you empower women with education… He introduced us to, you know, a [different] type of culture. And, ya, it is sad because it is not encouraged in very many Muslim homes.' There was resistance from the extended family. Mana Rajah related her maternal grandmother's resistance to the girls learning English:

> She used to come to my house after my father died, she used to come and live for up to six months. My sister [Ayesha] and my cousin who used to come with my granny weren't allowed to read English books. Oh, she was so fussy about that – so they used to hide their books under the mattress and when she was sleeping they would read all their novels and whatever they wanted to read. It was very exciting because if you weren't allowed to do something, it was more exciting to do, you see. She [grandmother] says girls mustn't be educated, they must just learn how to sew and, you know, do kitchen work and cook and then get married and have children – that was their way of thinking.

The school's uniform did not help their cause, according to Mana:

> I was going to Dartnell Crescent, Durban Girls' High, and we weren't wearing pants. We used to wear the school uniform with our blazers and ties and short dresses but they were on our knee, I mean they were very respectable dresses. The dresses were white with navy blue and gold striped tie and navy blazers and we had a principal by the name of Mrs Dory, a wonderful person…Even our teachers too – in those days we had

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> white teachers – very, very dedicated teachers. And we learnt Afrikaans and Latin, you know, I don't know why I learnt Latin but we had to do it. You see, this aunt – sometimes my mother would tell me that my granny's not well so she'll be in Pine Street [and] from school we must take a walk and go to Pine Street and she'll meet us there. So this aunt used to see us and she would say, 'Hey, you people are…' – she used the most derogative terms because we weren't wearing Islamic dress [long pants]. In Woodford Grove [in Stamford Hill] my mother allowed us to read books and, you know, we used to go to the movies and everything. It was fine. But my granny's house, you can't talk about going to a movie.

Ayesha and Mana would experience somewhat different educational fates, as we discuss below.

Tertiary education

Tertiary education was also racially segregated and marked by gender division. The Springfield Teachers' Training College was opened in 1951. The opening of the ML Sultan Technical College in 1956 to provide commercial and technical education was initiated by a grant of £17 500 towards a college building by ML Sultan, who had arrived in Natal as an indentured worker and made his fortune through banana farming.

University education meanwhile had been available through the University of Natal's separate Non-European Section that offered courses in the faculties of arts, social science, commerce, and education since 1938. They hoped to train mainly teachers and social workers, and classes were held in the afternoons at Sastri College after the high school students left. In 1953, there were 161 students registered, including fifteen women.[43] Zuleikha Mayat described the university in 1959 as 'a university from which every vestige of campus activity was divorced from the non-European section (Yes, that is the university our children go to – Natal University Non-European Section) and the story was the same. These courses made available for you and for a limited number only.'[44] The Extension of University Education Act of 1959 later established completely separate 'tribal colleges' for black university students, who could no longer freely attend white universities. An 'Indian' university was opened at Salisbury Island in 1963 and transferred to Westville in 1971.

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A few Muslim women took advantage of opportunities for higher education but, as Nafisa Jeewa points out, this was an exception: 'Even with high school there weren't very many Muslim girls at that time. I was at [Durban Indian] Girls' High and most of them were non-Muslim girls. But there were just like a sprinkling of Muslim girls.' Jeewa attended Salisbury Island in the early 1960s:

> We couldn't get into Howard College [at the University of Natal] – and then there was this tribal university and we had Afrikaans lecturers that spoke either Dutch Nederlands or Afrikaans – I think they did that deliberately because most of the students that were there were just out of school, and a lot of the boys didn't do Afrikaans at school until later – in Standard 9 or 10.

Nafisa studied Afrikaans and, after completing Nederlands 1, the Department of Education offered her a position at Ahmedia School, which she accepted. There were 'a handful of Muslim girls – a Ms Meeran from Pietermaritzburg and a few from Johannesburg'.

Zubeida Seedat grew up in Greyville, and schooled at St Anthony's and Durban Indian Girls' High. There were a few Muslim girls but 'by Standard 8 they started tapering off – they didn't go on much longer. At a certain age they were supposed to come home and get married.' Tehmina Rustomjee was her best friend. They spoke both English and Gujarati but English dominated in their homes. As late as the 1950s, they had several white teachers, such as Miss Dorey the principal, and Miss Hammond. Amina Butler was their teacher as well. After matriculating, Seedat attended the Non-European University at Sastri College in Warwick Avenue. She completed a BA degree and wanted to do her LLB but the university did not admit black students to its law programme. Instead she did an honours degree in native administration and an MA in anthropology, with a dissertation on the Zanzibari community in Chatsworth. By the time she completed her MA, LLBs were being offered to black students and she qualified as a lawyer in the late 1960s. Her contemporaries included Thumba Pillay, VS Rajah, and Paul Davids, who were involved in the anti-apartheid struggle through various movements. At university she recalls that 'some [lecturers] were difficult but there was absolutely no interaction as such, you know, you went for your lectures, you came back – there was no real campus

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life because it was segregated, so that part you just missed. You didn't have this student existence at all.' She subsequently lectured white students in the Law Faculty at Natal University for a few years in the 1970s and found the experience 'very schizophrenic' given the relationship between the white and black communities off campus. She joined the firm of Thumba Pillay, Hassim Seedat and Ebrahim Goga but, being 'too much of an individualist', opened her own practice a few years later.

Despite intense opposition from his family, Sara Simjee's father, Ahmed 'Chota' Parak, encouraged her to matriculate:

> I don't know where he got his zeal for education. I always wondered that myself, because in his family, there were no people who were educated. But somehow with schoolbooks too, he made sure we all had new books, you know in those days we paid for our books. He used to take us to the bookshop and sit with us and cover our books, he had a lot of interest. He always did say, 'Get a good education.' And when I got married and enrolled in UNISA [University of South Africa], he was so thrilled; he said, 'You are actually carrying on'.

After matriculating in 1966, Simjee spent a year studying for a BA degree at Salisbury Island. She passed but left when she got married at the end of the year to Ahmed Simjee, now a professor of medicine at the University of Natal. She enrolled at the University of South Africa aiming to complete her degree by correspondence but was unable to complete her studies because of the birth of the children. Her daughter, however, entered tertiary education and completed a BCom degree, on her urging.

Zubeida Patel (née Bobat) was born in Pietermaritzburg and grew up in Malvern in Johannesburg, where her father had a business. He died when she was seven and her family moved back to Pietermaritzburg to live with their extended family. She attended high school which

> wasn't normal. I lived in my grandmother's home in an extended family and the home was very close to the high school and so I just walked to the school pretty much unnoticed by my uncles who were very traditional. They didn't send their daughters to high school so I was one of the first women in the family to have had a high school education and the opportunity to go to university.

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Patel attended the Salisbury Island campus from 1966 to 1969, completing a diploma in teaching. She married Ismail Patel during her second year of study and was expecting their first child at the time of her graduation. The stories of Sara Simjee and Zubeida Patel are interesting in revealing the societal expectation that women should marry young, even while pursuing higher education. After the birth of her two eldest children, Fawzia and Rashad, Patel returned to the University of Durban-Westville and completed a degree in French and English, and subsequently a master's degree in education.

Sisters, Ayesha Vorajee and Mana Rajah, tragically lost their father when they were fourteen and ten respectively. Although their father had encouraged them to pursue their education, they faced intense opposition from the extended family upon his death. In Ayesha's case, 'straight away the uncles, the paternal uncles and the maternal uncles, stopped [my schooling]. "Right, no going to school, you understand?", and yet my dad always wanted to educate us. He always told my mother that whatever happens "I would love my daughters to be educated".' Mana was younger and she, with her mother's support, resisted family pressure. After matriculating, she attended the ML Sultan Technikon, where she completed a course in dress designing. Shortly thereafter she met

> two white girls from South Africa who had studied in London, one had become a designer and the other studied commerce. We just happened to meet one day at some function and started talking and decided to open a business together. We opened a little boutique called 'Top Gear' in West Street near these beautiful shops called John Orrs and Payne Brothers [who] used to have the most beautiful silks from France. The fabrics were unreal and we used to make up garments for the July handicap and the *Sunday Tribune* would take photographs. These girls were very beautiful and used to model as well. But also it was difficult because I couldn't use the same lift to go upstairs as them so they stopped using the whites-only lift, they used to use the lift with me. When we used to go to David Strachan & Taylor, our auditors, we used the goods lift – the three of us – because I wasn't allowed to use those [main] lifts. We carried on for quite a few years until I got married.

Mana then became involved in her husband's family's business.

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According to the 1970 census, 864 Indians (145 women and 719 men) had a bachelor's degree in the greater Durban metropolitan area. A further 1 868 (524 of them women) had a diploma. Only 1 823 women and 4 855 men had matriculated out of a total Indian population of 321 204, which was made up of roughly equal numbers of men and women. The economically active population of 93 355 included 18 312 (19.16 per cent) women, mostly in lower-paying jobs. Among administrative workers, there were 46 women and 899 men; and among sales workers, 917 women and 8 766 men.

The flow of Indians into tertiary institutions became much more pronounced during the 1970s. The control of Indian education shifted to the Department of Indian Affairs in 1966 and free and compulsory education became available from 1970. Between April 1967 and March 1972, twenty-six new high schools and sixty-nine new primary schools were planned for Natal.[45] The rapid increase in the building of schools resulted in adequate space for all children by 1973, when Director of Education PW Prinsloo announced that all Indian children of school-going age would be accommodated.[46] This reflected in the numbers of children attending school. For example, the number of candidates who wrote the final year Natal Senior Certificate examination increased as follows: 336 in 1953; 530 in 1960; 1 167 in 1964;[47] 2 623 in 1968; and 10 449 in 1984.[48]

Education ushered in important changes. One was the increasing importance of English. In her study of language use among Indians, Dr Devamonie Bughwan found in 1972 that 62 per cent of Indian children used English when speaking among themselves and 52 per cent spoke only English with their parents.[49] The number of Indians who regarded English as their home language increased from 6 per cent in 1951 to 93 per cent in 1996. Reflecting on the impact of education in 1967 in the state propaganda magazine about South African Indian life, *Fiat Lux*, Durban Inspector of Schools, MG Pillay, pointed out that girls were marrying later and many were entering the job market, with occupations like receptionist, typist, sales assistant and hairdresser being very popular, in order to raise the family standard of living, and arranged marriages were declining. He argued that education had 'freed South Africa's Indian women', and that the Indian community had realised that 'our women are capable of handling more than dishes and diapers'.[50] While small numbers of Muslim women were beginning to attend university in the 1960s, it was really from the mid-1970s that it became common for girls to matriculate and for some of

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them to attend the University of Durban-Westville, Springfield Training College, and the ML Sultan Technikon.

Many early members of the Women's Cultural Group, themselves denied opportunities for formal learning, were strong advocates of education as a means to empower women and they were determined that their daughters would avail themselves of the opportunities that were available. Ayesha Vorajee always held that education was 'very important, and I feel that when you educate someone you are empowering the whole family, you know, to get out of whatever problems they have.' When Vorajee, an artist who paints in oils, sold her first painting she 'took that money and gave it to Mrs Mayat to be given out as a bursary, because I was so thrilled that I managed to sell one of my paintings, and because I feel, really, that educating a person is very important. And even now too, I am still painting, and whatever I sell, I give it towards educating to empower someone.' Both her sons graduated with degrees in commerce.

Shairbanu Lockhat recalls that her mother, dying from cancer, 'always maintained to me, "Please give your children education. Make sure they get a good education because education is going to see them through."' Lockhat lost her father in a car accident at the age of eight and this also meant the loss of a supportive patron for her continuing education. Indeed, in the absence of her father, the family was reconstituted and it meant that any aspirations she harboured were not easily realised. She had been diligent in her studies, with a talent for biology in particular; some training in first aid at St Anthony's School awakened in her a desire to become a nurse. But, 'when I told my [maternal] grandfather and grandmother, they shrieked, "No ways! You are not going to be a nurse!"' This puzzled her because her mother's sister Amina Vaid had been permitted to study medicine and qualified as a medical doctor. When Lockhat, much later in life, inquired about this discrepancy, her grandfather hinted that the decision had been her paternal grandmother's. Lockhat, reflecting on possible explanations, considered:

> I suppose she felt that I had lost my father and maybe there was nobody to oversee what I was doing. I don't blame my grandmother. Maybe if her son was alive she would have said yes. Because my aunt, my mother's sister [who became a doctor], did have both sets of parents, so they knew what they were doing. Maybe my grandmother felt that I was alone and

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> my mother couldn't do that much; maybe if my father were alive, he could [have] helped me.

This was one reason why, when raising her own children, she worked hard to ensure their education. She emphasised the importance of a qualification to her children: 'I made sure that their schoolwork came first, didn't pressurise them, but made them sit and made them understand that today you need to be educated.' Her eldest daughter Fatima qualified as an optometrist and her second daughter Mariam did a degree in social work.

> I made the children see [the value of education]. I said, 'You must get a degree.' I insisted and that's how they did it, and they made me proud when each of them qualified and graduated. I'm happy that the children are now well settled. They have something to fall back on. If I'm not around at least they can say, 'Well, we've got something there', and I hope that whatever I have taught them they are carrying out with their children.

This narrative is common to many members. Fatima Mayat was forced to leave school after Standard 8 but her daughter Aziza did an honours degree in psychology. Aziza, according to her mother, also 'had a passion for the kitchen' and 'qualified as a chef' and is now a professional caterer living in Sydney, Australia. Laila Ally 'pushed my children. I wanted my daughter to do something more than I did so that's why I encouraged Raeesa a lot and she's an attorney.' Khatija Vawda's daughter Rehana qualified as a teacher, specialised in children with hearing problems, and received a scholarship to qualify as an audiologist at Northwestern University in the United States. Zohra Moosa's daughter Khatija completed a BA degree and is a teacher. Unable to fulfil their own desires for a formal education, most first- and second-generation members of the Women's Cultural Group ensured that their children had the opportunity to do so.

One of the more remarkable stories of this period is that of founding Group member Khatija Vawda. After losing her husband Dr Goolam Vawda (one of the first Indian ENT specialists in Durban) in 1977, she withdrew from public life for a while. Encouraged by her family, she enrolled at the University of Durban-Westville and graduated with a BA degree in 1981. She remembers the lighter moments of university life:

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Khatija Vawda

These [young varsity] girls used to ask me at spare time when we used to get together, 'So why do you, Khatija, why don't you come to the cafeteria?' I kept on saying no, no, no, and then one day they wanted to know my reason. I said, 'Okay, you want my reason? I am an elderly person compared to you girls. I know what goes on in cafeterias. The young generation may know me but I don't know them, I know their mothers, I know their parents. So I don't mind going there, but the young generation may know who I am, and it may embarrass them, so I'd rather not go. That is my reason.' They said, 'Oh gosh! We wish our parents would think like that.' [*laughs*]

Bursaries and loans

In March 1956, 'Fahmida's World' reported that a Miss Hansoo Bibi Khan of Merebank had gained admission to the Medical School in Durban and had received a bursary from the Amod and Amina Moolla Bursary fund.[51] In her column on 16 May 1956, Mayat mentioned a Training Centre for Muslim Teachers and appealed to the public to take advantage of the scheme: 'An appeal will be made to the public for funds for the scheme and for bursaries for the teachers. It is earnestly hoped that Muslim lady teachers will also volunteer for the course.' She also passed a gentle hint to bodies like the Mehfile Khwateen Islam and the Women's Cultural Group to 'arrange bursaries for female teachers if possible'.

The need for financial assistance was dire among many Indian and African parents who were mired in poverty and keen to send their children to school. At the suggestion of Mary Grice, the Group began assisting African students by providing funds to a bursary scheme run by the South African Institute of Race Relations (SAIRR). Association with the Institute led to a police search in the early 1960s. Mayat recalls:

Sergeant Moodley comes to our secretary who was staying in Wills Road. And Mrs Coovadia, the secretary's mother, quickly phoned me, 'The

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> police are here, they are talking to Khairoonisa, and they want to see the books. And she said she hasn't got [them], but you've got them.' She had them but was too afraid. I was staying in Clare Road. So Sergeant Moodley, within half an hour…he was there at my door and said, 'You know, I was there at your secretary's home and she said she hasn't got the books.' I said, 'No, she has got the books but she was just frightened of you, and we don't know why you're coming here.' And he said, 'Well, we want to see who you're giving your money to.' 'Fine, here is the cheque book. You can look at it, from there you can pick up.' 'So this is SAIRR?' [he asked.] I said, 'Yes, they have got a bursary scheme for African children and so we give it to them.'

While bursaries have been handed out since the inception of the Women's Cultural Group, full records of these are available from the 1970s, showing the growth of the amounts disbursed. From 1954 to the mid-1960s the focus was on high school students. In 1956 the Women's Cultural Group raised money for three bursaries which were given to pupils attending Clairwood Girls' School to see them through their Junior Certification. 'Fahmida' hoped 'that the recipients prove worthy, since it is not everybody that can be so lucky'. These were among the first bursaries provided with funds raised by the Group and there was a commitment to raise funds for more promising pupils from impoverished circumstances. She called on the public to apply to their secretary Fatima Osman [Loonat] noting that 'the applicants need not necessarily be girls or students in high schools'.[52]

As more Indian students began attending university, the emphasis shifted to tertiary education. Amounts disbursed for bursaries increased from R2 000 in 1972 to R600 000 in 2009.[53] To put these figures into perspective, in 1979 the annual fees to study for a BA at the University of Durban-Westville were R270 per annum. In 2009, the annual fees for same course were over R20 000, excluding inflationary growth in the costs of transport, books, food and lodging.

Initially, the main sources of the Group's income were from cooking demonstrations, fundraising events and returns on investments. From 1984, however, *Indian Delights* began to be published under the auspices of the Group's Educational Trust, which allocated R102 000 to bursaries and R100 000 to its development fund in that year. The development fund was earmarked for establishing a women's activity centre for the community, but when the Group

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scaled down that vision and acquired its current premises, the money was ploughed back into the bursary fund. *Indian Delights* has been a crucial source of revenue. As Zuleikha Mayat noted at the AGM in July 2007, 'had it not been for *Indian Delights* our financial position would have been akin to that of the many other organisations that rely on public funds…The *Indian Delights* baby has spawned and nurtured all of these [many projects]'. As the bursary capital grew, considerably higher sums of money were given from the 1990s, with around R600 000 disbursed in 2009. In 1993, the Group launched its 'One Million Rand Bursary Fund' campaign to meet the needs of students in view of the higher cost of education:

> The Education Trust is now going to put all the funds at its disposal into a Bursary Capital Fund. We hope that this will top the million rand mark by the end of next year. The coming years will see many of our students stretching out their hands for University fees. So instead of accumulating the dividends, we will help students pay for their education.[54]

Aside from the sales of *Indian Delights*, fundraising and prudent investments, bursary income has been obtained from donations, the institution of memorial bursaries, and trusts such as the Hafiza Mayat Trust, Kathor Lillah Trust, Shifa Charitable Trust, and YGH & Partners, which periodically provide bursary funds to the Group to disburse.

Funding to students was initially given in the form of non-refundable bursaries. This changed to loans in the mid-1970s, when a student, upon qualifying, donated back the money she had received in order to benefit another recipient. Changing to a loan scheme has not, of course, meant a total recovery of bursary money as the loans are interest free. A student who receives assistance for three to four years will usually pay that loan back over four or five years after qualifying, and there is a loss to the Education Trust through devaluation and inflation. Unrecovered loans also mean the continual loss of funds. To counteract such losses, one idea advanced was that loan repayment should be at the rate of the academic fees at the time of repayment. However, this was shelved because it was seen to be in conflict with the Islamic prohibition against repayments exceeding the amount loaned. Another suggestion was that candidates should be encouraged to make a 'voluntary donation' after the loan had been repaid. But this, too, did not become policy

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when some members felt that it may be seen to constitute a form of interest through coercion. A Group memorandum issued in 2004 stated their philosophical resolution that 'since our aim is to improve the quality of life among the disadvantaged, we view the loss as a solid investment in society'.[55] And, as Ayesha Vorajee pointed out, there are always a few students who repay more than the amount received, as a sign of gratitude.

Tardy rates of repayment were costly to the Group and Zuleikha Mayat regularly expressed frustration at the attitudes of recipients who would refuse to pay back loans despite the best efforts of Fatima Loonat, who handled bursary repayments until she took ill in the late 1990s. In her monthly newsletter for March 1992, Mayat wrote:

> Some students who owe us R12 000 pay back as little as R100 per month which means that they will take ten years to pay off their loan. That is if they pay regularly and many pay irregularly. We have observed some of our graduates instead of paying us back go for *Umrah* and other trips which shows they have the ability to pay bigger instalments if they have the correct priorities.

The treasurer's report noted in June 1996 that bursary repayment had been 'poor' and that the Group was reluctantly forced to hand overdue accounts to credit control. During financial year 1997/98, the treasurer reported that a significantly higher amount was repaid due to the policy being 'more strictly adhered to'. The treasurer's report of July 1998 stated that

> regular reminders are sent to students who have graduated and those that do not respond are handed over to credit control. We regret having to do so but I believe that one can be soft and forgiving with one's own money but Trusteeship is an *amaanat* and so a great responsibility rests on Trustees in their management of Trust Funds.

Notwithstanding these measures the Trust was forced to write off bad debts each year. For example, R76 862 was written off in 1999, which had accrued over a long period, and a further R49 581 was written off in 2000. According to Zarina Moolla, who assisted Fatima Loonat when the latter took ill and later oversaw the bursary repayments portfolio, they had no option: 'We have an undertaking form that [recipients] sign which means absolutely nothing if you

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can't get them to agree to pay. We had credit companies, we had a lawyer but there was no success really.' There has been a gradual turnaround over the past decade. In 1999, Mayat specifically thanked Zarina Moolla and Aziza Mayat for 'being persistent in their efforts. It needs tenacity and firmness to deal with people with *bad memories*.' In June 2001, Mayat commented that 'there has been exceptionally good performance by the Bursary Team, especially in recouping repayments from students who are gainfully employed'. Two years later, Zarina Moolla was again praised for her vigilance: 'old recipients are being tracked down and many conscientious ones have begun payments'. Some defaultees went back twenty years but they were 'able to pursue debt collections with a fine comb'.[56]

Zarina Moolla wrote in the Group's jubilee brochure in 2004 that the Education Trust 'emphasise[s] greatly self-reliance, responsibility and empowerment. We therefore have adopted a robust campaign to ensure that our students repay their debt to us as soon as possible. This has helped substantially to increase the amount of funds available to us.' As Zarina Moolla explained, the accounts have been 'captured properly on computer and are running quite well'. Where the approach to record keeping had once been more casual, full details about recipients (address, identity number, etc.) are now rigorously kept up to date. From 2001, the Trust began charging an administrative fee to cover the cost of telephone calls and faxes for the recovery of outstanding debts. The recovery of R4 040 during that financial year almost covered the year's telephone and fax bill of R4 874. The Trust continues to face problems though, as Zarina Moolla explains:

> Sometimes, you know, it's just unfortunate that the students don't complete their studies, they don't find jobs, they want to pay but they can't pay. Others sometimes totally deny having received the bursaries and can be very rude about it. The thing that has helped us a lot is updating the books. If the books are up to date and you know what's going on, no matter how much people argue with you, you can prove your point. And that's been the success. The recovery rate is very good now and between Safoura and myself we keep tabs on them all the time.

Despite the hitches, the Group has learnt expensive lessons over the years and accurate and effective record keeping has been fundamental to improving

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repayment rates. Younger members such as Zarina Moolla have also brought in new skills and professional experience, reflecting the educational privileges of a new generation that earlier Group members can be credited with working so hard to achieve. In addition, new communication technologies, such as faxes and cell phones, accountancy and bookkeeping software, and the now ubiquitous driver's licence and vehicle ownership have enabled the Trust to carry out a closer scrutiny of bursary loan recipients' academic performance, improve follow-up and dissemination of information to the bursars, and provide clear and accurate accounts and specialised payment plans.

While the Education Trust raises the bulk of its monies through fundraising and book sales, it sometimes receives donations from individuals, organisations and businesses. For example, when the Group celebrated its 50th anniversary in 2004, Mayat wrote to Al Baraka Bank on 30 April of that year, noting that 'customarily when celebrating a birthday or wedding anniversary one is loaded with goodwill and gifts. For our 50th anniversary we hope Al Baraka will in appreciation of our service to the community donate another magnificent sum to us. That would wipe out some of the wrinkles on our ageing faces.' The bank responded with a contribution to the bursary fund. Others have done likewise over the years.

Two other sources of funding are zakaat and donations made in commemoration of family members or associates, which is known as Esaale Sawaab and refers to the dedication of the reward (sawaab) of charitable deeds to living or deceased persons. This practice stems from the Muslim belief in a hadith of the Prophet which states that, when a person dies, all but three of his/her acts come to an end: sadaqah jariyyah, beneficial knowledge, and a pious child who prays for the deceased. Over the years, a number of bursaries have been started in honour of deceased persons. A recent example is the Noor Jehan Scholarship, which was established around 2007, when Dr Adam Mohamed gave a donation in the name of his late wife.[57] In most instances, donors set criteria for bursaries or loans, such as that the Group must take into account the financial circumstances and academic results of applicants, as well as obtain a written commitment that the recipient will do community service and/or become involved in humanitarian causes.

In other instances, the Group has dedicated bursaries to individuals who have contributed to community work or assisted the Group over many years.

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Zarina Moolla explained that sometimes members wish to

> make a contribution for somebody who has done a favour for you [but] who is not taking money, like Solly Manjra for instance. He does a lot of work for us, you know, and we wanted to thank him so we put funds in his name, which will earn income and, when income is given out, there will be sawaab in perpetuity for him. We've got our own members as well and, when we've had a good year, we put some money for them as Esaale Sawaab.

The Group receives zakaat funds annually without actively seeking to collect such funds and handles this according to the criteria.[58] The fact that the public entrusts the Group with zakaat funds is indicative of its reputation for reliability and trustworthiness. Mayat, in fact, commented at the AGM in July 2008 that the increase in zakaat funding should be taken as a compliment that 'the public, in recognition of our work, entrusts us with their zakaah and lillah, feeling confident that it will be put to good use for worthy causes'. Speedy utilisation of zakaah and full accountability has earned the 'admiration' of donors.

While this funding is a boon for the Group, Mayat feared compromising the Group's independence. 'Not having to solicit funds may afford us more time to expend our energies on other projects, but [it] will lead to us losing the right to declare that we generate our own funds for our own projects.' This fierce independence has been a feature of the Group's narrative from the time of its formation.

The funding sources of the Educational Trust indicate that, whatever the intention of the founding members and trustees, the Women's Cultural Group has been perceived as a mainly Muslim organisation catering primarily for Muslim students. Zubeida Patel, who was the secretary for a few years in the 1970s, recalls the Group received many

> letters from black students asking for bursaries. We gave out a few per year. And I remember feeling very sad about the fact that we were turning away black students who had a difficult time going through school with their mothers working as domestics and not having much money and they had to pay for school and uniforms and that was a very difficult time for me.

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Nafisa Jeewa, secretary from the late 1970s through to the mid-1980s, agrees that there was a great need among Africans but emphasises that the Group was not intentionally biased in favour of Indians or Muslims. 'Most of the bursaries were given to whoever approached us – Indian children, black children – they were given the bursaries as well but we weren't in contact with certain people.' Jeewa's explanation is that since the Group was better known among Muslims there have been more applications from Muslims. However, it is worth noting that of nineteen bursaries handed out in 1976, for example, eight beneficiaries were African, nine were Muslim Indians and two were non-Muslim Indians. In 1983, fourteen of the thirty-one recipients of assistance were non-Muslim students, several of whom were Africans.[59]

Officially, the policy has always been that 'our beneficiaries are allocated irrespective of ethnicity, gender or creed.'[60] In her speech at the 18th AGM in 1972, Zuleikha Mayat explained the procedure for selecting applicants and conceded that there was some bias:

> The question is often raised as to how we make our selections, and we reply 'on merit' but this is not strictly so. We do have a soft spot for African students and anyone recommended by the Institute of Race Relations, the Inanda Seminary or some such institution is given priority when the applications are weeded. It also happens that when the applications are being discussed, someone of the Committee knows the peculiar circumstances of the applicant, his or her family background. Being women, we lend a ready ear to these factors and even if, on the merit of their academic achievement two students show equal promise, it is the one in whose application we have gained a deeper insight who will receive the aid. This may not be entirely fair but in the absence of a better system it remains the one in operation…It shall be my strong recommendation, as the President of the Group to the Bursary Committee, to continue taking this personal interest in the applicants and let those who want to read a racialistic attitude in our disbursements do so.

Reflecting on the process in 2008, Mayat accepted that while bursaries 'are really given on merit' and financial need, the process is subjective. Applications may be similar in most regards 'but somebody in the Group knows the condition of one and they get priority. I think this happens with all groups, but

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we do try and spread it out.' While African students have received bursaries, in recent years, the number of beneficiaries has dropped, according to Hajira Omar, partly because the Group has lost contact with its one-time African membership in townships as well as with the Inanda Seminary and the South African Institute of Race Relations, which had referred many applicants in the past. The drive towards racial integration has ironically lost its 'fire' in the post-apartheid era, and there is a greater availability of resources for African students under the new government led by the African National Congress. After the implementation of the Group Areas legislation moved Africans into townships, and during the period of school boycotts and the political involvement of youth in the 1980s, when schooling was disrupted, the numbers of African applicants who were supported by the Group dropped. The impression of the Group seems to be also that residential instability and poor postal services impacted their decision-making about students who, 'when you send accounts or something, they have moved on. If there is an address, the post people don't do any postal deliveries there, only at postboxes. Very few Africans had postboxes then.'

There have been few applications from white students. In 1978 the treasurer reported that for the first time applications had been received from two white South Africans. While the Group policy remains that there shall be no discrimination on the basis of race, colour or creed, it is clear that, early on, the profile of beneficiaries depended upon the avenues of contact between racially segregated residential/linguistic/religious communities. Currently, the distribution of loans reflects a broader trend of voluntary insularity between apartheid-classified racial groups and the growing centrality of Muslim identity claimed within the Group, perhaps reflecting external trends and the politicisation of Islam globally.

The profile of applicants has changed in other ways too. The treasurer reported in June 2003 that there was 'an increasing number of applicants for bursary loans from professionals and people in good commercial standing. The bursary committee tries to select students who come from poor families but a sympathetic eye is also cast on those students from better-off families who have outstanding results. We trust that no one will take undue advantage of our soft-heartedness.' This point was reiterated by Zarina Moolla in the Group's 2004 jubilee brochure, when she wrote that as a result of the higher cost of living and

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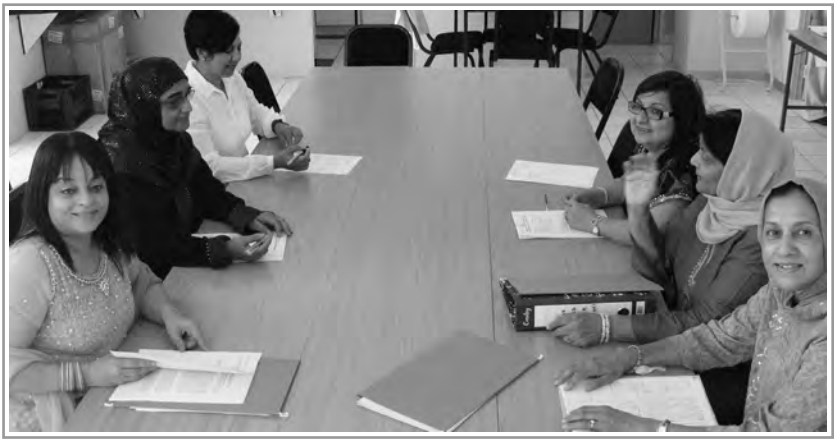

The Bursary Committee, 2010: (clockwise from left) Shameema Mayat, Shairbanu Lockhat, Hajira Omar, Zarina Moolla, Ayesha Vorajee and Fatima Mayat.

massive escalation in the cost of education, 'the number of applicants in need of assistance has increased exponentially in recent years'. Moolla added that this was due to the 'increased emphasis on education as a means to improve the lives of their families. Education has always been a window of opportunity for many to establish a career and ultimately financial independence.'[61]

The Group had always assisted students based on need, but the definition of 'need' has changed with the perception that tertiary education is no longer a privilege but a necessity and that this necessity is becoming increasingly unaffordable for large numbers of people. Among professional families, the economic reality is that it is now more challenging to pass on a similar standard of living to one's children unless each earns a degree. And, as a single wage-earner can no longer provide even for a nuclear-family household, occupational training has become a standard expectation for middle-class girls. Zarina Moolla confirmed that

> the [financial] demographics of students has changed over the years. Previously the students were the needy, needy, needy students – now it's a middle-income family which probably has three kids at university and can't afford to put the kids through, who would need assistance – in which case we ask them to pay back a certain amount – depending on how much they are earning. They pay us back in the interim while the student is still

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> studying. So we don't recoup more than what we have given them, but at least they pay us back at a faster rate and the student owes less at the end of their period.

The application process remains rigorous. Students fill out application forms at the Group's head office detailing their matriculation results, the course they wish to pursue, the institution at which they intend studying and their parents' income. Payslips and even tax returns are checked. The applications are collated by the Group's administrator, Safoura Mohammed, and scrutinised by a small pre-selection group made up of members from the Education Trust, which compiles a shortlist. According to Ayesha Vorajee,

> we sift through the applications and those that we feel are worthwhile and so on, and we look through the background as well [to obtain] detailed information regarding their parents' employment and so on, and then we interview them. A group of us get together, call the applicants in, and interview them with their parents.

Vorajee believes that this stringent procedure is necessary to avoid 'supporting lifestyles rather than people who are in need'. Care is taken not to make the process onerous as some applicants find it uncomfortable. According to Zarina Moolla,

> some parents find it very hard, thinking they are coming cap in hand. We make it a point to make people feel as comfortable as possible because you can, on the face of the father sometimes, see how difficult it is to come because, I think, it makes the person feel like they've not been able to fend for their own family and that becomes very difficult. So I always tell the groups who I am interviewing, 'Just make the people as comfortable as possible'.

Most applicants are young and cover a range of professions, including beauticians and interior designers, though most are undergraduates at universities or technikons. According to the presidential report of June 1996, the Group tries to 'persuade students to take up technical subjects at Technikon rather than enter for the academic field and we hope students will oblige. However, we have about eleven medical students whom we are helping.' Very rarely, bursaries are provided for private colleges, which are much more expensive.

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An exception may be made, for example, for someone who is disabled and needs to attend a private college for this reason. From 1995 to around 1998, the Group, along with several other donors, assisted Zainab Ismail and Ziatoon Suleman, who went to study at the College of Shariah at Zarga Private University in Jordan. They also co-sponsored Rashida Amod, who studied at the Al Azhar University in Cairo. All three students studied Arabic and Islamic studies. The rationale for assisting these young women was to create a core of women educated in Islamic theology.

Safoura Mohammed and Zarina Moolla monitor students throughout their studies, meeting regularly to check on progress and year-end results. This was easier in the past when the university mailed the reports to the Group. However, this has been stopped because of privacy concerns on the part of universities. 'Problem students' are called in and in extreme cases the bursary may be stopped because of non-performance. This is rare as the screening process is thorough and most students, according to Zarina Moolla, are highly motivated: 'Generally the students who are studying on bursaries are much more committed to completing their studies because it's their way out [of poverty].' Successful applicants are also encouraged to give time to charity work and community involvements as a way of passing on a portion of the privilege they have been awarded.

Involvement on the Bursary Committee has had a mixed impact on members. Hajira Omar said that after interviewing students she 'feels devastated that there is such a big need and that there should be five more Groups that aim for a similar kind of thing – we could have even more really.' Examining individual applications and the financial problems facing many families has driven home the extent of the poverty in the country. At the same time, as Zarina Moolla points out,

> there is a sense of fulfilment in that, you know, there are days I just feel I don't know what I'm doing this for and then you walk into a supermarket and somebody will come up to you and say, 'Thank you, my son's finished his studies thanks to your Group', and you feel you've made a difference to somebody else. All my life I have worked to make a positive difference.

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The Group has hundreds of letters on file from bursary holders expressing gratitude for assistance, such as the following, which was received in January 2006:

> It is me, Hamid Ahmed, the student from Natal University who you bought air ticket back home to Sudan in September 2004. I am so sorry for failing to contact U long before. I thank U again for UR assistance and want to tell U that I worked hard and managed to get a job with a British NGO in my home town as 'Business Development Officer' last April 2005. I am paid well ($450) a month which is enough to provide for my family, mother, relatives, and also make some savings. I never forget about U by the way and used to tell my friends about UR good deed. By the way now I can make some contribution to UR fund so plse tell how. Thank U and my greetings to all of U. Hamid. Please reply so that I know my message has been delivered.

Another recipient of financial assistance, Dr Z Seedat, wrote to the Group on 3 March 1998:

> On completing my degree, I have sat back many times thinking of all who made this achievement possible and without doubt the Women's Cultural Group were amongst the tops. Receiving the bursary did not only mean financial backing, but the encouragement of knowing that you had put faith in me. For this I thank you sincerely. I know it takes hard work to keep this fund going, but remember always that my success, like in the cases of others, belongs very much to the Group as well. All my *duas* are with you, so that you may continue with the good work.

Shairbanu Lockhat related an incident that took place in February 2008, when a father visited the office and she asked:

> 'Have you come to pay?' 'No, I have already paid that bursary. I've come for my other daughter's bursary.' Then he tells us, 'Thank you so much for the bursary. I couldn't have done it without the bursary. My son has a BCom thanks to the Cultural Group.' And he wrote us a lovely letter. So when you see this, the efforts and the rewards when somebody tells you that you are doing something right, that somebody is really thanking

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you for it. But there are people who say, 'Oh yes, you people are all talk, talk, talk' – it's not all talk, as you know.

This chapter has tracked changes in the attitudes of parents towards education, especially the education of girls, as well as the availability of educational facilities. The Group's members have always believed in the importance of educating girls and more especially in their ability. They probably felt vindicated when a young Pietermaritzburg girl, Amina Jogiat, became, in the late 1970s, the first Indian matriculation candidate to score distinctions in all her subjects. She subsequently completed her medical degree, being voted the top medical student. But there are signs, worrying for some, that the wheel of education is turning full circle.

Since the formation of the Group, the majority of membership has been Muslim and this identity has become increasingly pertinent in recent years. Ironically, in the post-apartheid period, there have been crucial changes in attitudes among many Muslims regarding education – reflecting a rise in conservative gender views and mistrust of cosmopolitan and modern values in relation to religious identity. Many parents are reluctant to send their children, especially girls, to government schools for a variety of reasons, including a perception that the standard of education has dropped or that children would learn 'un-Islamic' values from teachers, peers and the syllabus. For example, the Muslim religious body Jamiatul Ulama warned in its newsletter *Al-Jamiat* in May 1998 that Muslims were sitting on a 'time-bomb' by leaving their children in secular institutions: 'Who is unaware that numerous young boys and girls are losing their chastity at university and high schools? In the kind of environment that we have been submerged into, what steps have we taken to counter the onslaught of the forces of evil on our children?'[62] Some parents do believe that their children will start taking drugs, get into gangs, feel socially pressured to attend dances, may not get time off for prayer or festivals, etc., and instead choose to send them to Muslim or Islamic schools. The term 'Muslim schools' is used in the literature to refer to schools where the pupils are almost entirely Muslim but where a secular syllabus is followed with some Arabic and Islamic education. Starting with Lockhat Islamia College in 1985, Muslim schools have sprung up countrywide and fall under the ambit of the Association of Muslim Schools. The nomenclature 'Islamic' refers to schools which primarily follow an

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Islamic syllabus, with elementary English language and mathematics education. These schools are mainly attended by girls. Increasingly, large numbers of boys have begun to attend the various Darul Ulooms (Islamic seminaries), which have mushroomed in the past decade, to complete aalim courses.[63]

The Women's Cultural Group has disbursed several million rand over the past half-century and continues its advocacy of education. The ways in which funds have been allocated reflects the educational transformation in the region, especially pertaining to women. Until the 1960s the focus was on school education as that is where the greatest need was. From the 1960s, as more girls completed high school and made their way into university, the funding of the Group was directed towards university students. The transformation over the last five decades among South African Indians has been remarkable. According to the 2001 population census, 37 377 Indian Muslim males and 32 660 females countrywide had matriculated. In addition, 4 644 males and 4 278 females had diplomas in addition to matriculation certificates; 4 122 males and 2 988 females had bachelor's degrees;[64] 1 146 males and 946 females had honours degrees; while 1 677 males and 754 females had doctoral degrees. While parity has not been reached, the change has been remarkable given the attitudes towards girls' education two generations ago. Many parents, like Zarina Moolla, regard education

> as a way for people to move forward in life and to affirm themselves. Education is something I can give my child, which he'll take wherever he goes. Money, if I give my child, will just teach him arrogance and it's gone tomorrow. If you don't give your child an education and there is a tyrannical husband situation or something like that, what is she going to do with herself?

Moolla's question is pertinent because Muslim society is undergoing fundamental changes. One trend is the stark class division with better-off Muslims having access to expensive private education while the majority are forced to attend government schools where the education is of a poor quality. Another trend is for increasing numbers of young Muslims, mainly girls but also fairly substantial numbers of boys, opting for religious rather than secular education. At the same time, many more Muslims are marrying at a young age and, while this has not been quantified, the anecdotal evidence based on the experience of

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Group members who are beseeched for financial assistance from abandoned wives, the lectures of mawlanas in mosques and the websites of various Islamic organisations suggest that divorce rates are increasing markedly. Group member Mana Rajah, for example, commented:

> The divorces are due to [couples] getting married too young. The girls don't realise the responsibility of a marriage and running a home and kitchen, you know. And everybody wants to live on their own. There's too much of 'I don't want to live with my in-laws', too much of that – and then they realise that they can't manage. There's lots of homes where the mothers are sending food every day [to married daughters] because they want to study, they want to do this or they are too busy with their children, so the girls' mothers are sending food.

It is too early to predict the long-term sociological repercussions of these trends, not only for Muslim identity formation, but also for the inner domain of the family, home, extended family networks, the role of women and the economic situation of Muslims. What is clear, however, is that these trends will fundamentally transform some of the patterns in gender and family, and especially the education of girls, witnessed from the mid-1970s.

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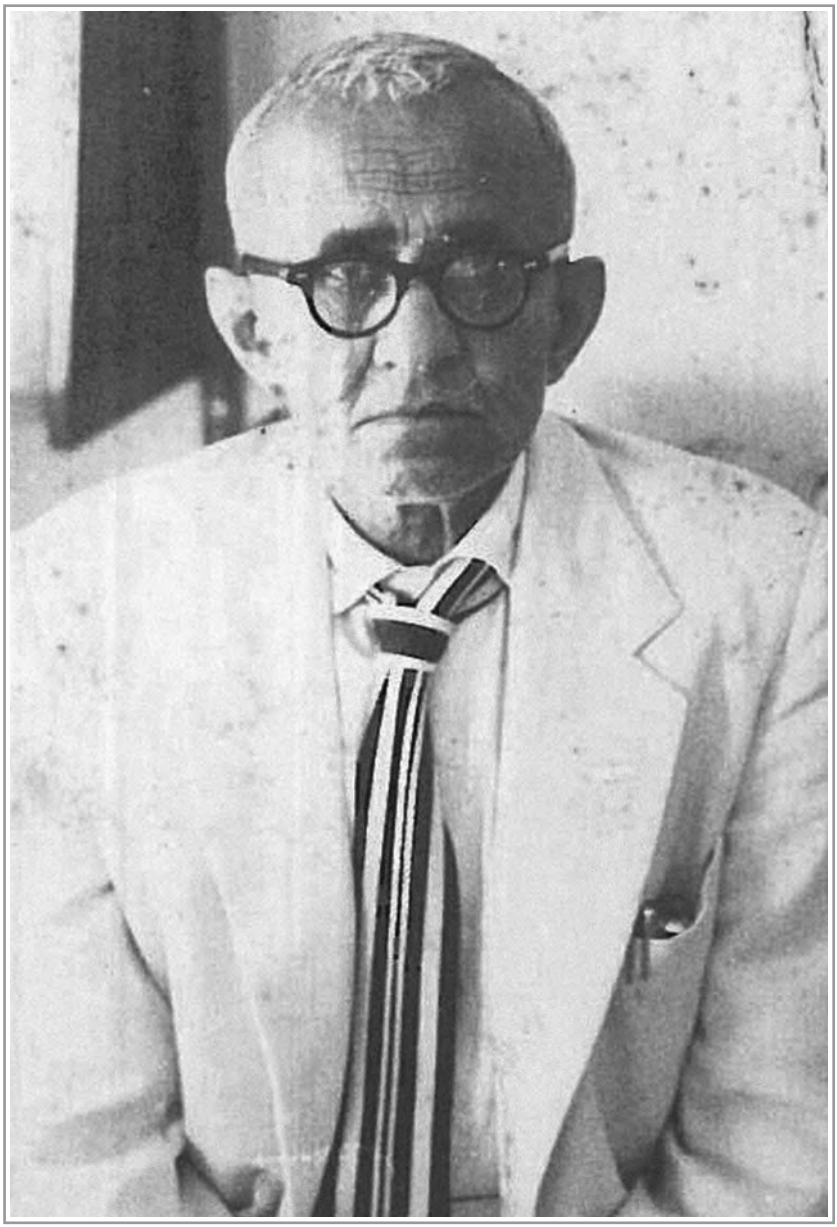

Mohammed Bismillah, father of Bibi Mall and Zuleikha Mayat, drummed into his children the lesson that others have a share in our incomes.

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6
BAKE, JUMBLE AND TRUST

Let us earn the good pleasure of our Lord.
By giving in charity of such goods, talents and service
To those that are in need thereof;
This is the wish of our Lord that riches
Bestowed by Him should circulate amongst all.[1]

Growing up in her father's shop in Potchefstroom, Zuleikha Mayat noticed that at the end of each business day he would put a tickey for every pound of gross sales into a jar. '[It] drummed into me the lesson that others have a share in our incomes.' As a teenager Mayat heard about a funding drive for the Friends of the Sick Association which had been established in the 1940s by the Reverend Paul Sykes in Durban as a care centre for patients with tuberculosis. Mayat responded 'by digging into my pocket money and cajoling friends and parents and siblings to add to it' and sent the sum by postal order. In 1972, Mayat expressed the ethos of the Women's Cultural Group when she wrote that 'the Bounty of God is not just for a select few but possessions, knowledge and talents must be shared so that a maximum number of people benefit as a result.'[2]

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But the concept of sharing and providing relief to the needy meant more than handing out alms. The above passage from the Qur'an, which appears in the Group's publication *Qur'anic Lights* as well in as many of its brochures,[3] captures the Group's approach to welfare and redress. Sanctioned by the Qur'an, charity is a valued social practice which manifests in the lives of Muslims through concrete acts such as the payment of zakaat, which is one of the five pillars of Islam, and thus as important as the declaration of faith in God, prayer five times a day, fasting during the month of Ramadan, and making a pilgrimage to Makkah. In addition, optional acts of charity such as lillah, fitra and sadaqah are paid at different times for specific religious purposes. Mayat emphasised that the best 'givers are those who get off their seats, lift their hands and do something through hard work'. In seeking to bring about a more just society, she argued, individuals should assist needy persons irrespective of race or religion. The Qur'anic passage quoted above resonated with the vision of Group members because it called on them to give of their 'goods, talents and service' rather than simply hand out money.

Mayat wrote in 1992 that 'we seldom touch the public for donations. Instead we break our backs in attempting to generate our own funds.'[4] This approach infused cash amounts with social value and transformed unpaid labour into an act of wealth redistribution. It helped to define the citizenship these women were creating and practising, a citizenship that was not linked to formal state recognition and rights but to responsibility under an alternative authority.

The production and marketing of *Indian Delights* proved a reliable source of revenue for funding many charitable projects and became the bedrock of the Group's financial independence and longevity. But there have been a spectrum of other fundraising schemes, and significant energy has been directed towards 'roll-up-the-sleeves' types of enterprises.[5] These activities demonstrate the innovation and shifts in strategy and scale that have patterned the Group's philanthropic career. They also reveal how this line of entry by Muslim womanhood into Durban's public sphere was empowered by their class status, constrained by apartheid restrictions, and bounded by patriarchal guidelines of acceptable action. While Group members frequently had the support of 'powerful' men in the local Muslim community, they were compelled to tread with gendered circumspection to cultivate and maintain their organisational

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reputation. Over the years, their efforts not only successfully raised millions of rand in charitable funds, but also circulated 'riches' originating largely within the Durban Muslim community, thereby constituting an important node in communal networking and identity reproduction.

The beginnings were humble. Before the cookbook, the Group relied almost completely on time-consuming and labour-intensive methods of raising funds, such as selling baked goods, rummage sales and dinner events. As Zohra Moosa recalled, 'Initially our fundraisings were not such big elaborate dinners; it used to be jumble sales and things like that, even cake sales.' In interviews with members, all were keen to emphasise that they raised money through their own initiative and hard work and exercised thrift in how these funds were used. In a speech in 1972, Mayat asserted that

> if the public thinks that we are squandering a lot of time and money on lavish functions let me assure you that very little of the Group's funds are touched on these occasions. Our policy is to make each function pay for itself. For tonight's function each member has been levied in kind, cash and talent and any shortfall we expect to cover from the sale of brochures.[6]

Mayat's prudence has translated into strict policy. One member confided that

> when it comes to money, Mrs Mayat doesn't like to spend. You know, for everything that we do we have to save, we have to collect money. Even for our monthly meetings, four members get together to provide the lunch but we don't use any [Group] money. That I agree with, but to do other things, like improve the [Activity] Centre, we have to battle to get money out of her – like to put in an air-con[ditioner]. I used to be in charge of the hiring of the hall. It becomes very hot and [if] you want to have functions, you've got to improve the hall. This hall has been improved now because Shameema herself raised funds. [Mrs] Mayat didn't let us spend money. I don't totally blame her because in lots of organisations – I heard that in one local [Muslim] organisation people are taking R25 000 salary for 'voluntary' work. I mean, it's supposed to be a charitable organisation! We are all *voluntary* workers – whatever it is that we do, even when we have our fundraising brunches, a lot of the things the ladies make at home and [donate].

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Selling cakes and sweetmeats, Fatima Loonat (right) was an early member of the Group and active in all of its fundraising events.

As all members conceded, however, Mayat's parsimoniousness has been pivotal to the Group's growing its assets and ensuring that it was sufficiently independent to be able pursue projects of its choosing. It also meant that members have not been reliant on men, even while they respected the gender boundaries and had the support of their husbands.

Sweets, sales and sweat

One of the earliest methods of raising funds was through cake sales. Recalling the first years, Khatija Vawda explained, 'Ja, there were no dinners at that time, only there were cake sales and jumble sales where we sold everything from clothing to crockery.' Baking was a woman's skill, built upon a heritage of matrilineal knowledges, large family sizes and the alchemy of thrift and pleasure. It did not require expensive ingredients, which meant that members could donate large quantities, and a great variety, of home-made sweets and savouries. Zohra Moosa recalled also that 'we used to ask all the [Group] members, as well as friends of members, family of members, and the response was consistently positive'. While advertised as a 'cake sale' the fare included iced cakes and cupcakes, as well as Indian specialties such as gulab jamboo and

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naan khathai, and the ubiquitous samoosas. Cake sales became a staple of Group activity within the first two years of its founding, held at schools, and at busy spots such as at the corner of Grey and Prince Edward streets, as well as outside the main Post Office in Pine Street.

Rummage sales, or what members called 'jumble' sales, were the lifeblood of the Group during its formative period. These sales were held regularly in school or church premises. Gori Patel recalls that the earliest ones were held 'in the Jumuah Musjid School…then we had it at the corner of Lorne Street and Grey Street, you know, where there was a church'. Nafisa Jeewa points out that all classes and colours of the public supported them 'as long as the location was right'. And the Jumuah Musjid School in Cathedral Road was an excellent location

> because that is central town and [we had] a lot of passing trade on a Saturday because the bus rank was there, and people in the flats were good buyers. And everybody wanted a bargain, right, so we'd pass the word around. We'd tell schoolchildren that we'd have a Saturday morning fair and they'd come.

Zohra Moosa agreed that it was a convenient location because 'a lot of Africans going to the market passed, so we used to get a good crowd coming in. We used to collect jumble from everyone, you know, and it used to go well.'

Gori Patel was first introduced to the Group when she attended a jumble sale at the Vedic Hall and met Zuleikha Mayat. Several of her friends were involved and, as she lived close to the hall, they would ask her to 'take along tea and biscuits to them at ten-o'clock, then I used to stand for a little while and help them', and she was persuaded to become a member. Collecting items for sale was part of the job:

> We had to collect the old clothes. I used to collect from here and there and [people] willingly giving us everything after we used to go explain to them, you know, if you got any old clothes give us – we don't want any new ones – so we can go and sell and make money for other people.

Extended households proved an advantage, Nafisa Jeewa remembers, for passing the word around and 'everybody's always got things in their homes that – not that you wanted to discard it – but things that could be of some help

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At jumble sales, bargains were plentiful and clothing passed to new owners for a few cents.

to somebody else. So we used to go around telling friends that "please, if you've got any clothes, crockery, groceries, whatever, we'll come and collect it." So that's how we started.' Items for jumble sales were obtained in advance and stored at members' homes. Nafisa Jeewa remembers that sometimes members of the public needed to get rid of items urgently and members had to collect them well in advance of a fair and store it. A couple of days prior to the jumble sale, a 'sorting afternoon' was organised where members 'sorted out the good from the bad and categorised, organised and priced the items'. This involved a lot of drudgery and hard work but it also contained strong elements of fun and pleasure, and was an excellent means of building camaraderie. Jeewa suggests, too, that it offered a certain freedom:

> Really, the ladies would enjoy it thoroughly, preparing for it. They'd be there from a Friday afternoon, everybody would carry tea and flasks and cake and whatever with them and we're sorting out things and everybody lets their hair down because you can laugh, nobody's keeping an eye on you – there's no 'hawk-eye', right, so that was a lot of fun.

At jumble sales, the Group 'did not give anything away for free because nobody appreciates it then. If you're going to pay five cents for a dress you've paid five cents and you are going to value that more than just being given something.' Charging low prices for things that were essentially obtained free

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of charge helped both to raise funds for charity and to circulate and recycle useful goods on moderate terms of exchange.

Fêtes similarly became regular events. In February 1956, Mayat wrote in 'Fahmida's World' that the Group had given out bursaries for study to three girls with funds raised at a fête. Two years later, she reported that money collected by the Group at its annual fête had been distributed amongst various charities in Durban, among them the Natal Indian Blind Society; the Indian Women's Literacy Association; the Darul Ulum; Bantu Child Welfare; the Coloured Women's Hostel; Darul Yatama; a Muslim orphanage run by the Mehfile Khwateen Islam in Riverside; and various other charities.

A fête held on 8 August 1959 at the Anjuman Islam School in Leopold Street was officially opened by Melody Gumede, the wife of Dr M Gumede of Verulam, an acquaintance of Dr Mahomed Mayat. There were stalls of groceries, fresh produce, hand-sewn articles, and toiletries. Bibi Mall's Little Theatre presented a play, *The Wedding of the Painted Doll*, and enacted nursery rhymes. 'Zarina's Café' served tea and refreshments. Another stall sold samoosas, pies, puri pattas, cakes and biscuits, fulfilling Fahmida's promise to the public that 'the leading hostesses of our town are contributing to swell the funds of the group'.[7] The event was proclaimed 'a roaring success' with helpers 'rushed off their feet at times trying to cope with the demands'. The sum of £105 was raised.[8]

Over the years, fêtes continued to be organised and expertise grew. In August 1976, when the rand was twice as strong as the US dollar, a fête raised R2 000, of which R1 000 was given to the Indian Cripple Care Association and R1 000 to the Sibusiwe Child Care Centre. Aside from their own fundraisers, the Group assisted other women's groups in organising fêtes or was 'contracted out' through friends and associates. For example, in September 1981, they assisted Dr Siko Mji to organise a fair at the Hammarsdale crèche; they also participated in the 'Malay Fête' at Jumuah Musjid in July 1979, and assisted the Coloured Cripple Care Centre at City Hall in June 1979. Virtually all the funds that were raised at jumble and cake sales were given to organisations involved in welfare and education activities.

While by the 1970s, western feminists would view the participation of women in cake sales and fêtes as a symbol of their marginalisation, in 1950s and 1960s Durban such events were often viewed as pushing gendered boundaries, riding the thin edge of respectability. For Muslim women to engage in

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public-sphere commercial activity was very much contrary to prevailing notions of acceptable behaviour. Gori Patel recalls that their activities raised eyebrows but this was compensated by the many positive responses:

> Ah, mawlanas, they were stopping us. And even when we went for collection – the people, they spoke, 'the women are walking in Grey Street, they're marching, they going shop-to-shop to collect [goods]', and all that. And, you know, I tell you, when we just go by them [the traders], they said, 'How much you want?' They won't ask us what you want the money for. They said, 'How much, how much?' So we don't have the amount, we tell them, 'Whatever you want to give, we'll be very happy'.

While crossing boundaries through their public participation during the Group's formative decades, they had support from male friends and family members. Zuleikha Mayat noted in 1972 that

> behind the scenes all our projects entail a lot of thought and hard work. We do not only pick the collective grey matter of the members but that of our husbands, fathers, and friends as well. One often hears the adage that behind every man there is a woman, but the converse also holds true.[9]

Gori Patel commented that while many in her family were unhappy about her participation in the Group, 'you see in the functions, everybody – all the members' husbands used to get involved. They used to come and help us too, like, you know, whatever we needed – I collect lot of old clothes and so he pack up and then he help us to take the boxes. All, all the members' husbands was involved.' Nafisa Jeewa agreed that

> we could rely on [husbands], you know, because – you can't just organise something and not have men around you, so especially when we had that very big fair [in 1978] the husbands were there from the morning, helping us lay out the tables. They'd be walking around, if there were things to fetch – they would do things like that.

Ayesha Vorajee added:

> Fortunately I married a man who didn't stop me from going out and doing community work. Because within the Muslim community there are some men who are very particular about that, they do not encourage

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Husbands of Group members supported the organisation by paying for tickets and attending the dinners or helping out behind the scenes.

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> their women folk…You know, our husbands encourage us, they are very supportive. For instance when we have fêtes – you need the man around there as well too, you know, because of security and so on.

Men offered physical and emotional support, their presence perhaps viewed by some as chaperoning and overseeing events. But it also indicated shifts in thinking about divisions of labour within marital partnerships. Zuleikha Mayat did not hesitate to suggest that such equity should play itself out in private spaces, too. Speaking at a fundraising banquet in 2007 she said:

> If you glance at our menu card you will notice that macho males are carrying food trays on their heads. Helping your wives in the kitchen, gentlemen, will not render you effeminate. You will only become more endearing. Our Prophet (peace be upon him) mended his own clothes and when a guest had dirtied the bed linen he did not call on the Bibis, Ayesha or Hafsa. No, he washed it out himself. What a role model to follow![10]

While husbands' support was always important, over the years the role of male community leaders was also critical in adding respectability to the Group's public engagements. Essop Randeree, Essop Timol, Yusuf Lockhat and Cassim Bassa were involved in a host of voluntary organisations and communal activities and, therefore, commanded the respect of local Muslim traders and mosque trusts. Their support for the Women's Cultural Group was crucial in conditioning the reaction of the broader society. Even though the rigid separation of gender spheres was being challenged in the worlds of education and wage work, it continued to shape the thinking of ulema who sometimes castigated the Group for showcasing their handworked products, engaging in sales and interacting with men, as this was deemed to threaten codes of female Islamic propriety.

For the women themselves, participation in these early fundraising activities extended their domestic roles and labour into the public sphere and into a wider economy of human relationships. Significantly, some of their events offered spaces for large numbers of women to utilise their gendered talents and skills to generate a bit of income. Two especially memorable events were the 'Meena Bazaars'.[11] Both involved hard work and meticulous organisation on the part of members and created an opportunity for other women to sell their wares. The first Bazaar, advertised as a 'gigantic bring and buy sale', was

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held on 29 July 1978 at the Orient Islamic School. In the treasurer's report for 1978, Zuleikha Mayat wrote that 'because of the high cost of living, many householders are struggling to make ends meet. Our concern goes out to them and in order to help, we have already got one scheme off the ground.' She was referring to a depot in Prince Edward Street where home-cooked food was sold. The Group hoped to expand this to include home crafts 'such as embroidered goods, godris, etc. Tremendous interest is being displayed by housewives from all walks of life. Our fête will help advertise this aspect of our life.' The Group was keen that where women were forced to remain at home, opportunities should be found to market their products, from cooking to embroidery.

Pamphlets advertised the 1978 Bazaar as 'no ordinary fête…for apart from the usual cake, fruit, grocery, jumble, clothes, we will also stage some unique demonstrations. This includes the making of sev, jalebis, laarwas, moorkhoos, etc.; badla work, embroidering with jeek, abla embroidery.'

Zuleikha Mayat invited Essop Randeree to open the fête, 'not because of the long association of our Group and yourself, but for the many years of continuous service that you have been rendering to the various communities'. Mayat thanked Randeree for assisting in their collection drive: 'the girls appreciate this gesture very much and they realise that without your help they would not be able to get a fraction of what they are receiving now.'[12] Nafisa Jeewa remembered that Randeree's support for the Meena Bazaar

> was really massive. It took months to organise. We had a lot of sponsors. We used to go around – a group of about four ladies and then we had Mr Randeree, whom we actually made an honorary member because he was well liked and the members also were very happy with him. He was easy-going – liked talking and made you laugh – and he was well respected. We used to go to all the shops in town and he would make a grand entrance – introduce us to the people and then we'd go into the office and he'd say, 'Right, Nafisa, tell them how much you want'. 'Come on, come on, give us a blank cheque' – that kind of stuff, you know, because he was very well known in the community. We never ever stipulated what we wanted because you may have a huge wholesaler but you don't know what business is like so it is not fair to impose on anybody. We would just tell them, 'Whatever you feel you want to give'.

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The Meena Bazaar was one of the biggest undertakings of its kind yet attempted by the Group and they were determined that nothing should go wrong. At the beginning of July, a circular was sent out in the names of senior members, Zuleikha Mayat, Fatima Loonat, Mariam Motala, Hawa Bibi and Amina Moosa, to members noting that the fête had been made possible by the efforts of 'the young leadership'.[13] The letter went on to say that the addressee's contribution was 'welcomed because there is so much to do: typing, phoning, publicity, sorting, collecting…' Members met at Orient Hall on Friday afternoon to set up the stalls. All volunteers wore name tags. The main hall was transformed, recalling its namesake in India: the space was divided into a number of stalls, such as the 'Chor Bazaar' (Thieves Market), where things could be purchased at a 'steal'; a henna stall; a chaat stall, which also sold tea, cakes and savouries; and an '*Indian Delights* stall', where cooked food was sold. There were stalls for 'cosmetiques', old magazines, used clothing, ceramics, arts and crafts, groceries, piece goods, greengrocer, and cookery demonstrations.[14] The three-day fair ended at five o'clock on the Sunday and members were warned well in advance: 'unless you have a very good excuse, you may not leave the fête until everything has been cleared…If this newsletter sounds a bit harsh please remember that the pressure of work does not allow for sweet talking.'

A post-fête report proclaimed the Meena Bazaar 'an unqualified success', as all three objectives that the Group had set for itself were met: to give 'a hand to the many organisations crying out for help; to provide a venue where our craftsmen and craftswomen could find a market for their creations'; and to create an outlet 'for our many housewives who desperately need to supplement their incomes'.[15] The profit of R7 000 (which exceeded the target of R5 000) was distributed to Ohlange High School (R2 000), the Natal Indian Blind Society (R500), Indian Cripple Care (R500), Durban & District Community Chest (R250), Hammarsdale Nursery School (R250), KwaMashu Crèche (R250), and Malagasy Clinic and Community Centre (R3 250). Unsold clothing was given to the KwaMashu Zamokuhle Women's Welfare Society's crèches (organised by Albertina Nguni) and to the Hammarsdale Nursery School (organised by Dr Siko Mji). It was agreed that there had been a

> magnificent response from our business community and housewives who gave so freely in cash and kind, the overwhelming response from the

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> public…eating the delightful fare that was being sold, trying their hand at the competitions, watching the fashion parade and the many demonstrations and sharing in the spirit of goodwill that was about.[16]

The minutes of the general meeting on 10 August 1978 recorded: 'In these Mubarak days spare a prayer for the health of all our members and for members of our business sector. This combination made our Fête a success.'

Another full-scale Meena Bazaar was held from 21 to 23 July 1983. Then president Mariam Motala reported that with 'the influential and very effective assistance of Hajee [Essop] Randeree some of our members have collected in kind and cash approximately R30 000.' The Meena Bazaar report of 1983 noted the Group had 'struggle[d] to gain recognition as a Group that lives to serve, especially in our male-dominated society that wished to dismiss us as another of those "female tea-party groups". We knew our fight was over when Mr Essop Randeree accepted honorary membership of our Group.'[17] This Bazaar again required extensive planning. Letters signed by office bearers[18] were sent to organisations, individuals and businesses in early May, simultaneously calling upon and welding a sense of belonging to community:

> Dear Friend,
> The success of *Indian Delights* is due to your help. You gave us your choice recipes, over the years you gave valuable tips and generally you have helped increase the knowledge of cooking in our community…It was also your help that has in the past made every function that we have organised so successful. Whether it was a dinner, play, debate, wayez, mushaera or fête, it was your help and participation that led to its success. Here is our first appeal. In July the Mayor, Councillor Sybil Hotz, will open our Hypersize fête which we have named Meena Bazaar 1983. We want your help with planning and organising and collecting. We don't only want stalls filled with lovely bring and buy things. We also want competitions, games, demonstrations, etc…Read the accompanying circular and see how you can help make this the fête to remember!

The fête was opened by the mayor and included prayer facilities; food stalls; chaat stalls; Rajah's Greenhouse (flowers, fruits, vegetables); Boutique Oriental (saris, burkhas, Punjabi outfits, etc.); jumble (old clothes); tumble (crockery,

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old toys); a Mendhi Salon; demonstrations (of mithai, pottery, screen-painting, etc.); and a chotli competition. The fête included innovations such as a parcel depot at the entrance, a crèche, and a games section to occupy the children while parents shopped.

The Group made a profit of R26 190, which was given to charities such as the KwaZulu Water Development Fund; Imkan (for boreholes in rural areas of Natal); Sibusiwe Clairmont Crèche; the Hammarsdale Centre; the Zamokuhle Centre (KwaMashu); the Islamic Women's Association; the VN Naik School for the Deaf; the Friends of the Sick Association; the cancer ward at King George Hospital; the Community Chest; and the *Daily News* Fund. Each organisation sent a representative to a meeting at the beginning of September 1983, where they met members of the Group and received their cheques.[19]

Nafisa Jeewa described this fête, too, as 'a great success – with the help of almighty Allah', in her presidential report for 1983. 'To have raised the amount we did, would not have been possible had we not worked as a team and a family.'[20] The Group dedicated the fête to Cassim Bassa, who had been involved in welfare work for many years and died shortly before the event. The post-fête report paid tribute to him and other philanthropists:

> In South Africa our Community has been served by outstanding personalities over the years. Recently we have lost so many of them. The late MAH Moosa, Habib Rajab, Dr AM Moolla, Dr Mahomed Mayat, Dr M Sultan. Some of these have been fierce critics of the Group but they were also our invaluable mentors. They gave guidance and constructive help. They introduced us to people that we needed to know at various times. Above all they encouraged us in all our work…Meena Bazaar 1983 commemorates not only the memory of Cassim Bassa and those mentioned earlier but all who served their people in diverse fields and we mention some more: the Late RK Khan, ML Sultan, Sorabjee Rustomjee, Mawlana Bashir Siddique, Moosa Meer, Gigi Bai Jhavery, Sakina [Bibi] Mall, Zuleikha Motala.[21]

Remembering these fêtes, Group members expressed great satisfaction at breaking new ground. For Ayesha Vorajee, 'you learn so much, you meet such interesting people. The fête was a completely different experience for all of us. In fact we were the first organisation to start with the fête, you know, amongst

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Some of the Group's benefactors. Back: CM Bassa, EM Moosa, Yusuf Lockhat, Essop Timol. Front: ME Sultan, Essop Randeree, AM Moolla and Zohra Moosa's husband, YAB Moosa.

the Muslim community. And thereafter it's been going from strength to strength.' Many Islamic organisations and schools have subsequently embraced this 'model'. But there are some differences that members have noted. One difference, according to Jeewa, is that 'the fairs nowadays are like an outlet, an extension of your shops, so it's not like you're going to get any bargains, you're just going to meet a lot of people there, but that's it. But here [at our fêtes] you could buy a dress for ten cents, you could buy maybe a set – cups and saucers – for about twenty-five cents, which was something.' Zuleikha Mayat pointed to another important difference. While most fêtes and flea markets have become an avenue for ready-made goods these days, often mostly imported goods, the Group's vision was to create an opportunity for ordinary housewives to sell things that they produced at home and, in the process, make the public aware of their products. The seeds for developing a home industry were intended to benefit those who were struggling financially but unable to go out to work for various reasons.

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Fêtes and sales raised money for charity, offered opportunities for financially empowering women and brought women into the public arena of commerce. While these actions might be viewed as an extension of accepted domestic roles, the successful interface with the public and with well-established businessmen and community leaders had the effect of bringing the Women's Cultural Group into the arena of accepted civic life, and its members became informal agents of community welfare. It enabled the Group to call upon an ethos of community that simultaneously circulated wealth and enforced a feeling of identity and belonging. The Bazaars were cultural productions as well as fundraising enterprises, bringing a sense of India's Meena Bazaar to Durban, and encouraging a diasporic identification in a localised space.

Fine dining and ladies' luncheons

From the early 1960s the Group adopted another method of raising funds: hosting formal dinners and brunches. These were initially all-women affairs, held at the Bolton Hall or Tamil Vedic Hall in Durban. The dinner was accompanied by a variety show, usually by a visiting qawwali artist or sometimes by members or their children performing an Indian dance or ballet. Members themselves prepared the earliest dinners at the home of Mrs SM Paruk in Derby Street, which was conveniently situated close to both halls. Subsequently, when guest lecturers were invited and the Group opened up its events to men, fundraising dinners moved to bigger venues, initially the Orient Hall, then the Truro Hall in Westville, DLI Hall in Greyville and, more recently, the plush NMJ Hall in Overport.

Menus featured Indian cuisine and were often organised around a theme. For example, an 'Oriental Dinner' was held on 18 June 1964 at the Tamil Vedic Hall. The 'Oriental Delights' included Sherbet-e-Pul, Khowse Rangooni (soup), a fish-dish called Kabab-e-Umgeni, which was served with Afriki Salad and patta; the rice dish was a Moghul Pilau and Kalya-e-Murghi, while the dessert included Halwa-e-Phaida a la Manjra. Entertainers included Maya Devi (Duwa-e-Sharooh), Mr Nandha (veena recital), Ravi Shanker (Indian dancing), Ramachandra and Party (singing), and a display of traditional costumes. Farooqi Mehtar read out a composition of his poems and songs.

The founding narratives of the Group emphasised 'culture', and during the early years there was much focus on the creative arts. First local, and later over-

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seas, artists were given a platform to perform Indian dancing, play instruments, model costumes, or recite poetry. Over the years, featured guest lecturers included luminaries such as: jurist and past president of the UN General Assembly, Sir Zafrullah Khan (1967); Palestinian-born professor of Islamic studies at Temple University, Ismail al-Faruqi (1971); distinguished Islamic scholar, Fazlur Rahman Ansari (1972); Professor Saeed Ahmad Akbarabadi (1976); expert on Islamic art and architecture, Dr Yaqub Zaki (1977); visiting Indian singer, Mohamed Rafi (1978); Professor Muhammad Hamidullah (1984), an expert on Islamic and international law; the then editor of the London-based *Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs*, Dr Saleha Mahmoud (1997); and Cape Town-based scholar Shafiq Morton (2007).

Guest lectures and cultural events drew larger and larger numbers, with 350 guests not uncommon for a single dinner. As guest lists grew, and as younger members entered full-time employment and motherhood, they found it difficult to cook all the entrées and a compromise was found, with the Group preparing biscuits, pastries and savouries and renowned local caterer, Solly Manjra, being subcontracted to provide the main course. Over time, the formal sit-down affairs came to be limited to annual events. According to Zuleikha Mayat, this was because many more organisations were hosting fundraising dinners and 'we are tapping the same public and sponsors and there is a limit on the resources we can tap into'. The Group has endeavoured to make their annual dinners unique. For example, a dinner in December 1989 was called Dhiyafat-e-khaas – A Special Feast. According to Mayat, members always tried to come up with innovative names for dinners, as well as for the various courses as a way to draw interest and 'tantalise the minds of the people. "What is this?" they should wonder.'

The 1989 annual dinner made a profit of R18 927, mainly because members contributed in cash towards various items and prepared the desserts at their own cost. They also paid half the cost of their own entrance tickets ('which [we] did not have time to enjoy,' Mayat wryly observed) and full price for their immediate families. They prepared side dishes, helped decorate the hall and tables, and assisted in clearing up afterwards. 'Clearing up did break our backs!' This arrangement has remained policy and members continue to participate and get enjoyment out of it. For example, Sara Simjee, who returned to the Group after a long absence, 'enjoyed participating in [the fundraising dinner]

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and working towards it and selling tickets – and then we have these guest speakers and they are the highlight.'

Sometimes annual dinners target specific causes or occasions. In 2005, for example, the Group held a fundraising dinner for the South Africa-Mali Project – a cultural initiative of the New Partnership for Africa's Development. The project started when then South African president, Thabo Mbeki, made a state visit to Mali in November 2001 and undertook to help build a new library in Timbuktu to conserve thousands of ancient West African Arabic manuscripts.[22] The Group raised R25 000 for the project. Safee Siddique, a local poet, composed a special poem for the dinner, which ended:

> Accept O Africa this request of the Women's Cultural Group
> Allow us to add our colour to your wonderful ones
> And to graft the exotic blooms of the orient on the Africa Flora
> For are we not truly part of the rainbow nation?
>
> 'Safee' sends this message to the western invaders:
> Facts cannot be hidden by fabricated dress
> Africa's garden is so infused with history
> Its fragrance does not emanate from artificial blooms.[23]

Ferial Haffejee, then editor of the *Mail & Guardian*, was another guest speaker at the dinner. In her letter of thanks following the occasion, she confided that although the dinner was the first time she had attended a Group function, the Group had long been a household name in her life:

> When young, my niece Jihaan always spoke of the Women's 'Cuchural' Group; we tasted the achaar and read all the books. Now I have been able to put faces to the names and recipes to the individuals. It was an honour and I do hope we will get to meet again. I will nag for cooking lessons when I eventually get married.[24]

While grand public evenings are annual events only, ladies-only breakfasts and brunches are hosted with more regularity. These have become popular since the Group moved to its current location at the Mariam Bee Centre. The Group's expenses are minimal since hosting at the Centre means no overhead costs for the rental of space, and members subsidise the event by donating the

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ingredients and assisting in all preparation. As Zuby Seedat (née Asmal) pointed out, the brunches have become 'very famous. It's lot of work, a lot of work [as] we bake things, cook, make rotis, we make everything at home.' Luncheon fare may include canapés such as samoosas, sandwiches, and salads, with fruit juices, tea, and pastries, accompanied by a main course, with popular dishes such as butter chicken, salads, and a full buffet of deserts. These events draw upon family, friends and acquaintances who attend to show support and to listen to an interesting speaker. They tend to be lively occasions with an emphasis on friendship. According to Zohra Moosa, 'The ladies sometimes enjoy being on their own, not with the men folk.' Speakers are selected to educate, entertain, and inform and inspire: 'maybe a beauty therapist, something interesting for the girls – yoga or different aspects of health, diabetes and blood pressure or nutrition, how to change their eating habits [*laughs*], which we need very much, isn't it? Really badly I mean, because our food is so rich.' In considering guest speakers, the Group tries to cross religious barriers by introducing non-Muslim speakers; they also look out for successful women to serve as an inspiration, and they focus on the fact that women should benefit from the talk without feeling overwhelmed. Speakers over the past decade have included attorney MS Omar, a specialist on Islamic law; dermatologist Dr Zuby Hamed; Nuri Domingo, on alternative remedies; plastic surgeon Arvin Lalbahadur; then Minister of Health, Manto Tshabalala Msimang; then Minister of Education, Naledi Pandor; Percy Moodley, a gynaecologist; Jayloshni Naidoo, actor and comedian; Shagufta Khan, a make-up artist; and Nishani Shah, a beauty therapist.

Third-generation member Zarina Rawat, views the brunches as 'spreading knowledge and information. We have guest speakers on everything – health, politics, beauty, finance – it uplifts women as it is educational, but also an opportunity to come out. So it is an outing, socialising and education thrown together.' Zuleikha Mayat also pointed to the events as a forum for breaking out of small social circles, 'to meet others, network – that's why they are very popular'. Trends in the kinds of speakers who have been invited have clearly changed over the years and a lot of this is due to younger members such as Shameema Mayat, who initiated a change by taking responsibility for organising the event. According to Shameema, they have made a deliberate attempt to keep things on the lighter side:

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Over the decades, themes for luncheons and lectures have shown a gradual shift in focus.

> Sometimes, these highbrow lectures can be too serious. And, really, these events should be a place where we can come, you know, and just take the veil off! Not so serious, not so scholarly, not so solemn. It should be an occasion for the ladies to listen to something they can identity with, something that addresses current needs, and something they enjoy. Years ago it was different. Women did not have access to formal education, news or the internet and so they really looked forward to serious talks and intellectual topics. Nowadays women have this, and they are actually looking for something light-hearted, so the focus can't only be on the serious stuff.

This change was contested and there have been generational differences of opinion over the appropriate forms of entertainment. In one instance around 2004, younger members wanted a comedian while the older members lobbied for an Urdu artist. Eventually, the younger members prevailed, though not without a struggle. Generational differences in interests and aesthetic tastes have become more pronounced as younger women seek inspiration in the globalised world of food and fashion that has opened up since apartheid's end. They have been eager to bring the decor and themes of fundraising meals more 'up to date', partly in the hope of drawing in new young members. In response, some first- and second-generation members have felt sidelined and that their views are being 'pooh-poohed' as old-fashioned, as one member put it. Younger members feel that while first-generation members did 'a wonderful job' in

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starting and growing the Group, the demands of the 21st century require a fresh approach. They reason that, even among Muslim women, a host of new charity groups have sprung up all over the province that are engaging in similar fundraising activities and targeting the same 'market', and that it would be the death knell of the Group to 'sit back and do things they did fifty years ago', as one member explained. Competition includes the production of recipe books by other organisations. Sharing shelf space with *Indian Delights* is *Food with Flair* by the Taalimun Nisa Association; *Kitchen Companion* by the Vryheid Muslim Ladies Group; and *Maa'ida* by Madrassah Islaahul Muslimat. These and a host of other new books may not carry the heritage value or gloss of the *Indian Delights* stable but they do well because they are sold locally for a 'good cause'. Because the Group is no longer 'the only show in town', invention and innovation is crucial for continued success, according to younger members.

In the world of dining and the culinary market, another society-wide transformation affecting the Group is the opening of numerous restaurants which offer access to global cuisines, and which bring food presentation and style to new levels of elegance. The arrival of immigrants from India and Pakistan in the post-apartheid period has also intoduced new dishes and flavours to 'Indian' food. Smaller households and more women working outside the home has meant more incentive for regular dining out. Increasingly, too, more local people in the Durban Muslim community have the opportunity to travel overseas and enjoy dining experiences abroad, thus also augmenting expectations of varied culinary and aesthetic styles. 'Like everyone else,' one member said, 'Muslims too have become a consumer society.' Careful thought, therefore, continues to be given to food functions to conjure creative ideas, sell tickets, settle on the decor, and draw up a menu that includes new dishes and unique flavours. Nostalgia and novelty compete for elbow room at these events, sometimes as a generational clash of ideas about taste.

Food and funfairs

From 1995 to around 1998 the Group organised an Annual Food and Fun Fair, held in September, at the Mariam Bee Centre in Kenilworth Road. The response from the public was so unexpectedly enthusiastic that on 29 July 1998, the Group secretary Aziza Mayat wrote to the Durban City Police requesting 'police assistance to control traffic due to massive public response'. The idea

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for a food fair came from Shairbanu Lockhat. Twice it was discussed but passed over as there were doubts about its success, but on the third occasion Lockhat 'mustered some support from the younger members'. The idea took off and 'grew beyond the vision of the proponents'. It involved a lot of hard work, according to Aziza Mayat:

> For the members it is backbreaking work that stretches into weeks of pre-planning and cooking, battling and sweating. We are our worst critics. We set very high standards for ourselves and we always aim at giving value for money spent with us. This cuts down deeply into profitability, but the goodwill this generates is wealth itself.[25]

The purpose of the fair, Ayesha Vorajee explained,

> was to enable the women, and there were lots of women who used to make things at home, to supplement their income. So we gave them a chance to sell. The tables – I remember clearly because I was in charge of that. We hired out the tables [and] felt that it helped the women in the community to empower themselves. That was the whole idea.

The Group itself decided to sell pickles, chutneys, masala and savouries, which was a huge success. The Group was determined that the fair should not be a flea market, but 'an opportunity for housewives to meet with their families and sell their wares in a delightful atmosphere. Also they can make some money and enjoy the food and fun.'[26] Since most of the advertising was by word of mouth, most of the stallholders and patrons were Muslim. Such was the popularity, Aziza Mayat noted in her report for 1998, that 'we have outgrown our venue'.[27]

During 1999 and 2000, the Group did not organise a fair, but participated in one organised by Al Baraka Bank on a much larger scale. This was also a mainly Muslim event. After the fair in 2000, in which the Group ran a tea garden, Mayat provided a breakdown of the Group's labour: a total involvement of 3 169 hours.[28] Group members also each contributed R5 for the tea and lunch that they consumed. The Group made a profit of R20 000. Despite the 'poor' returns relative to the heavy preparation involved, Mayat wrote to Al Baraka Bank on 14 October 2000:

> Our members voted to participate again this year for they said that being part of a community get-together, participating in friendly rivalry was

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Kitchen and politics: cooking demonstrations were popular with white South African women.

> worth more than lucre…Shirin [the organiser], your continuous good humour, friendly spirit and concern is highly appreciated…May the sisterly bonds reinforced continue in the future.

The Group eventually stopped participating because there were too many fairs being organised in Durban. It was becoming, in Shameema Mayat's words, 'too common and we felt we should concentrate on breakfasts which could be made into something different. Each fair was a repetition of the same products. We wanted something novel.'

Cooking demonstrations and lessons

Indian Delights facilitated the entry of Group members into the public domain as they promoted the book, appeared in the media, gave cookery demonstrations and gained recognition across South Africa as the doyens of 'Indian' cuisine and culture. In this way, the cookbook helped them raise funds not just through royalties but also through the opportunities that accompanied the growth of its reputation. Members were invited to public events, which meant travelling, mostly by themselves, sometimes away from Durban to places such as Howick, Margate, Johannesburg, and Estcourt. In 1972, for example, a delegation visited Estcourt, where they were hosted by a Mrs Kajee. They spoke on Indian arts and culture and gave a cookery demonstration. Members of various institutes and associations in and around Estcourt attended. They gave

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a similar demonstration at a large chain store, Greenacres, in January 1961; at a hobbies fair in August 1961; to the Numismatic Society in June 1976; and to women in the suburb of Hillary in November 1976. These audiences were mainly composed of white women.

Amina Moosa was appointed head of a now necessary Cookery Demonstration Committee during 1977. There were several demonstrations that year, beginning with one at the Twini Park Women's Institute in January, and another at the Maharani Hotel attended by a hundred women. In September of that year they gave cookery lessons in Hammarsdale. In November, a demonstration was organised at the *Natal Mercury* kitchen, with a menu that included prawn biryani, coconut sweetmeats and rotis. On this occasion, there were three sessions per day. The secretary's report for 1977/78 described the demonstrations as 'very successful. The audience was very impressed.' The occasion also resulted in sales of the Group's Magic Masala, a masala mix specially developed by the Group, and *Indian Delights*.

Another initiative that year was participating in the setting up of a 'multiracial restaurant' with nine other organisations, each taking turns to cater for a week. Mariam Moosa, Khulsum Motala and Gori Vahed represented the Group in this venture in St Andrew's Street, which began in August. They made sandwiches and tea for sale at lunchtime. Sadly for the Group, the public response was poor and the restaurant closed within a few months. The secretary reflected in her annual report for 1977/78 that 'group members were very disappointed with the project as they felt it was not serving any social purpose. Very few people patronized it, and hardly any whites.'

The Group participated in a cookery demonstration at the *Natal Mercury* auditorium in July 1980; gave a biryani demonstration at Salisbury Island for the wives of naval officers in September 1980; and in November 1980 held a sweetmeat demonstration organised by the *Daily News* where Amina Moosa, Zuleika Moolla and Gori Moosa demonstrated the art of making burfee and jalebi. In March 1982, a Mr Knox of the Midlands Group in Tweedie asked for a demonstration on meat curries. The committee meeting of April 1982 described the Midlands outing as a 'great success'. The audience had been energised and twenty cookbooks were sold. It turned out that Knox's daughter, Cathy, was a subeditor at *Fair Lady* magazine, and this led to a copy of *Indian Delights* being given to the magazine's editor, Jane Raphaely. Cathy

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Knox then asked to interview Mayat for the magazine. The resulting article was, however, described by Mayat as 'disappointing because it contained factual errors and the photographs were not even from the book'.

The Group participated in an Indian trade fair on 22 May 1982, where, to market their 'brand', members wore 'Women's Cultural Group' aprons that they had sewn themselves. The monthly meeting for May recorded that the Group had made 'an impression' with demonstrations covering Indian curries, samoosas, chilli bites, and sweetmeats as well as the application of mendhi and embroidery. In October 1982 they participated in an 'Oriental Experience' organised by the *Daily News*, with Zulekha Moolla, Khatija Mall and Laila Ally demonstrating the art of samoosa making. Around ninety people attended each of the three sessions.

In November 1983 the Group was invited by a Mr Saloojee to participate in a food fair in Johannesburg. Zuleikha Mayat, Amina Moosa, Gori Patel and a few other members travelled to Johannesburg by train. But when Saloojee did not pitch up, they had to to find their own accommodation. There was more disappointment for the usually meticulously organised Group members when they got to the hall. According to Mayat, 'There were no pans, no *masalas*, nothing, so we had to start, you know, phoning people to bring pans for us and so on and this is how it went on.'

The trip was 'memorably marred' as a personal and deep loss for the Group. Mayat returned by aeroplane as she had a prior commitment while the rest of the Group was to return a day later. As Mayat recalls, she 'had hardly come home when my [son] Aslam came to me and he says, "Ma, I'm going to take you to Mrs [Amina] Moosa's house in Reservoir Hills". "Why?" He said, "She died." She had come from a shopping trip, went to the room where she was staying – she just collapsed and died.' This was a cruel blow to members who had known Amina Moosa for almost three decades. As Nafisa Jeewa, the Group's secretary, reported at the AGM on 23 May the following year, 'Our happiness was soon to be marred for our excitable, enthusiastic, noisy, hard-working, tolerant, sympathetic, and understanding Amina Moosa was taken away from us.'

From about 2002 to 2006, Group members were also invited to serve as judges in culinary competitions organised by food critic Derek Taylor and the *Post* newspaper. This included a bunny chow competition at the Blue Lagoon Hotel on the beachfront and a 'Curry Cup'[29] at the Hilton Hotel. Mana Rajah explains:

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> Derek Taylor is normally in charge of that and they said they want three members to help judge the different curries that they had invited restaurants to prepare. I think twice it was Fatima Mayat, Shameema [Mayat] and my sister Ayesha [Vorajee]. Once I went and it was very, very interesting…Their food was very good, you know, very, very good. You know, how they prepare their bunny chows – they do it like a gourmet meal, with the little bunny in the middle, with the salads on the side – not just wrapped in paper.

On the whole, members have vivid recollections of demonstrations and other public appearances, which they regarded as an integral part of the Group's activities, something that promoted the Group, Indian culture and especially *Indian Delights*. According to Gori Patel,

> We used to go to [department stores] OK Bazaars, Greenacres, John Orrs and show them how to make samoosas, to fill the samoosas, and then I cut the strip of papers to make pur – you know pur – samoosa pur? I showed them that you must fold it like this and fill your filling inside – any filling you want. All the white customers of OK Bazaar and the Greenacres used to come and watch. And then in the church in Alfred Street behind the Albert Park – they had a church so we went there and we were the judges too like, you know. [*laughs*] They made jam and marmalade and we were the judges there to taste the food. We had a reputation. Ya, and we were very happy, a very good team we had, very, very good team. We used to understand one another. I never had a car so they used to come and pick me up, drop me at the end.

Laila Ally was among those who undertook demonstrations on behalf of the Group. She taught cooking to handicapped children at Spes Nova School and unemployed women at the South African National Zakaat Fund. She felt that public demonstrations were important in promoting *Indian Delights*. She pointed out that during the early years, 'whites were so fascinated with that book and the whole cookery process, and Indian food. It was catching on from then, you know, so they were thrilled to have us.' Despite the welcoming atmosphere, in the beginning she was

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> very, very nervous, and being up against all those people. They had this auditorium, and they had a beautiful kitchen, fully equipped, and Indian food was just catching on, believe me, we used to have full classes. It wasn't as though we had to wait and see what the advert is going to be like – it's going to be a full class. And even the food that we prepared, we were three ladies, we pre-cooked some of the things because the samoosa pur now, we had to show them the beginning and the end result. You know, things like biryani take a long while to cook so we had to have it in three processes, the ingredients, a half-cooked meal and a fully cooked meal. Samoosas were a hit but they found it time-consuming and a bit of a chore to make, but you know how they love samoosas and biryani! But even simple things like fish curry, they would want to know the origin of tamarind, and a lot of people did not know what 'rough' [sea] salt was. They took it for granted, you know, they always used fine salt, so rough salt for them was new. They actually asked, 'Is this kosher salt?' You know, things like that, that we take for granted, but it was really good to see that these women were so interested.

For Ally, these demonstrations 'gave me a lot of confidence. It's not easy standing in front of a crowd and trying to teach – but it was really good to see the end result and their response to that and of course the sales of *Indian Delights* were really booming.' Fatima Mayat made a similar point about the role of food demonstrations at the *Daily News* and *Natal Mercury* kitchens in developing her self-confidence: 'It was great, it was fantastic, I mean at that time to go and drive into town wasn't a hassle. You could park right down, say it was in Field Street, go upstairs, do your demo work, come back. We did lots of fairs and I was exposed quite a bit, meeting lots of interesting people.'

The Educational Trust

The original constitution of the Women's Cultural Group was approved in May 1958. By the end of the 1960s the Group's scope and ambition had increased to the extent that it became necessary to register as a non-profit organisation. This was a formality since the Group had been formed to provide services to those members of the public that the state was failing. These included promoting educational activities through scholarships and bursaries; sponsoring lecturers in

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educational and cultural fields from overseas; publishing books and periodicals 'primarily of interest to women'; and co-operating with and assisting organisations with similar aims. Income from book sales and other fundraising activities did not benefit individual members. On the contrary there was often a financial imposition on members of the Group, which was one of the reasons its critics tend to describe it as being 'elite'.

After consultations with Zuleikha Mayat's husband, Mahomed, businessman Dr AM Moolla and the Group's accountants, the Women's Cultural Group Educational Trust was registered with the Natal Deeds Trust in 1973 as a non-profit organisation. This remained the legal status until then Minister of Finance Trevor Manuel announced wide-ranging changes in 2000, which threatened the preferential tax treatment and donor incentives of non-profit organisations. Tax exemption would only apply to organisations that qualified in terms of criteria laid down for a new category of public benefit organisations. As defined by the new Act, public benefit organisations were organisations whose sole objective was to provide activities of public benefit in healthcare, education, land and housing, religion and welfare in a non-profit manner.

While the Educational Trust met these criteria, the snag was that the gross income of public benefit organisations from 'trade' had to be less than the greater of R25 000 or 15 per cent of gross receipts. Income from the sale of *Indian Delights* exceeded this. The trustees met with their auditors in October 2003 and considered forming a new Trust with three categories of beneficiaries, 'Religious', 'Education' and 'Other'. It was proposed that the existing Trust would donate monies from the sale of *Indian Delights* to the new trust. At an Education Trust meeting on 17 June 2004, members were asked to propose names for the new trust, which 'should combine an Islamic, feminist and ethnic theme'. Names such as Fehmida Trust, Makoti Trust, Sharmeeli Sisters, Ilm (Arabic for 'knowledge'), and Atminaani Sisters were proposed. They chose Ilm but, as this had already been registered, the trustees settled on Fehmida (the proper Urdu/Persian spelling of 'Fahmida') at a meeting on 30 May 2007. However, this turned out to be unnecessary as the Education Trust was officially granted the status of a public benefit organisation in February 2009 after submitting a motivation listing its objectives and activities since being formed.

Ten trustees had been elected for life to the Educational Trust in 1973: Mariam Motala, Fatima Loonat, Zuleikha (spelt legally as Zooligha) Mayat,

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Hafsa Mahomedy, Hawa Paruk, Amina Moosa, Mary Grice, Fareda Habib, Sakina (Bibi) Mall and Zohra Moosa. The composition of the Trust changed over the years as members relocated from Durban, resigned or passed away.[30] Only Zuleikha Mayat, Hafsa Mahomedy and Zohra Moosa remain of the original ten trustees. Many of the trustees had forged a bond going back many years and the loss of members was deeply felt. When Hawa Moosa died in 1993, the president's report noted that 'we feel the pain of separation and we keenly miss her presence'. In her 30th AGM report on 13 June 2002, Mayat was sad to 'bid adieu those who were recalled by Allah for rest in a more blissful environment' as well as those who had resigned or relocated, adding that 'they remain constantly in our thoughts for we can never forget their vital role in our activities over the years, activities that called for great sacrifices of time and energy'. Turning to the surviving members, Mayat offered thanks 'for the ongoing ties of sisterhood that were first forged nearly half a century ago'.

Prudent investment strategies have been crucial to the Educational Trust building up its financial resources over the years. In the formative years funds were mainly placed in conventional banks such as Nedbank, the New Republic Bank, Standard Bank, Marriot Bank, Habib Bank and the Natal Building Society, with funds deliberately spread among the various banks to reduce risk. The opening of the Al Baraka and Islamic banks in 1989 and Oasis Investments in 1997 provided additional options and the Educational Trust, cautiously at first but with increasing confidence in the case of Al Baraka, invested considerable amounts in these institutions. Zuleikha Mayat eventually served as 'Special Advisor' to Al Baraka Bank from 1990 to 2005.

In the 1970s, the Educational Trust had wanted to invest with Trust Bank but did not do so because of racist attitudes experienced by the Group at the Durban branch. Mayat wrote to Jan S Marais, MD based at the Trust Bank Centre in Cape Town, in September 1971 to complain that she had visited the Durban branch with Mariam Motala and Fatima Loonat to discuss investments. When they got to the branch they saw a 'Non-Whites' sign at a counter. They proceeded to the reception counter but were 'being ignored and later arrivals were being seen to because I was standing at what seemed generally to be accepted as the white counter.' They asked to see the manager, who was on the first floor. The lift attendant did not allow them into the lift for passengers and instead directed them to the goods lift, which was reserved for 'non-

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whites'. Mayat, Motala, and Loonat refused on principle, and left. They wrote a letter of protest to both the Durban manager and to Marais, which was signed by all the members of the Group. Marais replied on 17 September 1971 that the bank's approach was 'non-sectional, non-racial, non-religious and non-political' and that he would take it up with the branch. The Natal Regional Manager sent the Group a letter of apology on 17 September 1971 in which he wrote that 'it is a strange fact of life that one is not always able to create the impression that one intends…We feel sure, however, that you will agree that the intention is always of greater importance than the impression.' In her handwritten notes, Mayat wrote that her letter did not 'detail impression. They contained facts and the tone of the reply to me seems we were not taken seriously. Since there were two notices reading non-whites then it is not too clear what the 'intention' of the bank is. And there are separate counters even though they may be ignored.' Mayat recalls that Marais instructed the Durban branch manger to visit her at her home and that Marais was flirting with the Progressive Party at the time, which got him into trouble with the Afrikaner Broederbond and the National Party.

From the mid-1970s the Educational Trust invested in the stock market through the National Growth Fund and South Africa Trust Selection Shares. The experience proved negative as the Group lost R3 010 in 1975. Mayat commented in the treasurer's report on 29 February 1976 that

> not so rosy has been the loss the Group suffered in the share market. Some years ago we were advised to speculate on the market and get rich quickly. After seeing our initial investment growing less and less by the year we decided to cut our losses. We will leave all speculation to the Bulls and Bears and stick to regular dividend producing investment.

The Trust published its first balance sheet for the year ending February 1977. Proudly presenting it at the 23rd AGM in June 1977, Mayat commented:

> Before you accuse the executive of splurging money let me explain. Since so many husbands and VIP's were attending the dinner at Elangeni, it was felt that in order to impress on our men that we do work and not just play at meetings, we show them our Balance Sheet for it reflects a very sound state of affairs. We also wanted the public to know that unlike other

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> organizations we do not draw on them for donations when we sponsor tours, but that we work hard to earn the money for such projects.

Trustees continued to explore ways of diversifying the Group's portfolio to minimise risk. While dabbling in the share market did not yield appropriate rewards, the Trust has enjoyed better returns from investments in property syndicates.

From the mid-1990s, in fact, the trustees resolved to actively restructure their investments and place more of their funds in property syndicates than in fixed deposits. This was partly because they were deemed to be safer (the old adage 'safe as houses' is used in reports) and have more growth potential and also because, from an Islamic perspective, the income was regarded as shariah compliant. Discussion at committee meetings reflected the fact that they expected healthier yields since the investment was based on rental income, which usually increases over time. One downside, as the minutes of several meetings noted, was that property investment was not liquid. They overcame this by placing part of their funds on call to ensure that money would be available at short notice. Early optimism and faith in the property market also seemed to wax and wane with the national economy. The Group's treasurer reported in July 1998 that 'all was not well' with this strategy and with the Group's investments in general:

> The country is going through an economic crisis and daily rentals from property syndications are falling down at an alarming rate. This is bound to impact not only on our income but as well our investments, so we need all your prayers to see us through these troubled times and we must also pray for our community which is reeling from overdraft blows. Fortunately for us, we have never asked for credit facilities. Often we wondered if, like others in the business world, we should not take advantage of loaned funds from banks. Not having succumbed to temptation, we can still enjoy our sleep.[31]

No investment is risk free, as trustees were reminded every now and again. A committee meeting noted on 10 May 2000 that the Educational Trust had lost its investment in Victory Park, which was taken over by property group Seeff which only paid them out a portion of their original investment. When they

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tried to reclaim the full amount, Seeff gave them the option of investing hundreds of thousands of rands more to refurbish the property. 'This has been the Trust's major investing disappointment and Trustees hope that there would be no further setbacks,' the minutes of the meeting noted. This avenue of investment remains a key aspect of the Group's portfolio even though the property market has plummeted since mid-2008.

Even banks proved risky. While the global financial meltdown may have brought this into public consciousness in 2008, the collapse of banks has had a longer history in South Africa and the Trust was not immune to this danger. The New Republic Bank, one of the few banks with a majority of Indian directors, became insolvent in 1998. The Trust had investments with the bank totalling almost R750 000 and had a 'lucky escape' as they had withdrawn most of the funds shortly before the bank's collapse to pay for an order of books. A relieved and grateful Mayat noted in her presidential report in July 1999 that during the 'past year Allah's Bounty on us has been truly tremendous. For that we make Shukar and beseech Him for continuous Guidance and Favour. If we begin to count His blessings we will need a calculator.' There was a similar escape when the Trust withdrew its funds from the Islamic Bank in 1997 amidst rumours that the institution was facing financial difficulties. Less fortunate was a small investment with Jaame Ltd, another Islamic initiative, which collapsed in 1989.

Given this history, the Trust initially treaded carefully with Al Baraka Bank, starting in 1989, and with Oasis Holdings, a shariah-compliant investment company started in 1997. The relationship with Al Baraka has been largely trouble free though there was some consternation in 2000. Mayat's treasurer's report for that year noted that with the financial problems of clothing companies in the face of cheap Chinese imports,

> rumours floated around that Al Baraka was on the verge of insolvency. The rumours caused such panic that there was the threat of a run on the funds of the Bank. Knowing that our trustees would be concerned I addressed the issue at a monthly meeting, explaining the situation and emphasized that Trustees must decide whether we should withdraw funds or retain our confidence in the Bank…Alhamdolillah the rumours seem to have died down, the Bank is functioning as usual and its affairs

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> appear healthy. It is a compliment that the Trustees did not panic and calmly arrived at a decision.

A special Trust meeting held on 20 March 2002 decided that in the wake of insecurity in financial markets, investments should be spread between various financial institutions. This has continued to the present. As Zarina Moolla points out, as far as investments are concerned, 'the group is very conservative so they won't go where there's any sort of risks – they'll only go for the major stuff that everybody's going for and things like that'. Decisions are made with the involvement of all trustees, especially old hands such as Zuleikha Mayat and Zohra Moosa. But cognisance is also taken of the views of new trustees such as Zarina Moolla, who describes herself as 'very much into the markets. I watch Summit TV every night on Bloomberg. I mean that's like a sabbaq as I call it, for me.' This conservatism or 'better safe than sorry' attitude extends even to the embracing of modern technology. Zarina Moolla points to the example of internet banking: 'Mrs Mayat, you know, I've been trying to talk her to go onto internet banking. She just won't do it. She's too scared that somebody's going to pilfer money out of the account.' The motto of the Group can best be summed up by a resolution adopted at a committee meeting on 16 November 2005: 'We stick to tried and trusted investments instead of investing in any new deals.' Despite the financial difficulties in the market, the Trust's investments reached what members then called the 'magic' one million rand mark in 1994 and has continued to climb steadily. This is due to being prudent, exercising options that minimise risks even if the returns are lower, and regarding funds as an amanaah which should be treated with utmost care. This approach is likely to continue as long as the likes of Zohra Moosa and Zuleikha Mayat are around.

Financial stability and new leadership

While expressing sorrow at the loss of members over the years, Mayat also referred to the mutation of organisations and leadership. Following the loss of Hawa Bibi Moosa in 1993, Mayat wrote that the Group was 'extremely fortunate that her place has been filled by an enthusiastic, younger and energetic person in Ayesha Vorajee'. In her presidential report of June 1997, the 25th year of the Education Trust's existence, Mayat wrote:

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From left: Zuleikha Mayat, Fatima Meer and Hajra Seedat were prominent in public life at a time when this was frowned upon by the local Muslim community.

> It is the law of nature that the old must give way to the young so that life and events carry on…It pleases me to see how gradually Zohra Moosa, Fatima Loonat, and myself are handing over affairs to younger and very capable hands. That is how it should be for river waters can only ripple smoothly when the channels are kept free of obstruction.

At the 1998 AGM, Mayat said that

> old age makes one cranky and overcritical of younger, more spirited youth. Old persons are reluctant to let go of their responsibilities for then they fear being marginalized. But wisdom dictates that one gracefully slow down in activity, make space for younger blood and indulge in duas praying that the young do not repeat the mistakes of committees earlier. And mistakes there have been, you can rest assured on that point.

In the July 1999 presidential report, Mayat commented on the 'well-motivated new crop that are now slowly taking over the affairs of the Group. I certainly do not see them as a threat, which will displace us. I see them as an added force, expertise and energies that can only be of benefit to us and the community.'

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However, despite these statements about passing on responsibility to younger members, Group founder Zuleikha Mayat remains the public face of the Group and a key decision-maker. Some believe that the Group will fade away without Mayat's strong style of leadership, as was the case with the Islamic Propagation Centre International under Ahmed Deedat and the Arabic Study Circle under Dr Daoud Mall, organisations that did not have clear succession plans or atrophied by having the same leadership for decades. In the case of the Women's Cultural Group, it may be argued, the addition of new trustees and appointment of administrators has put into place a sound administrative team and bureaucracy that will ensure continuity. Those who have joined the Group share a common mission and vision even if their approaches may differ. When Mayat steps down, her five decades of influence and wisdom will leave a void but younger members were appointed with the intention of bringing on board persons with a range of desirable professional experience and leadership skills. They were 'recruited' for their ability to make an effective contribution through their ability to organise fundraising events, as well as their bookkeeping skills, understanding of investments or general management expertise. The experiences that the new and considerably younger trustees gained through their involvement in other organisations or businesses was deemed by the incumbent trustees as being important and valuable and as lacking in the Trust, especially as trustees such as Zohra Moosa and Zuleikha Mayat were getting on in years.

Second- and third-generation leadership

Younger members bring new energies and new ideas to the group. Hajira Omar is one example. Hajira Omar was born in Kliptown and married cricket star Yacoob Omar in the 1970s. The couple lived in England for two years (in a caravan for much of the time) while Yacoob played cricket there, before settling in Durban. Hajira met Shameema Mayat through Yacoob and later met Zuleikha Mayat. She was 'captivated by her [Zuleikha Mayat's] energy and foresight, I mean, just getting a group of women together. They might have had skills that weren't being brought to the fore because of their situation and she harnessed those skills and I think that's admirable.' Hajira did not join the Group immediately as she was involved in the family business, ran a skills project

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for unemployed domestic workers at the Ecumenical Centre, co-ordinated a skills project in Imboza run by the University of Natal, and subsequently ran a skills-training project for the Crescent of Hope. She attributes her involvement in community work to the influence of her father, Solly Desai, who was involved in the non-racial Congress movement in the 1950s. She recalls that the family 'always struggled as kids. But in a way Dad instilled something because there was an Urdu saying he used, that humanity is godliness, there is no other way of spiritual development but through your humanity.' Hajira eventually succumbed to Mayat's overtures and became involved in the Group, 'using my administrative skills because I don't have any cooking skills – none whatsoever!'

Zarina Moolla become a trustee relatively soon after joining the group in 1996. Zuleikha Mayat noted in her July 1998 report that Fatima Loonat was not well but that 'failing eyesight and sore bones has nothing to do with mental alertness and Fatoo has plenty of mileage to enable her to oversee the Bursary portfolio.' However, Loonat, who had given sterling service over many years, was gradually forced by ill health to pass on some of her bursary-related responsibilities to Zarina Moolla. It 'passes from one pair of good hands to another,' Mayat noted. This was made official at a Trust meeting on 10 February 1999, and from June 2001 Zarina was given power to sign bursary cheques. In May 2004 she became one of the five signatories with powers to sign all Group documents. While the other four signatories – Zuleikha Mayat, Zohra Moosa, Shairbanu Lockhat and Ayesha Vorajee – had been members for four to five decades, Zarina had been a member for less than ten years. Zarina Moolla's route to the Group was via Johannesburg and London. She was born in Johannesburg in the 1950s, but at fifteen she went to live with her brother in London to complete high school and it was there that she made her first 'connection' with *Indian Delights*:

> My brother was part of a private banking company called Finance Intercontinental. He used to bring these 'heavyweights' home for dinner and tell me, 'Make some lassi,' and I'd never made lassi in my life and I didn't even know what it tasted like and I'd quickly go to the kitchen, check the *Indian Delights* and run to Harris's, which was across the road from the house, and get the ingredients and make the lassi and things like that. So

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> my very first introduction to cooking was through the *Indian Delights* – even the samoosa pur was made by me, which I've never done again since I've come home. What my cooking is today is because of [that] book.

The London experience was important for Zarina, as it was there that she socialised with white people for the first time. Given her apartheid upbringing, she initially found this 'daunting. My brother still laughs at me. The first day when he went to enroll me at school I asked him, "Are these people the same as us?"' When she returned, Zarina completed a BCom degree and served articles with JH Smegg & Co. Marriage to lawyer Ebrahim Moolla brought her to Durban and, through his political work, she became involved in the United Democratic Front in the 1980s. She spent time in the poorer Indian township of Chatsworth and, through her political work, she met people such as the late Minister of Justice, Dullah Omar, and retired Constitutional Court judge, Albie Sachs.

Zarina was drawn into the Group through Shameema, as their children attended the same school. She soon met Zuleikha Mayat, who persuaded her, inevitably, to help informally with the Group's administrative matters. When Fatima Loonat took ill, Zarina assisted in allocating and overseeing bursaries, 'updating the books and so on and before I knew it [I was] drawn into the Educational Trust'. She welcomes Zuleikha Mayat's support: 'She's given me a very free rein on the books and she'll respect my decisions quite happily and if I say "No", she accepts the no.' Mayat fast-tracked her 'apprenticeship' in trusteeship. Even though there was consensus among trustees, some members did feel that the vacant position should have gone to a more senior member of the Group who had served 'her time'. Zarina Moolla's tongue-in-cheek comment in the 2004 jubilee brochure that the founding members 'take on the role of tormentors rather than mentors' may have been written in jest but points to the strong influence that older members continue to exert.

Fatima Randeree attended Durban Indian Girls' High but left in Standard 8 and, shortly thereafter, married psychiatrist Dr Farouk Randeree. She was involved in the general administration of her husband's office and in co-ordinating his research projects. She was a 'latecomer' to the Group, joining in around 1998, when she was introduced by her relative and long-time member Fatima Mayat. She did not have a formal association with the Group prior to

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that even though she knew some of the members. She was probably put off by intimidating 'stories about the Group being a "Who's Who" of our society' but is now glad to have joined. As she explained, 'Clannish behaviour is the nature of most groups so that does not bother me. I marvel instead at what has been achieved…You can't throw out the good because of the little you don't like. Each of us can't do what the Group can do together.' Randeree described herself as a 'doer. There is a lot of running around to do, like picking up books from Sartaj and dropping them off somewhere. I don't mind getting my hands dirty.' It is precisely this type of approach that has sustained the Group over the years.

Shameema Mayat was born in Pietermaritzburg and completed her BA and BA (Hons) degrees at the then University of Durban-Westville. She then obtained a teaching qualification from the University of Natal. She taught for many years at Bechet High School and subsequently at a girls' madrassah run by Mawlana Yunus Patel, which she in fact helped to get off the ground by being one of its first members of staff. Shameema joined the Group shortly after her marriage to Zuleikha Mayat's son Aslam. The couple has lived with Zuleikha since the death of Mahomed Mayat, forming an extended family household – the exception rather than the rule these days. She was appointed to the Trust in 2003, after an 'apprenticeship' of almost twenty-five years with the Group. Fellow members who were interviewed described Shameema as 'enthusiastic', 'committed' 'hard-working', and an 'outstanding organiser'. In fact, several opined that it is because she is related to Zuleikha Mayat through marriage that her progress within the Group has been retarded. Mayat maintains a rigid principle against nepotism and this may be a reason for Shameema's delayed progress; another possibility may be that, in a household of two exceptionally strong-minded women, household tensions cannot but carry over into Group dynamics. Ayesha Vorajee, a member for five decades, feels confident about the Group's future in the hands of younger members. 'No, there is a core that is very, very efficient,' she explained. 'And, of course, there is Mrs Mayat's daughter-in-law, you know, Shameema, who is very good, although not as experienced as Mum.'

Women such as Zarina Moolla, Hajira Omar, Fatima Randeree, Shameema Mayat and Safoura Mohammed, the administrator, are using their skills in different ways to introduce new and more efficient systems and controls. For

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example, Hajira Omar and Safoura Mohammed initiated the move to put the *Indian Delights* accounts on Pastel during 2005. A grateful Mayat commented at a committee meeting on 16 February 2005 that 'there is no longer a need for me to fiddle manually as I have been doing for fifty years'. Hajira Omar described the old ledger method as 'incredible. She did this accounting system by hand with a ledger that you haven't seen for, God, thirty-odd years and she had it down to the cent.' Initially Mayat ran her manual system while they put the accounts on computer but after a couple of years she accepted that the computer was as accurate as she. Safoura Mohammed and Hajira Omar felt 'very proud that now, finally, she doesn't check that the VAT is correct or not. She accepts that it is correct and we submit it.' Mayat reported to the Group's AGM on 18 July 2007 that 'the office load used to be burdensome but sharing it with Safoura, Zarina, Shairbanu, Shameema and Hajira means that there is a team of five now yoked to the task'. She was especially complimentary of Safoura, whose 'input has been laudable, her co-ordinating skills have been fine-honed and she has learnt not to lose her cool'. And she also complimented her 'Kitchen Team' of Fatima Patel and others for their unstinting support in carrying out the functions of the Group.

The Group was helped by the fact that it could call upon the human and material capital of members. Until at least the 1980s the creative Mariam Motala would usually take charge of decorating venues for dinners and events. She and her band of volunteers would cut roses, bougainvilleas, aloes and ferns from members' gardens, as the Group was 'not wealthy enough to buy them'. Fatima Patel and Farida Chenia were also adept in floral arranging. They also borrowed carpets, Kashmiri screens, ornaments and brassware from members. The articulate Fatima Loonat was usually the master of ceremonies. All of this reduced costs. As Shameema Mayat points out, members still 'do our own flower arranging, buy our own serviettes and decide our own colour schemes so that we project the identity and image that we want'.

What the Group is able to accomplish in terms of fundraising relies on thrift but is also premised on an existing resource base. Their innovation is to make use of what is available to them to suit their own purposes. Critics of the Group who speak in terms of elitism and tokenism fail to capture the full analytical picture with such labels. It is true that part of the reason for the success of the fundraisers was that members bore many of the costs – and that this may have

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prevented other, less privileged women from joining the Group, thus constituting a structural exclusion. Yet, on the other hand, their heavy tax on themselves and their families is also an acknowledgement of class privilege and an ethos that has become increasingly rare in the age of self-spending commercialism. While the Group's fundraising activities might, through one lens, be viewed as replicating class and redistributive paternalism without challenging the economic structural foundations of capitalist class production, such a heavy-handed critique leaves little room for acknowledging the enthusiasm for civic involvement and the spirit of personal and collective satisfaction that has driven and continues to drive this group of women. It also downplays the involvement of members such as Gori Patel and others, whose main contribution has been to give of their time, a valuable commodity which complements the resources of other members. The collective effort of the women has been an important factor in the Group's financial power.

In looking at the Group's achievements it may be suggested that it failed to exploit its full commercial value. At different times the Group has made atchars, methi masala, sweetmeats and fish masala for commercial sale. But as soon as someone else began producing the same item, they stopped and switched to something new. Yet, according to Shameema Mayat, members felt that if 'others are catering for the community and are needy, there is no need for us to be in competition with people who are struggling financially. For example, we did catering at one stage. Then we taught women from the South African National Zakaat Fund to cook. We don't want to duplicate others.'

Despite the difficulty of some of the physical work involved, most first- and second-generation members that we interviewed, as well as the minutes of meetings and brochures that we examined, suggest that the women found such work satisfying on a number of levels. One theme that cropped up regularly was that theirs was not an individualised activity but one with social and communal value. According to Fatima Mayat, she and the other members remain keen to host dinners and brunches (even though it involves a lot of work with relatively small returns) because it provides them with opportunities to work as a team, develop camaraderie and relax. For Zuleikha Mayat such events provide a signal that the Group is 'still around and continues to provide benchmarks for excellence'. In similar vein, Shameema Mayat pointed out that the 'social activities make people aware we still have our finger on the pulse'. The excep-

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tional success of the fêtes provided public acknowledgement of the Group's work, which gave some members an inner satisfaction. Equally fulfilling was that the financial proceeds of fêtes, fairs, and dinners allowed them to assist various organisations. The 1983 Meena Bazaar brochure would record:

> The many institutions, societies and individuals that we have helped may be impressive, but the friendship and goodwill we have gained from South Africans of all ethnic groups by far outweighs what we have given. We have sweated over stoves and toiled over tables; shoes and tempers have worn out arranging mushaeras, debates, lectures, dinners and fêtes and all this to make someone else's journey through life a little easier.[32]

Sixteen years later, Mayat would express similar sentiments in a pre-Ramadan newsletter dated 8 December 1999, which provided a succinct summary of the value that they attached to their work:

> We make Shukar that the time and energy that every one of us has expended for Group activities has benefited disadvantaged persons and societies. We have a feeling of satisfaction that our sweating and toiling, which landed us with blisters on our hands, and gave us sore feet as we rushed to get things done in time, was well worth it. By choosing to work collectively, we have become a household name. Together, we have helped numerous societies and launched hundreds of young men and women into professions that are of benefit to society. And we also give thanks to the Almighty for not only have we been able to help others, but we ourselves have learned much from each other and forged bonds of sisterhood that are very strong indeed.

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7
IN THE FAMILY OF HUMANITY

Hast thou observed him who belieth religion?
That is he who repelleth the orphan,
And urgeth not the feeding of the needy.
Ah, woe unto worshippers who are heedless of their prayer;
Who would be seen (at worship) yet refuse small kindnesses![1]

By any measure, the work of the Women's Cultural Group has been impressive in its reach and impact. *Indian Delights* has rippled over oceans and across national and ethnic boundaries. The Group has engaged in fundraising, providing bursaries and services and, on occasion, advocacy. Members have been involved in a range of philanthropic activities, from establishing schools and participating in the running of an orphanage, to assisting in setting up an old people's home, implementing programmes to teach skills such as sewing and cooking, and providing assistance during emergencies such as floods and fires. For the Women's Cultural Group, civic participation has meant that community welfare and charity are the foundation of its activism, something that Zuleikha Mayat continually advocated. In 'Fahmida's World' she admonished her readers:

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> Have you ever wondered why there is such a lack of public spiritedness amongst us Indians and virtually no civic pride? Is it that not being entrusted with civic responsibilities we have let this talent atrophy through disuse? One often sees Europeans going around with petitions to remedy any existing or threatened inconvenience. We Indians on the other hand seldom lift a finger to help ourselves, and those few that do venture to do so are regarded as general nuisances.[2]

Mayat was urging her mainly middle-class Muslim readership to involve themselves in voluntary actions that would improve the life of the 'community'.

Robert Payton has defined philanthropy as 'voluntary action (giving, services and association) for the public good' that goes beyond one's immediate family.[3] Voluntary associations, in this instance the participation of members in the Women's Cultural Group, help, from Payton's perspective, to 'organise gifts of time and money to accomplish public purposes'.[4] Payton divides philanthropy into 'acts of community' aimed at improving the quality of life and 'acts of mercy' that relieve immediate suffering. The provision of bursaries and the teaching of skills, for example, were intended to improve 'quality of life', while the provision of blankets and the settling of utility bills that were in arrears aimed to relieve immediate suffering.[5] Philanthropy manifests in both intention and action; action that 'must have some public purpose – to achieve some vision of the public good…or at least *a* public good'.[6] While the previous chapter focused on money – the money that was crucial for the Group to implement its many programmes – underlying their activities was the promotion of a public vision of the social good that included expanded access to education for women and a more equitable and tolerant society.

To a significant extent, the philanthropic ambitions of the Group drew these mainly Muslim middle-class women into a much broader circle of relations, and into wider definitions of community, than many had before experienced. The humanistic and religious orientations that inspired concern for 'less fortunate' residents in the Durban area saw the Group firmly committed both to existing charity organisations offering care and comfort, as well as to developing new projects and institutions. A determination to cross racial and cultural boundaries saw them working with 'parallel' civil society groups such as the KwaMashu Zamokuhle Women's Welfare Society (known as Zamokuhle)

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and the South African Institute of Race Relations, which meant working with people of African and European descent. Some women from these groups became members of the Women's Cultural Group; others worked in tandem with the Group and helped organise co-ordinated events. In this way, the Group cultivated a limited but important level of racial and cultural integration within its own membership, proactively pursuing its original aim of existing as a society open to 'all women'. While officially 'non-political', the 'inter-racial' character of the Group in the context of apartheid rendered it political by default. A few Group members cultivated personal ties with more activist organisations such as the Black Sash or with members of the African National Congress, but the Group was determined to maintain its non-political profile, careful to protect its welfare work. It did not identify with movement politics or pursue 'radical' actions more than occasionally. Its leadership was keen to ensure that the Group remained a viable involvement for 'ordinary' housewives who might otherwise have had no civic outlet. Nevertheless, in addition to philanthropic work, the Group and its members were involved in lobbying and petitioning in support of democratic processes at various times.

The Women's Cultural Group was formed in 1954, at a time when the economic position of many Indians was dire. Rapid urbanisation during the 1930s and 1940s brought large numbers of Indians into the city. The Indian population of Durban increased from 16 400 in 1921 to 123 165 in 1949 and the African population from 29 022 to 109 543 during the same period.[7] Burrows noted that the flow of Indians to the city was 'due less to the offer of attractive employment or even of any employment at all than to economic pressure driving them off the land'.[8] Before the 1930s, market gardening had been important because land was available for lease, it required little capital to start, and it allowed Indians to create diverse household economies in places such as Clairwood, Springfield, Mayville, Sea Cow Lake, Riverside, Umhlatuzana and Bayhead.[9] Land became scarce by the 1940s and market gardeners had to give way to industrial expansion at South Coast Junction, Lamont Industrial Estate, and Umgeni; to the airport at Isipingo; and to roadworks at Wentworth.[10] In the 1950s, Indian-owned land was also expropriated in Riverside, Merebank, Wentworth, Sydenham, and Springfield because of the Group Areas Act.[11]

From the early 1920s, Indians entering the industrial workforce had been handicapped by the White Labour Policy, the Apprenticeship Act of 1922, the

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Industrial Conciliation Act of 1924, and the Minimum Wage Act of 1925, which gave preference to white workers. Thus in 1951, per capita income was £40.02 for Africans, £45.00 for Indians and £282.74 for white people.[12] CS Smith, a visitor to Durban, reflected on Indian poverty in a letter to the Town Clerk in 1940:

> As a stranger to Durban from overseas, one of the first things that struck me was the appalling condition of the majority of Indians here, malnourished and housed in hovels, without any sanitation. Just before Xmas I was working at Hulett's in Rossburgh and had to give out the meagre Xmas boxes to the Indians. I have never seen such hopeless, emaciated specimens of humanity. Some were too dazed to say 'thank you' and had the apathetical look of the half-starved.[13]

A University of Natal study in 1943/44 reported that 70 per cent of Indians were living below the poverty datum line and that 40 per cent were destitute.[14] A six-year study of the clothing industry reported on in 1944 indicated that 90 per cent of Indians suffered from malnutrition and 60 per cent from amoebic dysentery.[15]

There was little state assistance for black citizens and private welfare organisations were crucial in assisting the poor. The state took on part of this responsibility after the publication of a report by the Social Security Committee in 1944 which underscored the lack of social services for Indians, who subsequently became eligible for old-age and blind person's pensions in 1944 and disability grants in 1946, though the amounts were considerably less than those paid to white and coloured people. A family allowance was instituted in 1947 to provide assistance to families for their third and subsequent children. However, this was stopped within a year due to propaganda that it would lead to an increase in family size.[16]

Given the extent of the poverty, Zuleikha Mayat chided those in her community who spent large sums of money on lavish weddings in the midst of poverty:

> Why should we indulge in needless expenditure when the crying needs of our community assail us on every side? Shall we never learn to spend wisely? We have in our midst people who are only too willing to waste £500 or more on a colossal nuptial ceremony – but approach them with a bursary or social welfare proposal and the miser in them is quick to

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> assert itself. What can't we do with funds? Perhaps there is no community other than us which is in greater need of bursaries, scholarships and funds for the proper administration of our religious and social institutions. How can such a pathetic and anomalous situation be remedied? The answer lies in Youth. The elder people are too accustomed and grown in their useless veteran customs to do a thing. Wherever opportunity arises Youth must protest against such inequities.'[17]

In 'Fahmida's World', Mayat regularly questioned how material wealth was being spent. She believed that the values and priorities of many of the wealthy in her community were distorted. Instead of helping to expand education and establish proper institutions, they were using their wealth in pursuits that she felt were frivolous and unacceptable under the prevailing economic circumstances.

Many Indians relied on private alms-giving by individuals and organisations for their very survival, notwithstanding Mabel Palmer's description of the system as 'still run on mediaeval lines'. Palmer wrote in 1957 that 'it is often asserted that the wealthy Indians do very little for their own people and nothing at all for the Africans. Both these statements are false though on the whole it is true to say that much of their charity is still indiscriminate.'[18] Palmer was only partly correct, as several organisations co-ordinated their charitable efforts at that time. These included the Aryan Benevolent Society (est. 1922), the Durban Indian Child Welfare Society (est. 1927), and the Natal Indian Blind Society (est. 1937). Those who could afford it were urged to support these organisations and, indeed, all of them were liberally supported by Indians. *Indian Opinion* in 1922, in an editorial which highlighted the efforts to cast Indianness as an ideological given, stated that 'for a nation that wishes to be independent it is the primary duty of the rich to look after the needs of the poor…We can only obtain just and fair conditions by being generous to our own flesh and blood. Let us, to put it another way, be patriotic.'[19] Assisting fellow Indians was seen as politically loyal and socially ethical. Where the Women's Cultural Group differed was in seeking to move beyond this narrow notion of a racially defined nationhood.

What was distinctive about the former organisations, however, was their co-operation across religious lines. Although the Aryan Benevolent Home was founded by Hindus and adhered to Hindu rituals, AI Kajee, a Muslim and grandfather of Group founder-member Zubeida Barmania, collected £229 for

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its school building.[20] The Administrator of Natal, G Plowman, observed in 1921 that among Indians there 'was a strong disposition to look after the needs of their own people…It was well known that the Indians had a large number of castes and distinctions and, while in their everyday life these might obtrude, they all combine in works of charity and philanthropy.'[21] MA Motala, also a Muslim, and maternal great-uncle of another Group founder member, Zubeida Seedat, arrived from India in 1903. He started out as a small retailer and was a wealthy merchant by the time of his death in 1957. In 1922 he founded a school for the children of (mainly Hindu) employees of the Durban Corporation. In 1939 he established the MA Motala Boys' Hostel near Pinetown for delinquent boys between the ages of twelve and eighteen. He was also the second-largest contributor to Sastri College and donated land to the Natal Indian Blind Society in 1945 to build its Home and Vocational Training Centre.[22] Zohra Moosa's husband's family trust, the Moosa Hajee Cassim Charities Trust, contributed widely to community projects such as the Pathan School in Cato Manor; the Fannin Government-Aided Indian School in Wyebank; and AI Kajee Government-Aided Indian School in Mooi River. The fact that women such as Barmania, Seedat and Moosa came from families with a tradition of involvement in philanthropic work suggests that, like Zuleikha Mayat, who watched her father daily set aside money for charity, patterns of socialisation probably inculcated a tradition of involvement in community affairs.

Another feature of charitable work among Indians was that most of it was carried out by men. Writing in 'Fahmida's World' in 1959, Mayat referred to criticism that Muslim women 'tend to fritter away their energies in trifling activities but will not put their shoulder to the wheel when it comes to the real hard heave.' She blamed this partly on hovering menfolk who 'shelter and pamper women to a state of invalidism' and the Muslim social scene which 'requires a lot of dissipation of women's precious time in such frivolities as entertaining, attending functions, and the replenishing of her wardrobe for all these activities.' However, continued Mayat, women were no longer 'content to slumber on her menfolk's shoulders…she desires only that she be allowed to function as the second wing of one craft flying the same route.' Mayat believed that men and women had complementary skills and could work together effectively, combining 'his business acumen, his discipline, his strength, and

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her eye for detail, her motherly sympathy, womanly intuition'.[23] Caring for the family of humanity, in this construct, was an ideal expressed about (monogamous) marital partnerships.

Given the extent of the need, and the lack of state assistance, charity was important to many families for their very survival. The Women's Cultural Group helped to fill an important vacuum even though many social and economic problems persisted. Over the years, some of the Group's members have been invited to serve on committees and boards in male-dominated institutions, such as the Orient High School, Darul Yatama Orphanage, Al Baraka Bank and Iqraa Trust.

Three women – Zuleikha Mayat, Khatija Vawda and Bibi Mall – were included on the board of trustees of Darul Yatama in 1958. Darul Yatama was founded in 1934, when Mawlana Mukhtar Siddique, the paternal uncle of Group founder-member Sayedah Ansari, was visiting Durban and helped locals establish a home to provide shelter and care to Muslim orphans and destitutes. The first home was in a wood and iron cottage in Sea Cow Lake provided by the EM Paruk family. When that property was condemned as 'a health hazard' by the city health authorities in 1937, a cottage was purchased in Westville. It was called 'Westhaven' and was officially opened on 15 August 1937 by the then Agent-General Sir Raza Sayed Ali. When Westville was declared a 'white' area under the Group Areas Act, Westhaven was expropriated in 1963 and the home moved to La Mercy. The new home was officially opened by Essop Randeree on 23 November 1974. Mayat commented in 1958, when women were invited to serve on the board, that the 'work done at the orphanage seems to be showing results and no doubt now that women have been taken on the committee, the progress will be more evident. It is sincerely hoped that when these women approach the public to help them in their task the response will be forthcoming.'[24] Khatija Vawda and Bibi Mall were appointed trustees, with Mayat replacing her sister Bibi Mall in 1980 after the latter's tragic death.

The theme of women being practical and getting things done is one that Mayat picks up over and over again. On another occasion she criticised the fact that Advocate RK Khan had bequeathed £40 000 for a hospital for Indians when he died in 1932 but, more than two decades later, the trustees were still searching for a suitable site. She wrote in 1958 of 'this pitiful story' and asked rhetor-

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ically, 'Do my sisters agree with me that two women on the board of trustees will be successful in bringing results?'[25] Mayat observed that the success of the missionaries was due to the fact that they began their 'institutions from scratch and built it up over the years'. McCord Hospital, Adams College, Marianhill Monastery and St Anthony's School were testimony to this.

> On the other hand think of any Indian project. First of all there must be a pompous committee where some of the members apart from the giving of an over-publicized donation will not do a stitch of work on behalf of the project. Next, thousands of pounds will be collected from an already over-taxed community, then elaborate plans are drawn up, every detail for the future years thought of in this gigantic scheme, and then phizz goes the damp squib. Either they cannot obtain the land or the personnel is inadequately qualified, but in any event stagnation sets in. Why can't we get started on any tumble down building?…Elect a committee of genuine workers who will give their time and labour. Let there be plaques for the donors who so desire but do not have puppet committees. Prove to the public the worth of the institution before we clamour for perfect buildings and equipment.[26]

This is where, Mayat argued, women differed from men.

In disbursing funds to the needy, members initially adopted a 'hands-on' approach that saw them get personally involved where assistance was required. Involvement in fundraising and community welfare schemes brought them into spaces that were traditionally the preserve of men. In her presidential address on the occasion of the 18th AGM of the Group in June 1972, Mayat reflected sarcastically on the perceived intellectual differences in the ability of men and women, and how this affected the manner in which they reacted to crises. It also succinctly captures the personal involvement of members in crisis flashpoints:

> For any organization to remain in the limelight for two decades is something to crow about. Here we attribute our success to our unerring women's intuition. Not having that much bulk in brain matter to play with we do not feel inclined to sit for hours deliberating matters. I can quote one instance where there was need for urgency in collecting money. Whilst the men were still dialoguing over the setting up of a

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Packing for Pakistan: Group members sort blankets for disaster relief.

> grand committee our cheques and our crates were all on their way to the disaster area.[27]

The Group saw itself as positioned in the 'underprivileged section of South African society', according to the brochure commemorating its 35th anniversary in 1989. As such, it was frequently called upon to 'handle a crisis within the community'. Community in this context was not necessarily confined to Muslims or Indians but included anyone in need, especially as a result of calamities such as floods or the sudden loss of breadwinners through death or unemployment. Assistance was also given abroad on occasion. For example, £3 000 was remitted to the Red Cross in Bangladesh, while clothing and a thousand blankets were shipped on the *SS Karanja* in December 1970. Cash, clothing and medicine have been provided over the decades for various disaster relief operations (mostly in the Islamic world) such as the Turkish Relief Fund (1976), the Maputo Relief Fund (1984), flood relief in Pakistan (1989), refugee aid in Afghanistan (1990), cyclone relief in Bangladesh (1991), earthquake relief in northern Iran (1990), war relief in Iraq (1991), flood relief in Sudan (1991), the Indian Earthquake Fund (1992) and the Pakistan earth-

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quake (2005). Following the tsunami of December 2004, an 'extraordinary meeting' was convened on 3 January 2005 and a committee formed to raise funds: R56 576 was handed over to the Al Imdaad Foundation and the Gift of the Givers, two organisations that were active in Indonesia. According to members, Mayat always emphasised accountability in all her dealings. If money was collected from the public for a particular project, Mayat insisted that it be used for that project only. For example, the Group collected almost R14 000 for the Iran Earthquake Fund in July 1990. Mayat wrote to the fund administrator on 20 July 1990 that she

> was most disappointed to learn that weekly amounts were not forwarded for purchase of medicines as originally agreed upon. To me it is most important that any decision taken at committee level to be carried out explicitly. Should this not be possible, then everyone concerned should be informed accordingly. After several calls to your office, at last information was available that instead of medicines the money was to be forwarded to Iran for purchases on the spot. This placed me personally in a spot (excuse the pun) with the different women who at my request collected this large amount in so short a time – despite the fact that their menfolk had already contributed.

In the local context too, the Group has attempted to provide relief in times of crisis. When a fire in Sea Cow Lake left thirty-five people destitute in 1971, Durban Child Welfare contacted the Group: 'Although we are not a welfare organization, such appeals are impossible to ignore. Help to those affected would eventually be given by others we knew, but here, there was an urgency calling for immediate relief. The official who received the phone call, phoned three other members and so a ball was put into motion.'[28] Members contributed blankets and mattresses. During the 'Inanda Fire tragedy' of September 1984, the Group provided assistance and formed a 'relief committee' to co-ordinate collections from different areas. The committee consisted of Gori Aapa Mahomedy (Westville), Gori Patel (Durban Central), Nafisa Jeewa (Asherville), and Khatija Vawda (Reservoir Hills). This was the pattern whenever crises arose.

Over time, however, as other organisations were formed, the Group did not 'rush to every scene', as Zohra Moosa put it, but provided funding to organisations already involved. According to Zuleikha Mayat, 'when we perceive that

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others are doing a good job we fade out for we are loathe to duplicate services.' Around fifty organisations have benefited financially from the Group over the years.[29] As Shairbanu Lockhat wrote in 1979, 'we lend a sympathetic ear to any request. We try not to turn down anybody. Sometimes there is a delay, but in the end we get around to everybody.'[30] This pattern continued down the years.

Education and the wellbeing of those who were physically and mentally challenged were of special concern for members. One project that married these concerns was the opening of Tiflaneh (Urdu for 'child'), a pre-school for children with Down syndrome. Members felt that the absence of a special school deprived children of social interaction and education during a pivotal phase of their lives. The decision to establish the school was taken formally in October 1979. Nafisa Jeewa, an active member at the time, explained that the attitude of many parents caused them to embark on this project:

> Basically, if you had a disabled child amongst the Indians, the child was left at home. Nobody ever thought of educating the child. The mother was too busy, right, besides her domestic work and other children. The child was left at home, you give it meals, bath it, dress it, but no motivation. There was no such thing as 'let's do some colouring, let's do some learning' in any basic form.

In November 1979, Zuleikha Mayat sent out letters to potential donors outlining the aims and objectives of Tiflaneh.[31] The school was registered and opened with fifteen children at the Truro Hall in Westville on 5 February 1980. While parents welcomed the school, which filled a huge gap, the logistics created a problem. One was the venue. The teacher, Rashida Vaid, had to set up the classroom each morning and pack things away in the afternoon, which was tedious. Transport was another problem as Westville was out of the way for most parents. The Spes Nova School in Phoenix, also a school for special needs children, assisted in transporting the children for a few weeks. Thereafter the Group was forced to hire a vehicle. While the Group was busy attempting to solve its problems the Golden Gate School was being opened in Greenwood Park. AK Singh of the Education Department approached the Group in April 1980 about merging the two. According to Mayat, members saw this as a 'great opportunity' as there was a 'realisation that we would not be able to continue with Tiflaneh in the long run, especially because Rashida Vaid was about to get married'.

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Singh advised the Group in August that it would have to provide a teacher and an aide, and assist with vehicle and running costs. The terms of the merger were finalised in October 1980. It was agreed that the section of the school sponsored by the Group would be called the Tiflaneh Centre. The Group would continue to assist towards various projects at Golden Gate. When the Group contributed R5 000 towards the nursery block in 1986, for example, S Singh, the school's principal, wrote to Mayat on 26 February 1986 to thank members 'for their very generous and spontaneous donation. Their magnanimity is a source of tremendous inspiration to us in our fundraising efforts. Your charitable disposition is to be admired and we pray you be blessed with good health and happiness you richly deserve.' The Group also contributed to the coffers of the Natal Indian Cripple Care Association (NICCA), Bantu Blind, Cripple Care Centre, Sydenham Cultural Institute, Durban Community Chest and Indian Social Welfare, while Mayat served on the board of NICCA for six years.

Another project close to the heart of many members was the establishment of a health clinic in Malagasy on the south coast. Several members visited the township in August 1978 and saw the appalling living conditions first-hand. It was a huge shock for some, such as Laila Ally, who had grown up under apartheid, to see Indians and Africans living side by side, and especially the extent of poverty among Muslims. It was an 'eye-opener', as she put it. She described Malagasy as an area for 'outcasts' – that is, a place of refuge for Muslims who had married non-Muslims and were shunned by their families. The pathetic conditions left her

> totally depressed. My father saw me and said, 'No, you're not going back there.' I said, 'Why not? I may be depressed today but there's something that can be done.' The next time we went there…we cooked yakhni. We told the ladies to meet us there. There was a little community centre there and we had lunch. We read namaaz together. And that was something that will live with me. It was such a fantastic experience – being with the local community. And then we asked some of these women, 'What do you need? What do you want? What can we do for you?', and thirteen women came forward and said, 'We want one thing.' And we said, 'What is that?' And they said, 'We want our nikahs to be performed because we are all living here like outcasts – like a condemned

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Members of the Group visit the Zamokuhle Women's Welfare Society's gardening project; township visits were fairly common during the 1970s and early 1980s.

> community.' So MYM [the Muslim Youth Movement] got involved. They went and performed the nikahs.

In July 1979, the Group provided funds to assist the Muslim Youth Movement to build a clinic in Malagasy. The Group successfully approached Shifa Hospital to donate a couch and collapsible screens, while a table, chairs and steriliser were purchased from its own funds. The Child Welfare Department has used part of the clinic as an office and interview room and the Isipingo Board ran an antenatal clinic from the premises. A plaque bearing the words 'Women's Cultural Group Clinic' was placed on the outside.

An indication of the changing times was that, just ten years later, when long-time member Mary Grice resigned, Mayat wrote to her on 16 May 1990 expressing her sadness but commenting too on the political and criminal violence that was making it difficult for women to continue in their old ways:

> All our lives are filled up with things around us. Daily we have news of someone we know who has either been robbed, killed or worse. Conscience stricken as we are, we still go around eating, and taking some enjoyment out of life. May we be forgiven for being spectators of history and not participants!…The Islamic societies, like the church organizations, are doing meaningful work among the disadvantaged. The

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> Cultural Group has helped out with funds, but believe it, when we were asked to go to Malagasy and see how the clinic and welfare work there is being conducted, we backed down on the grounds that it was too dangerous an area.

There were many other examples of the women getting involved in areas and issues that they would not ordinarily have visited or covered. In May 1978, twenty-two members visited the Spes Nova School for Cerebral Palsy in Phoenix. The visit, the minutes of the June 1978 monthly meeting recorded, 'made us realize just how much we have to be grateful for'. In November 1984, members visited the Imbeliyezwe Primary School in Hammarsdale and the Inchanga Islamic School, which they had sponsored. They were treated to lunch at Inchanga and received an insight into the running of the school and madrassah. Such visits sensitised members to the class and other inequalities in their midst and forged in many a determination to do something about it.

Chow-chow alliances

Involvement in the Group also resulted in working with African and white women, though friendships across race barriers remained limited. Support for African organisations was an interest of Mayat's from the beginning. She wrote in 1956, for example:

> It is kind of us to send relief to India and the Europeans to Holland after floods have ravished the country, but we should look around us and give succour. Africans unlike our people will not come round begging from door-to-door when the times are hard.[32]

There was a link, for example, with Zamokuhle, a social welfare society, and its officials such as Doris Pamla and Albertina Nguni, a councillor in KwaMashu township who was also a long-time member of the Group. Through Zamokuhle, the Group contributed funds to various African women's societies and initiatives. In July 1976, when Albertina Nguni returned from a conference on euthanasia in the United States, she addressed the Group about the issue. In September 1976, members of the Group arranged contributions for a cake sale organised by Nguni. Members also visited her home in KwaMashu, where they had tea and toured her garden, as Nguni was a keen gardener.

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On the occasion of its 18th anniversary the Women's Cultural Group of Durban held a get-together at the Orient Hall, Durban, recently, where the main guest was Chief Gatsha Buthelezi of Kwa Zulu. Picture shows the Chief interestingly watching a young member of the Women's Group applying Mehndi (henna) to his palm, while Mrs. Mariam Motala (right), a leading member of the Women's Cultural Group and wife of Dr. Yusuf A. Motala of Durban, looks on.

The association with Nguni drew the Group into the politics of the Zulu Kingdom. Chief Mangosuthu Buthelezi was invited on 3 February 1972 to be guest of honour at the Group's 'Sweet Seventeen' anniversary celebrations. Buthelezi accepted the invitation on 10 February, responding as follows: 'many thanks for remembering that our friendship [with the Mayats] is now 17 years [old]. That's a lifetime!' He went on to add, however, that a recent 'coup' attempt in Zululand had involved some members of Zamokuhle. He was 'not too happy about their involvement…However, if you have already involved them and you cannot extricate yourself from it, I will quite understand.' The function on 25 April 1972 went off successfully with Irene Buthelezi donning a traditional Indian sari. Six members of Zamokuhle who were considered loyal to Buthelezi formed a guard of honour for the Buthelezis, who were presented with a copy of the Qur'an. Buthelezi spoke on 'The disabilities

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which hamper women in their efforts towards making their full contribution to the whole development of society'.

Irene Buthelezi was a patient of Zuleikha Mayat's husband, who delivered the Buthelezi children. Mangosuthu Buthelezi often visited the surgery and the Mayats' home in Clare Road. The Group also invited him to meet its international guests, such as jurist Sir Zafrullah Khan, who at one time held the position of president of the UN General Assembly.

The Group was also associated with the Sibusiwe Claremont Child and Welfare Society, headed by Virginia Gcabashe. Gcabashe was born in 1930 in the village of Blikana in the Eastern Cape, where her father was a teacher and her uncle was the local pastor. From an early age she aspired to be a nurse 'to help people', having been exposed to needs and traumas of people who visited her family for sustenance. One Christmas morning, a man arrived on their doorstep very hungry and with swollen feet.

> I was a child and the story which he related – being beaten up by farmers, walking through the night – touched me. And I was most touched by the way he ate – it showed how hungry he was. I thought if this is what happened to our people, I need to do something, to give comfort to people.

Virginia completed a nursing course and practised midwifery at King Edward Hospital in Durban. She married a doctor who had studied at the University of the Witwatersrand. The couple returned to Durban, where Virginia's husband, Vusa, worked at McCord Hospital with Dr Mahomed Mayat. Virginia remembers the resonance she felt with Zuleikha Mayat's vision of women working towards community development. 'I met Mrs Mayat because we had common interests in many ways – we felt we needed a Federation of Black Women and we formed this with the likes of Fatima Meer, Dr Goonam and Zubeida Seedat and other women.' The Women's Cultural Group supported several of Virginia's projects.

> In Durban, at first [my husband and I] lived in Chesterville and I started a local chapter of the Young Women's Christian Association. We then moved to Claremont and I was involved in community work through the Methodist Church, YWCA, and we formed the Sibusiwe Child Welfare. We started this because we understood that the first three years of a

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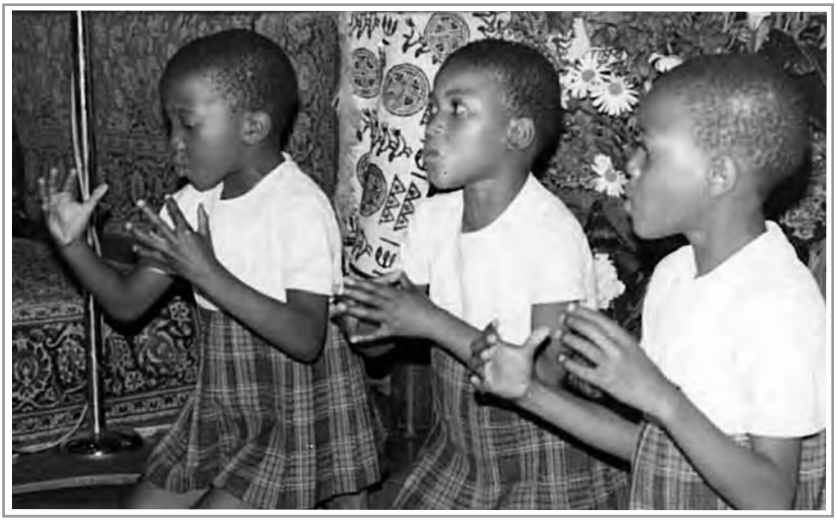

Alliances with other women's organisations in the region created opportunities for children to cross apartheid-imposed lines and enjoy exchanges of talent.

> child's life were important. Claremont had lots of factories – mothers were working and children must have a place to stimulate them. This was fulfilling but we needed more. We looked at schoolchildren and felt that we needed a holiday programme. There was the excitement of Christmas and New Year but then there was a dull period and we wanted to emphasise life skills so [we] had a programme for high school children. This is when we worked with the Women's Cultural Group and they assisted in many ways. This was important because the projects are still running. These projects are still running.

Exchanges between segregated communities were not only financial; there were cultural events as well. In November 1972, the minutes of the monthly meeting recorded that the Group organised an Eid/Diwali function where guests read extracts from their own works in Urdu and English. There were talks on Indian music and dancing, while children from the school set up by Albertina Nguni, described as a group of 'Tiny Tots' from KwaMashu, 'thrilled everyone with their performance of songs and poetry'. In April 1973, Fatima Meer arranged for the Group to host the cast of Athol Fugard's anti-apartheid play *Sizwe Banzi is Dead*, which was performed at the Orient Hall.

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In August 1976, funds raised at a fête were handed over to the Sibusiwe Child Care Centre. In December 1977, members funded the training of two nursery school teachers in Hammarsdale and collected cash and other donations for Albertina Nguni's crèches in KwaMashu. In March 1978, financial assistance was provided to build an Educational Centre at the Inanda Seminary. Three members visited the school in April and described it as an inspiring trip: 'Those who have not been there have really missed out on something worthwhile.' Mayat described the Inanda Seminary in 2008 as 'a very important institution which still exists but sadly we are not in touch.'

The Group assisted Dr Siko Mji of the Hammarsdale Women's Group to establish a pre-school in 1978. The relationship with the Mjis began through Dr Mayat, who would often bring colleagues and acquaintances home for supper on Wednesdays and in this way an association would be forged. Members of the Group visited the pre-school on several occasions. For example, they attended an 'Open Day' at the Mpumalanga Crèche on 11 November 1979 where Dr Mji addressed them while the children entertained parents and friends with songs and dances.

Like Virginia Gcabashe, Siko Mji (née Mjali) was a contemporary of Zuleikha Mayat. She was born in the Eastern Cape – in Tabankulu in the late 1920s – to a father who was a Methodist minister. Although only a year younger than Zuleikha Mayat, her educational path was quite different. Following her father's postings she attended six different primary schools and matriculated from high school in 1942 at the Healdtown Institute. From there she was educated at Fort Hare. ('As a matter of interest, my roommate was an Indian girl,' noted Mji.) She taught briefly at Kroonstad Secondary School in the Orange Free State while engaged to John Dilintaba Mji, whom she had met at Fort Hare. The couple went from there to the University of the Witwatersrand, where he was studying medicine. In 1952, the year she was married, Siko herself received a scholarship to study medicine at the University of the Witwatersrand and she managed to juggle the responsibilities of marriage and professional training.

> It took me ten years to complete because it seemed that every alternate year I had a baby. In fact, three of my four children were born while I was studying for my degree – to make the story really spicy, my only daughter was born at 9am on the day I was to write my final examination. I would want to return to classes the next year but Professor Dutt, the famous

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> Professor Dutt, would insist, 'You stay at home and breastfeed your baby'. There was no Pill in those days, no contraceptives. White people may have known about condoms but we didn't.

Later, while practising at McCord Hospital, Dr Mji's inevitable contact with the Mayats sparked a number of interactions with the Women's Cultural Group, many of them related to Siko and Zuleikha's mutual interest in helping women. Dr Mji recalls:

> [My husband and I] lived in a far-off place then, Hammarsdale, where the situation was difficult for women – they had to work, raise their children, their husbands working – and they earned poor wages. I was touched by that and saw a need for pre-school care. Together with several community friends, we founded the Pre-School Education Forum and worked to build a pre-school. We had to raise funds, get equipment, pay teachers, and all these things required money and time. I had heard about Julu [Zuleikha Mayat] and visited her to ask if she would help. And I had known her husband many years earlier. In this way I was put into contact with the Group. They were a very active group – involved in their sales, book, fairs and so on. I was even made MC for one of the big fairs at a school. It was a great benefit to us as we could also buy things cheap and they helped us organise one or two of our fairs. Julu was a helping hand that I cannot forget. The pre-school is standing to this day – Khulakahle Pre-school. We were assisted by the Urban Foundation, Julu, the Beare Group and others.

Siko Mji became 'a more or less honorary member' of the Group. She attended meetings and was kept informed of everything but could not be active like the other women because of her many other involvements. Commenting on Zuleikha Mayat's organistional skills, Mji had this to say:

> They were an enviably active group of women. Being a woman organiser I knew how difficult it was to organise women and I could not organise women like Julu did. She was creative and energetic and now I read that she could not fulfil her desire for education, but she had no inferiority complex, nor a superiority one, for that matter.

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The Group's limited resources meant that it was unable to cope with the high demand for assistance. The annual report for 1977 stated that numerous appeals had been received for financial assistance but it could only 'adopt' a few. In that year Ohlange High was chosen as the 'big project'. At the opening of the school, a plaque bearing the name 'Women's Cultural Group' was put up. Monies raised at a a fête in July 1978 were given to the likes of Ohlange High, KwaMashu Crèche and the Hammarsdale Group. In September 1979 medical instruments were given to the Happy Valley Clinic and Eid hampers were given to Dr Dada of the Inchanga Centre in Marianhill. On 11 November 1979 the Group attended an 'Open Day' at Mpumalanga, Hammarsdale, and visited the Marianhill Islamic Centre.

In December 1982, blankets, biscuits, sweets and other items were sent via Albertina Nguni to crèches in the African township of KwaMashu as part of the Group's 'Christmas Cheer' programme. In November 1984, members visited the Imbeliyezwe School and Inchanga Institute which they had helped to establish. They were treated to lunch and received an insight into the running of the school and madrassah. The Group's files are littered with letters of appreciation from recipients such as Dr Siko Mji and S'bongile D Nene of the Nosizwe Community Project. For example, the latter wrote on 10 January 1986 'to express on behalf of management committee our heartfelt thanks for your very kind support'. Despite supporting predominantly African-run township-based organisations, the Group was sober in its assessment that the attempt to forge links with Africans had not succeeded to the extent that members had hoped. This was remarked upon in the Group's 1972 brochure, and the relationship arguably weakened in subsequent years as apartheid intensified:

> Over the past eighteen years many are the bridges that we have crossed on the road of race relations. Our members have addressed other women's organizations and we have given them a platform in return, so that each child could learn from the other; that civilization and culture knows no colour; that every mother wants a better life for her offspring. Whilst these bridges were crossed and temporary meetings held at the caravanserais, along the harsh road of man-erected barriers, no permanent station seems to have been established.[33]

Friendship with Albertina Nguni and Doris Pamla lasted until their deaths, after which contact was lost with Zamokuhle. Mayat observed that, ironically,

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Albertina Nguni, Doris Pamla and Mariam Motala.

with the end of apartheid, there is less need for cross-race contact. African members and societies have greater access to state and other sources of funding and are no longer dependent on the contributions of Indians. The rapid rise of Dr Diliza Mji, the son of Dr Siko Mji, on the corporate ladder is an example of the changing post-apartheid landscape. The same pattern is replicated with most organisations. As the extract suggests, and as Mayat pointed out, 'there is a great deal of regret that we did not or were unable to sustain these relationships'. Mji similarly comments:

> At that time the various races worked together, they felt they had a togetherness. We were all under the iron heel of apartheid, particularly in education and academic field and there were good feelings. In Fort Hare for example, as I said, Miss Pillay was my roommate. We had other Indian and coloured friends – generally there was no deep consciousness of us being African and they being Indians, especially those belonging to the ANC [African National Congress]. We felt no difference. The co-operation was most welcome. Even the Black Sash were with us, though they were apart, we felt. In the present time, to be honest, things have not gone as people anticipated. I would have expected the accord to go stronger but it has grown weaker, not stronger. The new generation has tendency to divide. Africans are Africans, and they feel that Indians are taking bread out of their mouths. This is developing a lot. I don't understand it.

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Mary Grice was similarly perplexed about the faltering urgency for cross-racial exchanges, and even her own, once-regular association with Group members has diminished. 'I don't know why but over the years there has been less and less contact, though now and again I do get to meet Zuleikha', she declared. One such occasion was the launch of Zuleikha Mayat and Ahmed Kathrada's book on 24 October 2009, which was attended by both Mary Grice and Siko Mji. Virginia Gcabashe was also invited, but being confined to a wheelchair she found it difficult to attend, though she sent a letter of good wishes that was read out.[34]

A formal Group member from the 1960s, Grice had been a stalwart of the Black Sash and South African Institute of Race Relations. Born in the same year as Zuleikha Mayat, her father was in the British Colonial Service in Kenya and she grew up in Tanzania in the 1930s. Moving to England during the Second World War, she studied for a year in London at University College, then moved to Cairo, which she described as 'a fantastic place, what a change from a quiet ordinary English life...people from all over the world, speaking so many languages, so many cultures'. In 1947, she moved to South Africa to study at Rhodes, where she earned a BA in economics and politics.

Her husband, Duchesne Grice, a lawyer, had arrived in Durban in early 1951 and settled in Gillits. Duchesne Grice was a member of the South African Institute of Race Relations, and its president from 1973 to 1974. He was 'keen on getting people from all backgrounds to meet'. With people such as Joe Thorpe and Ann Perry they set up the African Art Centre 'to bring people together'. Mary Grice met Zuleikha through their respective husbands' professional networks and liberal social circles. She remembers that 'my husband knew Mayat's husband – they would meet socially – sometimes we had dinners at my in-laws' house where people of various race groups would attend – in Lambert Road – JN and Radhi Singh, IC Meer and Fatima Meer, Devi and Dennis Bughwan, lots of such people'.

The cases of Grice, Mji and Gcabashe shows that the Group's early inter-racial exchanges and collaborations with non-Muslim women were clearly facilitated through the marital and class positioning of a few key members. Marriage to professionals, or being active professionals in their own rights, connected them to humanitarian enterprises across the segregated spaces of apartheid. Socially active and professional women such as Siko Mji, Virginia Gcabashe and Mary

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Grice were important in the Group's aspirations towards a broader sense of sisterhood and community. While the Group remained a mostly Muslim women's association, it always strove to find ways of concerning itself more broadly with the 'pickle-mix' of South African social needs. This vision has come under strain with the end of apartheid and challenges posed by globalisation.

Family and faith community

The society in which the Group operates has transformed over the past half-century and the Group's activities and focus have changed accordingly. Importantly, myriad organisations have emerged, many with access to greater resources. The Muslim Youth Movement was established in Durban in 1970. During the early phase its focus was on increasing Islamic consciousness among the youth. By the end of the decade there was a concerted attempt by many Muslims to integrate Islam into all aspects of their lives, and several other organistions such as the Jaame Limited, the South African National Zakaat Fund, the Islamic Da'wah Movement (IDM), the Association of Muslim Accountants and Lawyers (AMAL) and the Islamic Relief Agency (ISRA) were launched.[35] The South African National Zakaat Fund, for example, founded in 1977, provides emergency relief, a winter warmth programme and a labour bureau. Its funds are obtained mainly from zakaat contributions.

The Women's Cultural Group has worked through organisations such as the South African National Zakaat Fund and the IDM, which was founded in 1981 and has established jama'at khanas (prayer centres) and madrassahs across the province, and assists indigent students with school fees and books. The Group also provided financial assistance to the Islamic Relief Agency (ISRA), which was formed in 1987 in response to floods that caused major damage in KwaZulu-Natal. ISRA has worked closely with the Red Cross and other emergency organisations in providing medical assistance, food, clothing, blankets and financial assistance to those living in squatter camps and informal settlements.

The Gift of the Givers Foundation was formed by Dr Imtiaz Sooliman in 1992 with a focus on feeding schemes, education, and health and medical services. The organisation has an international profile given its involvement in places such as Bosnia, Palestine and Bangladesh, and it provided millions of rands worth of aid following the xenophobic attacks that swept across South

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Africa in May 2008, when the government response was lethargic. Members of the Women's Cultural Group did not wish to duplicate this work and therefore contributed financially to these organisations or provided skills training. One consequence of this approach is that there is less direct contact between Group members and the beneficiaries of their endeavours.

The Group's focus has shifted over time as new challenges have arisen. As part of its 'crisis' programme, a helpline was started in January 1996 for women in distress as a result of wife and child abuse, substance abuse, and marital problems – problems arising in part from the breakdown of extended families.[36] The presence of elderly family members and extra hands around the house had, in the past, cushioned the impact of various tensions. Ayesha Vorajee, Shameema Mayat, Zohra Moosa, Zubie Paruk, Suhaima Tayob, Shairbanu Lockhat and Sabera Timol were among those involved in this project, and Nafisa Mayat was made co-ordinator. Volunteer counsellors were available to the public from Monday to Saturday mornings. It was open to women of all religious backgrounds. After the first year of operation, Nafisa Mayat reported that most of the cases involved depression and young people's failure to deal with marital problems.[37] Callers were provided with advice and referred to professionally qualified psychiatrists, doctors, social workers, welfare agencies, and mawlanas. After almost two years the service was stopped when Nafisa Mayat joined the Department of Social Welfare and organisations such as Al-Ansaar began to operate similar services. A perusal of the records shows that many callers were afraid of their husbands finding out that they had sought assistance and pleaded for anonymity. They also asked for 'a strong person' to speak to their husbands. Comments such as 'the woman sounded desperate [but] she seems afraid to take the next step' were common in the case records. Women feared divorce because they felt that they did not have skills to survive alone and remained in a dependency relationship. For Zuleikha Mayat, this confirmed the need to empower women.

A formally structured 'Women's Cultural Group Crisis Fund' was initiated in August 2002 to assist those faced with unforeseen short-term financial problems.[38] This too is a reflection of the end of systems of mutual aid. It was opened with financial assistance from the Iqraa Trust, the philanthropic arm of the Al Baraka Bank, to assist families that required short-term assistance for school fees, uniforms, medical bills, and utility bills that could not be met because

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of unforeseen circumstances. Mayat wrote in the jubilee brochure (2004) that 'it becomes almost impossible to refuse these genuine cries for help if the need has been established.' The minutes of a committee meeting of 3 September 2002 stated that the money would be given as a 'loan in order to not make the recipient feel like they are receiving a hand-out as they are not used to this'. Hajira Omar, who heads this committee, explained:

> We help people just, for example, a woman who got too ill to pay her utility bills, that kind of unforeseen expenses – somebody's son is very sick or they have a crisis in school fees, or rentals they can't afford, and then we would interview and check whether there is a genuine need or not, and once we have screened that, we either give them a loan or it's just given outright sometimes.

Typical of the assistance provided was that given to a mother of four in Chatsworth in January 2003 who earned an income by going from house to house doing washing and ironing. Her water had been disconnected when illness prevented her from paying the utility bill. The Group paid the bill to reconnect the water. The Crisis Fund has even assisted school governing bodies to meet their utilities commitments. For example, R2 000 was given to the Ekukhanyakwelanja School in Chesterville in July 2006 to pay utility arrears.

The empowerment of women has been a 'hobby horse' of Zuleikha Mayat's for many years as she sought to help individuals develop cottage and small business initiatives so that a class of entrepreneurs could be created among those that the formal sector failed to absorb. Mayat sought to avoid what she termed a 'dependency syndrome' and advocated teaching women skills and knowledge related to productive work and empowerment so as to create opportunities for them to become self-sufficient.

While Mayat and most of the formative Group members were home-makers, they did not articulate a vision of the 'ideal' family as comprising a working husband and non-working wife. On the contrary, Mayat emphasised the advantages of the economic empowerment of women and advocated that women should work if it meant economic benefit to the family. She wrote as early as 1956: 'I can only say that one rule applies to any family, anywhere whatever their religion or race. That where the father is incapable of earning a livelihood then it is better for the woman to do so instead of begging.'[39]

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The Group presented a proposal to the Iqraa Trust in September 2003 to empower women, whose neglect, according to the memorandum, resulted in 60 per cent of human resources being 'ignored or lost' to the Muslim community. Poverty forced many women to supplement family income with home-based production and the proposal called for 'motivation lectures' to encourage women to start small businesses and set up savings schemes. For example, some women sold rotis from home but with a roti-making machine they could 'easily treble income and with less sweat at that'. In the proposal, Mayat cited one 'success' story to make her point:

> A family was in a precarious financial situation. Husband, wife and two children had a roof over their heads that was under threat of being removed. It was imperative that the husband who was without a job should start earning. The husband and wife came to my home, we made a marinade and the Women's Cultural Group was involved to help retail it. At every food stall, flea market and food demonstration the Women's Cultural Group ladies were in attendance with the wife. Very soon the couple could not cope with the demand [for the marinade] and the wife's brother closed his own operation in a café and joined them. Today Magi Masala and Gorima's [masala] are entities known throughout the country. All this started from making one twenty-five litre [container] of masala at a time.

Mayat quoted several other examples, such as providing sewing machines to individuals and organisations that were teaching sewing skills through the Crescent of Hope organisation, which also helped trainees to market their products. While the women were in training, the Crescent of Hope deposited part of the income they earned in a bank account in their name to help them acquire their own sewing machine. Another example was that of Darul Tauheed, which, with the help of the Iqraa Trust, set up a pottery studio at the Anjuman School in Leopold Street. The Group also assisted a carpentry firm to secure a government tender to produce door and window frames for a housing scheme. The loan was repaid timeously and the company secured a bigger contract. Mayat argued that such small business enterprises should be nurtured to 'erase the prevalent dependency syndrome and change it into entrepreneurship.'

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The Group's attempt to implement the scheme more broadly received a setback, however, when serious defaulters stretched its resources and the scheme had to be stopped. In a letter to Mawlana Kathrada of the Jamiatul Ulama on 26 November 2004, Mayat explained that the Group had hoped to assist people to 'start some money generating operations' but was forced to shelve the idea after several negative experiences.

As a result of the achievements of the Group over the past half-century and Zuleikha Mayat's standing in the Muslim community, she was invited to serve on the board of Al Baraka Bank as a 'Special Advisor' and on the Iqraa Trust as a trustee. Advocate AB Mahomed, deputy-chairman of the bank, hoped that Mayat would inspire Muslim women to become involved in Islamic banking in order to empower them, noting that

> I would like to see the day when no women of Islam are left without help when misfortunes fall on their husbands or families; that they become truly self-reliant educationally and economically; that in their youth they are given educational and spiritual opportunities that will make them the finest builders of human beings and potentially of new Muslims.[40]

Mayat accepted the position on 16 June 1990, stating: 'I appreciate the appointment of the Al Baraka Bank Board and do thank them for it. As I take all my responsibilities seriously I hope and pray that I will prove to be of use to both your establishment and to women in the community.'[41] Mayat served on the board until 2005.

Mayat was also invited to serve on the board of the Iqraa Trust, which was established by the Al Baraka Bank in 1994. Iqraa in Arabic means 'read' and the mission of the Trust is to spread reading and literacy in order to facilitate development. The Iqraa Trust provides assistance to organisations that focus on welfare, education, skills development, and social development. Mayat remains a trustee of Iqraa, which has donated over R60 million between 1994 and 2009 to health, education and social welfare projects without regard to race or religion.

The Women's Cultural Group has also been involved with the Darul Yatama Orphanage since the late 1950s. Darul Yatama runs old people's homes for men and women, an orphanage in La Mercy and a school in Pine Street. Group members are involved on a hands-on basis in the old people's home for ladies,

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the Baitul Hifazat in Williamson Road, Sparks Estate. There is a separate home for men, the Baitul Firdous in Randles Road. The Group contributed financially and has assisted with the running of the home since the project was first mooted in January 1998. At a meeting on 24 February 1998 it was established that the Darul Yatama would be the umbrella organisation co-ordinating the project, with the Group forming a women's wing to get the project off the ground.[42] Mayat made it clear that 'this does not give any special status to the Women's Cultural Group, it only means that we will be able, because of our constant association with the Darul Yatama, to liaise more effectively with them.' Ever the diplomat, Mayat emphasised:

> All of us gathered here are going to give our services in various capacities, but often that means chaos especially when one half of the members do not know what the others are doing, and there will occur overlapping, treading on each others' toes and leaving bad feelings against each other, so really the work of the Women's Cultural Group will be that of facilitators. What we all have to keep constantly in mind is that our orders will come from the Darul Yatama.

The Group opened a separate sub-account for all funds collected on behalf of the Baitul Hifazat. Twenty-one women from several organisations attended a follow-up meeting on 4 March 1998. Committees that had been formed to look into the requirements of setting up the home reported on progress.[43] When committees and office bearers of the Baitul Hifaz were elected on 12 March 1998, Group members featured strongly – Ayesha Vorajee was elected vice-chairperson, Zarina Moolla was placed in charge of finance, and Fatima Patel of the kitchen. The first residents were admitted on 21 October 1998. Group members such as Sara Simjee, Shameema Mayat and Zaiboon Naidoo are involved in the home informally, and it is an involvement that has given them great satisfaction. Simjee, for example, said that she 'got to know the old-age homes through the Group…I was very laid-back in a way, but Mrs Mayat will phone, "Come and join in, we are going to this place", and now I go on my own and sit with the people and talk to them.'

Assessing the Baitul Hifazat in February 2006, Mayat wrote that it was 'rapidly being filled with the lower income group but, where the higher income group is concerned, the stigma of a family member in an old-age home

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lowers the family izzat and the persons involved would rather suffer in silence than have the lowering of the family prestige.'[44] Getting the old people's homes established was a struggle because of opposition from certain sectors of the (Muslim) community. According to Mayat,

> The old mawlanas would say, 'no orphanage, no orphanage, no old-age home – families must look after them.' Eventually they had to give up first with the orphanage because there were abandoned children – nobody looking after them – so they had to open an orphanage. The same thing with the old-age home – 'No, never, if you throw your mother and father out, you know, how you going to face God and so on'. Eventually they said, 'There's no way around it. The lifestyle is now such – people are being abandoned, rather [set up] a home.' So we started the home and some of them are very happy there.

Notwithstanding the opposition, Mayat holds firmly that the expansion of female employment and nuclear families made the old-age home inevitable. She went a step further when she submitted a proposal to the Group and the Iqraa Trust in February 2006 for a retirement village. Mayat argued in the proposal that the community had to deal with 'the plight of our elderly parents who can no longer attend to their needs'. The extended family had ensured that the old were taken care of by daughters, daughters-in-law and grandchildren. In the patriarchal nuclear family, one person had to cope with 'the whims and demands of the aged parent. The granny especially feels ignored and sidelined for the grandfather can still move around meeting friends even if it is just at the Mosque. In the midst of luxury they are starved of attention…From a commanding position they are demoted to a dependent one.' Young mothers too often felt trapped in a generational chasm as they were torn between seeing to their children and the elderly. Mayat urged the community seriously to consider establishing a retirement village:

> For over a decade some of us have been ventilating the idea of a retirement village, a place where the ageing persons can reside with others in the same situation. The complex should have a central building with a cafeteria, clinic, and space where hobbies can be pursued and socialising made comfortable…I am not asking for financing for the complex…

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> What is required is to raise the community conscience towards a problem that will soon reach a crisis point.[45]

Mayat is confident that her vision will become a reality in the not-too-distant future. In the 1930s, she pointed out, the ulema were against orphanages 'but they had to change their fatwas when the situation became acute'. They eventually conceded that old people's homes had become a necessity, 'so why not a retirement village?'

Many small-scale projects continue to be undertaken more quietly. Fatima Mayat started a soup kitchen in the late 1990s. For a few years members went to outlying areas to serve food. Due to crime and security considerations, they then began providing sandwiches, which were prepared at the Centre and sent to schools. If members are not available to make sandwhiches, the bread and fillings are supplied directly to schools. Since 2006, Safia Moosa has been collecting books for less-privileged schools. Also ongoing is the collection of clothing and utensils for refugees and shack dwellers. Sometimes the collection is for an organisation, such as the Chatsworth Hospice for its fête in 2006. The Group has supported the Imdaad Literacy project aimed at developing the literacy skills and expertise of domestic workers. It supports organisations such as the As-Salaam Private School, Phoenix Hospice, Al-Qalam Bursary and Research Fund, and others in various ways.

Speaking to members, there was a clear articulation of the view that, since they were economically comfortable, it was their duty to assist others. Third-generation member Zarina Rawat, who joined in the 1990s, did so because the charitable aspect appealed to her as she felt that it made 'life more fulfilling'. And, according to Zarina Moolla:

> Nobody's looking for any sort of status through the Group's wealth and things like that. To help people is the reason why I've probably stayed with the Group because there's a lot of transparency here...There's a lot of accountability, you know, if you take a bunch of dhania from this Group, you pay for it. And that, to me, is very important. There's no free ride, there's no gravy train here whatsoever, because even if we go for dinner say, to a restaurant, for an Eid meal and one of the Group's members decides to pick up the tab, to treat the women, we are not allowed to take it. We have to put the money into the Education Trust or into the feeding

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> scheme or something – so we would not get a benefit in the name of the organisation, you know, which I think is absolutely important. In fact my husband always says, 'If you put the Group of your women into the Parliament, you'll sort out a lot of the problems there also.'

Petitioning the state

When the then Minister of Education Naledi Pandor spoke at a Group brunch in 2005, Zuleikha Mayat addressed her, saying:

> Among the audience are equally involved persons who represent other NGOs who work *sans* publicity in the field of education, welfare and health. That is why we have asked you to motivate us to get out of our laagers and become more inclusive in our sphere of activities. We want to know from your experience the effectiveness of lobbying, the importance of involvement in local, provincial and national affairs, and how to avoid being marginalised on key issues. Perhaps you will inspire us to march with the times and not float around like debris after a storm.

The Group had, in many ways, been 'marching with the times' for years. One such occasion was when the Indian Market in Victoria Street burnt down in 1973. Many believed it to have been a case of arson organised by the City Council. The market had originally been built during the First World War and the City Council was trying to evict stallholders, as the land was required for a proposed freeway. The final eviction date was June 1973. Negotiations were under way for the vacant beer hall site next door when the market was consumed in a blaze. The City Council's position was that the market was a shopping complex and that it was under no obligation to rebuild it. The Minister of Indian Affairs issued a statement that there would be a temporary restoration of the market. On 13 April, the Women's Cultural Group formally proclaimed that temporary restoration would 'not meet with the wishes of the citizens of Durban' and called for the market to be restored because of its value as a tourist attraction; a place where poorer segments of the population could purchase their requirements at competitive prices; and because of the potential 'loss of income for stallholders, employees and their dependents'.[46] Two weeks later, the Group submitted a petition containing 10 980 signatures (broken down as follows:

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6 764 Indian, 3 075 white, 561 African, and 166 coloured, plus 264 tourists and 150 undefined) to Mayor Ron Williams, the City Council and the Minister of Indian Affairs and Tourism, Senator Owen Horwood, calling for the market to be rebuilt as a matter of urgency. The petition argued that the market

> has been a landmark historically and traditionally associated with its Indian citizens, giving to the city an individual character known internationally. As a cultural association we maintain that as a tourist attraction, the Victoria Street Market had no parallel in South Africa. Serving daily some 100 000 persons of diverse racial origins from all walks of life, it generated a colour and vitality peculiar to Durban. This made the Market a must on the itineraries of all tourists to the city. Markets like these are the very heart and soul of the cities where they are situated. Flea markets, Pettycoat Lane, Portobello and other day markets, Grand Bazaar in Istanbul, Shah Abbas in Isfahan to name just a few. These markets do not belong to the few that are running it. They belong to the city.

The petition appealed to the gendered authority of the signatories in their domestic vocation:

> As homemakers we are convinced that as a low level shopping area, the Market enabled housewives of all racial groups to combat the increasingly high cost of living, and that from under this one roof, so centrally and ideally situated near bus terminals and the Berea Road Railway station, basic commodities, fresh meat, fish, fruit and vegetables could be purchased at prices generally lower than anywhere else in Durban.

The local press photographed Zuleikha Mayat, Albertina Nguni and Josephine Thorpe of the South African Institute of Race Relations, representing a cross-racial alliance over the issue, presenting the petition to the authorities.

More recently, the Group involved itself in lobbying against South Africa's Anti-Terrorism Act. When the Department of Safety and Security introduced the draft Anti-Terrorism Bill for comment in September 2002, South African Muslims were concerned that the bill would target them, and Muslim organisations such as the Islamic Medical Association, Jamiatul Ulama in KwaZulu-Natal, the Muslim Youth Movement, the Association of Muslim Accountants and Lawyers, the Al-Ansaar Foundation and the Women's Cultural Group met

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on 16 September 2002 to formulate a response. They drew up strong submissions against the bill on the grounds that the state already had sufficient legislation to deal with the threat of terrorism. In its submission, the Group argued that the government's inability to deal with bombings and killings in the Western Cape (which were blamed on an organisation known as People against Gangsterism and Drugs), the 'frightening rate of crime in the country', and the AIDS pandemic had caused ministers to make accusations without proof.

> It seems we have learnt nothing from the McCarthy era, nor from the dark days of apartheid, nor from other lessons of history (or perhaps they have!). Our learned President ought to take time to read the *The Crucible* by Arthur Miller to his Ministers so that they can be educated as to the dangers of rumour, innuendo and witch-hunts.[47]

Several human rights organisations, the Congress of South African Trade Unions and the Freedom of Expression Institute also opposed the draft bill on the grounds that it would curtail civil liberties guaranteed by the constitution.[48] The government refused to discard the bill but made amendments and a revised version, taking cognisance of some of the objections, was eventually passed in November 2004. The importance of this process is that it drew Muslims into organised lobbying over a national issue, albeit one that was perceived to be a direct threat to Muslims.[49]

Following the 9/11 attack on the World Trade Center in New York, then US President George Bush declared an indefinite 'War on Terror', which included the invasions of Iraq and Afghanistan, and peddled manichean narratives of good and bad which emphasised difference and division. Restrictions on civil liberties included the secret detention of citizens and non-citizens, extraordinary renditions, expanded surveillance of political and religious groups, unauthorised interception of telephone calls and emails, and the denial of habeas corpus to so-called enemy combatants at Guantanamo Bay. Zuleikha Mayat commented on some of these developments from time to time. In her annual report for June 2004, she wrote: 'we live in very interesting times, these are also very dangerous times. The onslaught from many sides on all things Islamic should alert us to the constant danger that lurks and is ready to pounce when we lower our defences. Our duas are essential but our deeds and acts are equally so.' In her speech to the AGM on 6 July 2005, she wrote that

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> the humiliation of Gauntanamo Bay, of Abu Ghuraib, of the flushing down of Qur'ans, we had to suffer side by side with the devastation of Afghanistan, Iraq with its historical sites at Kerbala and Baghdad, of the hundreds and thousands of innocent Muslimeen tortured and killed by enemies which they then cosmetically dub away as 'collateral damage'. The perpetrators enjoy peaceful sleep; we, the emotionally raped Ummah, toss and turn in our beds trying to forget the nightmares that bedevil our lives.

Another notable instance was the disappearance of Pakistani national Rashid Khalid from South Africa in 2005. Khalid was a resident of Estcourt, a small town in KwaZulu-Natal. This particular case caught the public headlines because of the South African government's role in the alleged extraordinary rendition. Khalid was arrested by heavily armed men in the middle of the night, whisked off to Pretoria and handed over to Pakistani authorities, resurfacing in a Pakistani court in 2007, where he was cleared of all charges.[50] Mayat wrote in her annual report on 14 June 2006:

> From our own doorstep a young man has disappeared. Some unknown flight, manned by unknown persons has flown him to an unknown destination. What torture he must be enduring at the hands of those that perpetuated the rendition can be imagined. A Christian Bush and a Christian Blair are the prime suspects and our own Government seems to have danced to the tune of these pipe masters. If anyone deserves a Nobel Prize then it is Mr [Zahir] Omar, the lawyer who has put his life in danger in bringing the case to the attention of the world.

In 2009, the Group involved itself in the national debate over the possible implementation of Muslim personal law, which would be based on shariah law. During the transition to non-racial democracy in 1994, some Muslims called for the implementation of Muslim personal law on the grounds that the South African Constitution made provision for the recognition of 'personal or family law' provided it did not contradict other provisions of the Constitution. The government established a Muslim Personal Law Board, but nothing came of that. On 6 July 1995 Zuleikha Mayat wrote to the Minister of Justice, Dullah Omar, that the Group, as an 'organisation concerned with Community Affairs', had

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> closely followed the proceedings of the Muslim Personal Law Board (now dissolved) and the current technical committee that is attempting to get it back on track…As far as women are concerned there are several aspects that we find most disturbing…[and] need to have discussions with you. For that reason, and many others of course, we are requesting that you accept our invitation to come to Durban.

Dullah Omar was unable to accept the invitation but the issue remained of concern to the Group.

In March 1999, a Project Committee of the South African Law Reform Commission was appointed under supreme court Judge Mohamed Navsa to draft an Islamic Marriages Bill. The Committee issued discussion papers in May 2000 and December 2001 and, after three years of extensive deliberations with South African Muslims, a report was presented to Justice Minister Penuell Maduna in July 2003.[51] The report, popularly known as the Draft Bill on Islamic Marriages, has not been ratified because of differences among Muslims that created much contestation. The ulema consider the draft bill too liberal, while many women's rights groups feel that it gives too much leeway to men. As Waheeda Amien points out, 'The draft legislation can be described as a product of compromise between extreme views, the internal dynamics within the Committee regarding gender composition and political leanings, and the external pressures by the clergy.'[52] The law would be optional as couples would have to register to have the bill apply to them. The result has been a stalemate without an imminent resolution.

In May 2009, a South African NGO, the Women's Legal Centre Trust, argued in the Constitutional Court that Parliament and the president were required by the Constitution to 'prepare, initiate and enact' legislation to recognise Muslim marriages. The Trust's lawyer, Andrew Breitenbach, told reporters that they had taken the matter to court because Muslim women who married under shariah law were prejudiced in the absence of regulatory bodies to rule over issues such as divorce.[53] Shameema Mayat submitted a twenty-page memorandum on behalf of the Women's Cultural Group on 20 April 2009 – acting as as a 'Friend of the Court'. She argued that while the Group agreed that there was a 'dire need' for legislation, because of the fundamental differences among Muslims it would be 'reckless to simply set a time frame for an Act to be promulgated'.

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She continued that the draft bill had

> caused great animosity and acrimony, and huge rifts within the Muslim community…Any attempt at steamrolling through such legislation is short-sighted and may in fact result in no legislation being passed at all…The Women's Cultural Group fully supports the process for appropriate legislation recognising Muslim marriages and their consequences. Such legislation will be subservient to our Constitution and must be premised on full freedom of choice for existing and prospective Muslim marriages.

On 20 May 2009, the Constitutional Court narrowed its argument to two issues – whether it could instruct the president or Parliament in terms of law-making, and whether it should be the first court to hear the matter – and reserved judgement.[54] At the time of writing (March 2010), the question of Muslim personal law had not been resolved and in the absence of a statutory framework where Muslims are married according to religious rather than civil law, disputes are settled on a case-by-case basis, often to the detriment of the woman concerned.

Notwithstanding intense debates about the efficacy and purpose of philanthropy, philanthropic work was important in the Women's Cultural Group's self-definition and that of many of its members. It drew them into the wider community and caused them to experience aspects of urban life that, as middle-class women, may otherwise have escaped them. This impacted emotionally on some members. As the president's annual report dated 14 June 1978 recorded: 'Remember that unforgettable moment when we visited the Spes Nova School. We were impressed and touched with the love and dedication of each person involved in the caring of the handicapped. Mr Desai's words are still ringing in my ears: "Your Group's first R1000 started this school".' There were many such moments. The fact that members identified with the Group's objectives and derived affective satisfaction from charitable activities made it easier to get involved.

While most of their civic labour was humanitarian in nature, the Women's Cultural Group engaged in overt political action on occasion, drawing upon their moral weight as women, as ratepayers and – more recently – upon their identity as Muslims to level their petitions.

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8
HAVEN OF OUR DREAMS

A brochure, produced in 1991, depicts an attractive sketch of a building fronted by pillars and graceful archways. A hybrid of modern glasswork and traditional Islamic architecture, it is surrounded by gardens, and shows three figures approaching a sweep of steps to doorways where others are gathered. A car is parked outside. The title reads 'Women's Cultural Group Activity Centre'.

On the spread of pages inside is a floor plan for the ground level, with a legend that indicates its divisions of space: a large hall or multi-purpose room is its central and largest feature; to one side a kitchen, scullery, pantry, office and store. At the back of the building are toilets and a designated space for making wudhu. A facility where family members could prepare the bodies of loved ones for burial, to give them proper ghusl and to cover them in the kafan, is also represented in this blueprint – families living in urban flats do not often have proper spaces for this crucial religious practice. The text explains that this facility, so long a dream of the Women's Cultural Group, 'will soon become a reality'.

> For many years we in the Women's Cultural Group have dreamt…of a venue where women of all ages could meet to socialise, improve our talents and use them for the good of the community. We dreamed of pleasant surroundings where grandmothers, mothers and daughters could

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> spend a few happy hours away from the stress and cares of a household; where the young could benefit from the experience of elders; and where elders could share in the vision and aspirations of the growing generations. Where together all could work for a happier, stronger Community.
>
> This haven of our dreams should be such where we could expand our minds, develop our physiques, give nimbleness to our fingers, where our daughters could exercise and work under the watchful eyes of grannies who would be there to impart Community values to them. The discipline that Dadimas and Nanimas can exercise is too valuable to forgo.

The brochure was not merely informational; it was a plea for community support, both financial and ideological. It appealed specifically to growing Muslim concerns: the discipline of daughters, the ideal of gendered spaces, the centrality of family, the importance of generational continuity. It offered the community a positive solution to the problem of changing values and social relations. Islamic guidance classes would be offered, along with cooking instruction for younger women. 'And not to forget the grannies, they will have their own Granny Club where once a week they will get together for an interesting lecture or programme.'

A space had already been acquired with the help of members of the Orient Old Boys Club and it only remained for the building to be 'restored, renovated and equipped'. Yet the story of optimism and grand schemes portrayed in this narrative was, in reality, more complicated. The ideal of such an activity centre for women had indeed been a vision of many years, even decades – but had already been scaled down by the time this pamphlet was produced and the appeal to conservative community-based concerns was an indication of a new political climate.

The story of the Women's Cultural Group's quest for institutional space reveals how the world around them was changing in a variety of ways. The centre that would finally come into existence would not be the grand facility that its designers had originally imagined and plans for a ghusl, gym, swimming pool, crèche and regular educational programmes would be abandoned. With the end of apartheid and the rush of global investment, recreational spaces and opportunities for self-development were opening up for women. At the same time, conservative elements within the Muslim community wanted to exert

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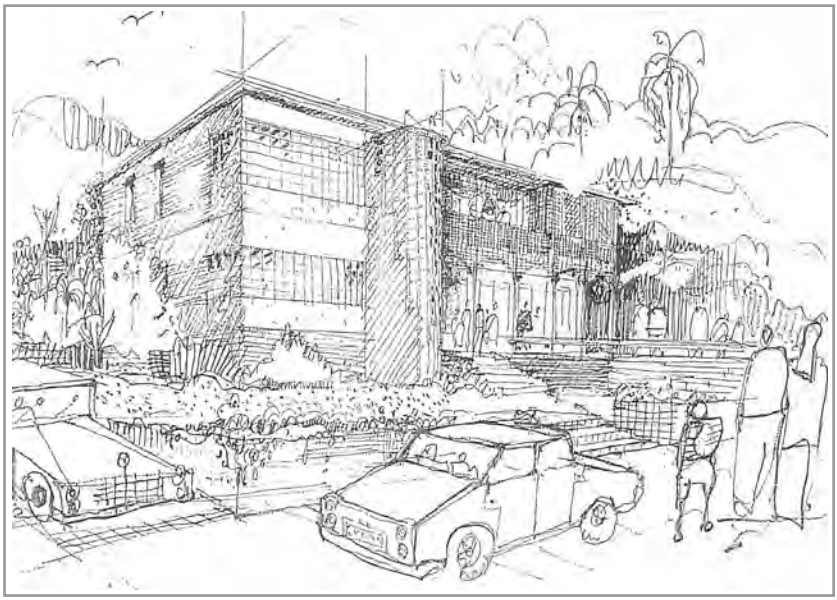

An artist's impression of the planned Women's Cultural Group Activity Centre.

more control over girls and women, pushing gender relations against the directions championed by the original modernist, liberal orientation of the Group. Local politics certainly played a role in circumscribing their vision and reach. The centre that was finally established would be fully adequate for co-ordinating many of the tasks that were becoming more central in their work – the Educational Trust, fundraising luncheons, and meetings. But the loss of the original dream meant a curtailing of the Group's potential impact as a community resource and intellectual influence.

Early reveries

By the end of the 1970s, success with *Indian Delights* had laid the basis for financial security for the Women's Cultural Group. Just as importantly, Group members now found themselves equipped with experiences and skills that contributed both to their collective levels of confidence and a new, professionalised sense of themselves and their mission. Fixed in the limelight of culinary expertise, and having proved their philanthropic efficacy in valued domains of

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community life, more and more women were joining the Group. Their membership was growing and so were their aspirations. The Group began to work towards the idea of establishing a special, centralised space of their own. They dreamed of building a publicly located base where they could hold meetings, fundraising events, cooking classes, lectures and a range of other activities.

One indication that the Group was awakening to a new orientation for themselves was their acquisition of a postbox. At a committee meeting in January 1979, it was resolved that the Group would notify the public that its correspondence would no longer be sent to Sayani and Co., the business address of Zohra Moosa's husband, but should rather be directed to their own postal address in Westville. Members were instructed to destroy old letterheads, while other bureaucratic efficiencies were urged: all letters written in connection with the Group were now to be duplicated; and one of the two secretaries would attend every meeting.

The Group began applying its collective mind to the prospect of obtaining a formal centre and meeting space, and to the benefits that such an expansion represented. Since the Group's inception, meetings had been held in private homes. In the 1950s, the clustering of Group membership in neighbourhoods close to the central business district meant minimal travel for the majority of members. That only a few women drove cars in this period did not pose much of a practical problem: some women walked, while others were conveyed by male family members or formed lift clubs. In 1957, 'Fahmida' reported that 'the Durban Women's Cultural Group has decided to hold all its monthly meetings…at the Kajee Hall in future. Time 8pm. Most members will find this venue more suitable as it is centrally situated and in any case the membership is now too big to use private homes as was the habit in the past.'[1] With the Group Areas Act taking effect in the 1960s, Indian families were scattered outside the municipal centre. Members moved to Westville, Reservoir Hills and Clare Estate, dramatically expanding the distances between respective homes. By this time, however, more women drove cars and so could independently organise transport, though there were difficulties for some. Gori Patel, for example, an active early member, now lived in Mobeni Heights and did not drive. Widowed in the late 1980s, she found herself somewhat hesitant to continuously impose on her willing-but-busy daughter-in-law. Even though meetings were held monthly, not everyone could attend every meeting.

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Within the pattern of daily life, evenings had long proved to be the most convenient time for members to meet. Nafisa Jeewa explained, 'It was after your daily chores, your husband was back from work, you had given him his dinner, so everybody was relaxed by then.' For women who held jobs in the formal economy – lawyer Zubeida Seedat, for example – evening meetings were the only option for regular participation.

Into the 1960s members again took turns to host monthly meetings, with two other members elected to assist the 'lady of the house'. The home environment allowed a sense of intimacy and informality to infuse the gathering – a meeting of friends as much as of associates. Many enjoyed the social ease of being a guest and welcomed the responsibility of hospitality as a chance to exercise their homemaking prowess. Yet the demands of hospitality could also create anxieties. Jeewa recounts that

> as the Group grew we found there was still a bit of a competition. If it was held in my home and I just served tea, right, and maybe Tennis biscuits or Marie biscuits, [and then next month] you had the meeting in your home but then you have samoosas and pies and a freshly baked chocolate cake, etc., right? So now I'm going to say, 'Oh my God, I just put Tennis biscuits on the table!' and I look at this and everybody would be digging into the food…Then, when it was time to have the next meeting and we said, 'Right, members, who's going to take the next turn?' and people were reluctant, because it was like a competition. And everybody couldn't afford everything. Some people don't mind digging a hole in their pocket, others do.

Shyness about 'measuring up' to perceived standards, either stylistic or economic, was not the only daunting prospect for the would-be hostess. When Nafisa Jeewa joined the Group, there were 'maybe just about twenty to twenty-five members in the Group at that stage – so it was easy to have a meeting in somebody's home'. But growing membership meant that this became more difficult. Zuleikha Mayat remembers: 'We had at one stage about a hundred members. I couldn't accommodate them in the home anymore. They all didn't turn up [every time], but when you had a big function and you wanted [all of them there], it was really very desperate.'

The desire for a formal, centralised space to hold meetings had been present almost from the outset of the Group's formation, concomitant with the same

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impulses that had inspired its founding. A key motivation was the idea of creating a space in which women could come together to be in a social setting outside of the domain of family, somewhere that would enable more young women to be actively engaged and involved. Such a development would be a resource for women in their quest for personal development, the rationale being, according to Mayat, that

> if we had some outlet for the women, it would really expand their minds. Even physically they would be more active. So you could have a tennis court as some women were already playing tennis at the Moosas' tennis court…swimming [as] some of us had already started swimming lessons. So we thought, 'Let's get a centre of our own where we can do all these things privately.'

Privacy meant a space just for women and it meant two more specific things: firstly, a space that addressed customary concerns for gendered seclusion in order that more Muslim women (especially those who felt isolated) could be drawn out. Fatima Meer explained, in the Group's 35th anniversary brochure, that for Group members 'the social reality is that our lives are circumscribed by our ideology, our religion, our ritual, our neighbourhood; and the choice is usually between remaining family bound or stepping out and forming associations with those easily accessable to us'. The activity centre was envisioned by the Group to be an accessible and secure environment for the 'stepping out' of future generations of women. Secondly, a 'private' space would allow married women some independence from the social circles of patrilocal, extended family settings in which they lived, and, for unmarried women, a legitimate space away from parental households. Mayat explained that for her generation particularly, the pressures on married women to be involved in the same social set as one's mother-in-law and aunts could be quite intense:

> Women certainly needed [independent] space. We were all supposed to be little clones of our mothers-in-law in those days. Their friends were your friends. Their circle was your circle. Their activities were your activities. You were just fitted into that group. And when you tried to kick [over] the traces it caused unhappiness in the homes.

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The emphasis on inter-generational female ties could, for many women, pose a challenge to developing intra-generational friendships. As indicated in Chapter Two, Group founders actively sought out friends within their own age-sets, a peer group that could come together to discuss similar concerns and experiences. Finding space for such relationships to flourish had been an important motivation for forming the Group: it also featured in the desire for a centre where activities and involvements could take place in a 'home away from home'.

In the mid-1970s, what had been pondered for years as a dream began to be pursued as a necessity 'because of the growth in membership and the interest of new members wanting to come in, wanting to do new things and we didn't have really the facility for that', according to Mayat. Over the following decade, the centre that emerged in the mind's eye of the Group would incorporate many functions and many facilities. Possibilities opened and closed regularly through the 1980s, but the quest for a centre was a persistent theme. This quest constitutes an important aspect of the Group's history, one in which failures and disappointments are as instructive as successes. Ironically, by the time the Group had gained all the elements and means to create their ideal 'haven of dreams', political and social changes had shifted the goalposts in two, paradoxical ways. On the one hand, in the mainstream, gender and racial politics had altered, creating more opportunities for Indian women in various public arenas, including the employment sector, and there was perhaps less of a need among the younger Group members for the kind of space that a centre promised. On the other hand, the local religious leadership had shifted towards a more conservative view of gender relations and of what was acceptable for women. Women from more conservative Muslim families were not likely to be successfully drawn out to a venue run by a women's collective known for its modernist views and a fifty-year-plus history of working to get women into the public domain. Crucial financial and institutional support for a centre – in which women would develop themselves educationally, economically and publicly – was not, in the end, forthcoming. The centre that was finally established had many of the most crucial facilities but it was, from many of the members' perspective, a compromise on their initial aspirations.

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Hunting and gathering

In July 1979, Zuleikha Mayat met with AM Moolla at the site of vacant land in Asherville owned by the AM Moolla Trust to investigate the possibility of building a centre there, but no transactions emerged.[2] In November of the same year, Mayat sent letters to members of the public and various Trusts conveying the Group's vision for a centre.[3] This generated a good response, with several offers of land. For example, in December, Ismail Loonat, husband of Fatima, came forward with an offer of three quarters of an acre of land to erect a building for the benefit of the Group and community at large. In June of the following year, Ayesha Motala and her husband volunteered land at no cost in Reservoir Hills. For one reason or another, nothing came out of these initial offers: either the land was unsuitable or they came with strings attached that the Group did not wish – or have the capacity – to involve itself in, such as building a retirement village. Progress was made, however, when the Group was offered land on Hendry Road at the 'special reduced price' of R15 000. After inspecting the site in May 1980, members declared it 'suitable' and purchased it.[4] The land had belonged to a Dr Logue who had been running a school for children with disabilities across the road from the vacant ground. Dr Logue had been in contact with Zuleikha Mayat and AM Moolla and agreed to sell the land on the verbal understanding that it would be used for teaching children with various disabilities.

In the meantime, the Group continued to look for appropriate built space to refurbish and use while land was being sought and funds were being raised for the centre. The most pressing need at this juncture was for a demonstration kitchen to teach cookery to people who wanted to use this skill to earn a living. So, as a temporary measure, the Group rented premises in the central business district from October 1980. The premises were to be used for instruction in cookery, as well as classes in embroidery and arts. Several members volunteered to work in the kitchen and contribute towards the rent until the enterprise was able to pay for itself.[5] The kitchen itself was far from standard, however. Zuleikha's father-in-law organised the installation of a stove and donated a lounge suite; Ebrahim Moosa, husband of a Group member, a reconditioned fridge; Khatija Mall, a pot; and Gorie Patel, curtains.[6] Additional work on the 'Delights Centre' proceeded and the plan was for an official opening in April 1981.[7] However, this did not materialise. Minutes of the April

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1981 committee meeting recorded that 'though members tried their utmost to make this venture successful, it failed to get off the ground as we could not overcome the obstacles the Health Board imposed'.

The following year, the Group was back at the drawing board, stressing at their general meeting in August 1982 that premises were required urgently because of new requests for cookery lessons. Possibilities continued to be investigated. Essop Timol, who served on several important community trusts, took some of the members on a visit to the former Crescent School in Pine Street. They reported back that it was certainly large enough, centrally situated and 'very convenient'.[8] In December, an Activity Centre Committee was constituted to communicate with Timol and architect Rodney Harber about developing the site.[9] Yet, the Group was unable to get this property on terms it could afford. Over a year later, at the end of 1983, the secretary reported that public response to Group activities continued to be 'excellent, but everybody was interested in knowing when the Group was to have its own premises!' She continued: 'For a long time now we have repeatedly tried to do something but to no avail. Let's make this our New Year's resolution that 1984 be the year to launch something new. Let's breathe some new life into this.'[10]

Yet, the search continued as 1984 came to a close. In March 1985, Mariam Moosa took the Group to view a property in Burnwood Road, but they found it to be too small. In November, Zuleikha Mayat and a few members visited premises in Dunnotar Avenue, run by Mawlana Patel. It was a house divided into two, with a large hall at the back. 'Our ladies were really sorry that we weren't able to buy the site for ourselves.'[11] The mawlana felt that the premises were too big for him and he was willing to lease part of it to the Group, but not sell it to them.[12] In March 1986, Timol once again accompanied the Group to a site on Clayton Road. However, they were offered a lease only and could not buy it outright. This, and the stipulation that the centre would have to be open to the public, an arrangement they were not keen on, caused them to reject the offer.[13]

Kitchen space

In September 1986, a Mr Sabat of the South African National Zakaat Foundation approached Laila Ally to send some members to look at their kitchen and to provide them with a list of crockery and cutlery requirements. Members informed him that they were hoping for 'top quality' fittings and utensils. It all

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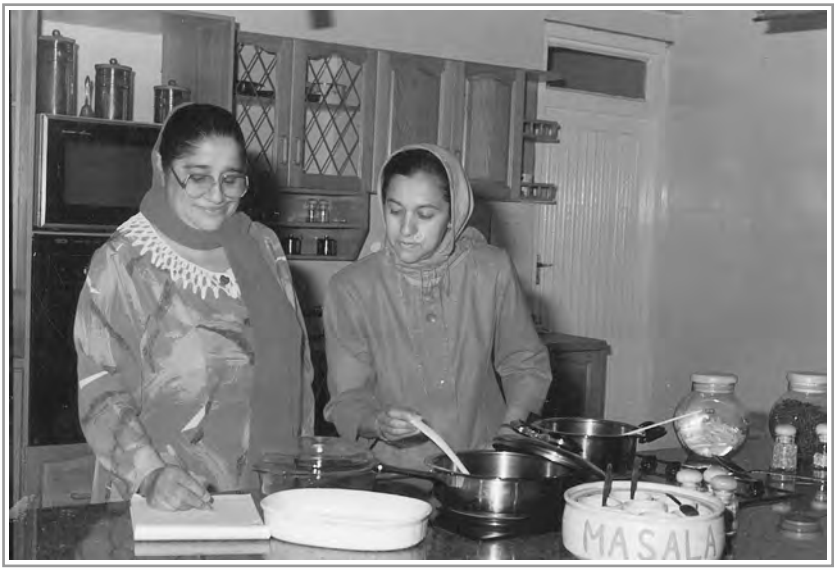

Fatima Patel and Fatima Mayat in the Centre's kitchen.

was meant to happen quickly: Laila Ally and team would make their visit on 27 September and the kitchen would be opened in mid-October.[14] However, when the Group visited, they found that this proposition was unrealistic. There was much to be done, such as installing the eye-level oven and a stove, and tiling work. Once again, members went about the business of hunting and gathering essentials. Thanks to the initiative of Mariam Motala, the Group got a set of AMC pots and a new microwave on loan for a year.[15]

The kitchen was only ready at the end of May 1987 and the first cookery lessons, a series for schoolgirls, ran in June. Several of the members took charge of the demonstrations.[16] Cooking came with religious instruction. An Islamic talk was presented to the participants before each session. The kitchen was officially opened on 10 October 1987, with AMC Classics making an official presentation of its pots. The press, representatives of various organisations, and some of the women who had contributed recipes were invited. Profits from the cookery lessons were given to the South African-based Al-Imdaad Foundation, which provided humanitarian assistance in various regions of the world.

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The Group started with a six-week course that took place each Saturday morning. A class was held for schoolgirls from nine thirty until eleven thirty in the morning and from noon to two o'clock for ladies. Both were reported to be 'progressing well, despite the inefficiency of the stove', and, in response, funds were raised and a new stove installed. Classes proved so popular that holiday sessions were added in December.[17] Another four-week course began in March 1988. Classes were also introduced for underprivileged participants free of charge. Instructors focussed on different types of food. They were paid a nominal fee but most returned the money to be put into a kitty towards the Group's persistent dream of a kitchen of their own. Classes ran for a full year, as agreed with the South African National Zakaat Fund, and were discontinued thereafter even though Zubeida Asmal, who co-ordinated the lessons and menu in conjunction with other members of the Group, urged that classes be continued because of the positive response from the public. Other members preferred doing so in their own centre.

Dreams beyond kitchens

While the kitchen was being established there was still the matter of the land that had been purchased on Hendry Road. After about a year the Group realised that it did not have the capacity to run an institution for children with disabilities and Mayat, who was on the board of the Natal Indian Cripple Care Association (NICCA), decided to sell the land to NICCA, thus fulfilling her verbal commitment to Dr Logue. Shortly thereafter, however, NICCA was offered more suitable land by VN Naik and sold the land back to the Group in 1982 for R20 000 on the verbal understanding that should the Group ever sell it, the profits would be shared with NICCA.[18] The Group decided to develop its centre on the land. By August 1985, a quantity surveyor had submitted a plan showing the contours of the land and Fatima Loonat and Zohra Moosa met with an architect to discuss their proposals. To accommodate their pocketbook in the depressed economic climate of the 1980s and to remain true to their grand vision, they considered building their centre in stages.

But while plans were being considered, a legal glitch arose. A permit was required since the land was in a 'border' segment in relation to the racially designated Group Areas, and permission had to be obtained from the City

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Council. In their appeal to the Durban City Council in March 1986, the Group explained their need for the space:

> Wishing to spare as much money as possible for Community Aid, we have all along conducted our multifold activities from members' homes. [In preparing the *Indian Delights* manuscript] the experiments in the kitchen for testing recipes, the typing, task of proofreading, the making-up of dummies for the printer, all this and much more has been done in our homes. However, the volume of work in keeping accounts, selling of books, storing books, interviewing persons, filing, is just too much. In order to carry on, we are desperately in need of a venue.

A permit was granted and a feasibility report on the site was prepared in April 1986. Because the Group intended using the centre for charitable purposes, Zubeida Seedat applied to the City Council for a rates rebate but was unsuccessful. The Group received some tempting bids from potential funders for assistance with construction, but these came with strings attached that did not fit in with the priorities and vision of the activity centre that they themselves had in mind. While they waited, members took care of the upkeep of the land, which turned out not to be a straightforward task. In February 1987, for example, they negotiated with a Mr Khan to clear the land. Yet when Nafisa Jeewa and Zuby Bobat inspected the property they reported that his work had been 'unsatisfactory'.[19] On 3 March 1988 the City Health Department sent a letter of warning to the Group that an inspection had disclosed the presence of 'a number of unauthorised shacks being used for human habitation'. Problems such as these were frustrating members.

Meanwhile, in spite of financial hold-ups, the Group was busy coming to a consensus on their vision for the centre that could be incorporated into a set of architectural plans. Members submitted written suggestions.[20] After much discussion, Zuleikha Mayat summarised a collective vision for the centre, which they hoped to make into a unique and fully equipped educational and supportive space for women, one that would also be used to convey a sense of South African Indian heritage and history. In her July 1988 presidential report, Mayat suggested that the centre would be

> a complex where mothers and children can learn and relax, so one of the units is to be a crèche where mothers can leave their children on a full-

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> time or part-time basis. Charges will be same as other crèches around town…I would like to emphasize that the complex will not only be one that embodies the activities and achievements of the Cultural Group, but it will also commemorate in some way the leading women and men who have played a role in this country and I hope that we will start right from the time of the arrival of our people here. The complex must be a museum of our people, not in a dead manner, but one that reflects its continuity. I had in mind glass-enclosed cabinets on the walls of the different units where historical papers, photographs, artifacts, etc. can be on permanent display.[21]

Nafisa Jeewa also recalls that members wanted 'a cultural centre so we have everything there – cooking, promoting culture (Indian culture – not Islamic culture – Indian culture!) and ladies could have a little outing, play table tennis or whatever, you know, that kind of thing. That was the idea. Then we said, alright, if there's a janaza, and you live in [an] apartment and you can't have it in your home, we'd use that centre for the funeral as well.'

In August 1988, Mayat presented a set of plans to a general meeting of the Group. The centre was to include a hall, a crèche, a pre-primary school, a kitchen, a jamaat khana and a ghusal khana. There would be a gymnasium, a swimming pool and a squash centre for fitness enthusiasts, squash being a game that became very popular among Indians in the 1980s. The centre was to include an 'advanced library' for research purposes, as well as a residential area with two suites. Members also felt that activities and spatial provision should be made for older members of the community who 'were feeling left out' since the growing trend towards the formation of nuclear families and working mothers left many grannies and older aunts lonely.[22]

Clearly, this was to be an enormously costly project. To raise awareness of their need among the community stakeholders who commanded resources to assist in generating the required funding, the Group held a special dinner at the (de facto men's) Orient Club on 6 September 1988. They planned with care. In fact, as Mayat would later record, 'many years of thinking had gone into this project before we approached the Community. We realised fully that the task facing us was a gigantic one. That it was not only a matter of erecting the project but the care and maintenance afterwards.'[23] According to the report of the general meeting that followed the presentation, 'an exclusive invitation list was drawn up and sent out…The meal was outstanding and the guests

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were pleasantly surprised by the layout.' Mayat addressed the audience on the future plans for the community centre. She told male listeners 'Listen, you men are allowed four wives. If we [women] give half a million, you give two million!' Architect, AR Gaffoor, outlined the plans and the session was opened to questions from the floor. The response was divided. Some in the audience were optimistic, while others were hesitant about the community investing such a large amount in a single project. They were of the view that the money could be put to better use by investing in several projects. There were suggestions too that the Group should build its centre in stages as the 'project was too big for the Group to handle'.[24] Reflecting on this period, Zuleikha Mayat has an explanation for the lukewarm response:

> You know, [the Group has] always been just a nuisance value. [Members of the Orient Club] respected me and so on – but they didn't take you that seriously. At that meeting I said, 'Look, we've got this land in Hendry Road, right? We develop it. We have the land and we've got half a million rands which we'll give from our capital.' I said, 'Now, if you men also come up with about a million or so, we can start there.' Nothing came about. The plans were drawn up. After a while, a few meetings and so on and phoning them all the time, nothing came of it. Their co-operation was lethargic, they murmured that the women would never be able to run the proposed centre, there were even innuendos that we take on some males as trustees. Then they came up with a [new] plan [saying], 'Why do you want to go and *build* a centre? This [other property] Mariam Bee Sultan [with existing buildings] is available, we'll get that for you.'

But Mayat did not leave the matter there. Following the meeting she contacted some members of the Orient Club individually and was encouraged by them to proceed with the Group's existing plans. Another geographical survey of the land was carried out and Group members agreed to hold regular workshops to explain the building, administration and programmes to the public.[25] Mayat opposed the suggestion to stagger the development as she felt that it would 'hamper the entire concept'.[26]

In February 1989 the Group Areas permit expired and the Group was required to apply for a new permit. At the same time they received an offer of purchase for the land and they briefly considered selling it and then renting a

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different site. Three members accompanied Essop Timol in March 1989 to view land that was available in Clayton Road but the property was found to be too small. In May, the land in Hendry Road was finally transferred to the Group. In September, Zuleikha Mayat wrote to the City Council to try once again to get the rates waived. Although the Group provided a comprehensive explanation of past activities, and emphasised that the centre was an education and community centre, the appeal was rejected for a second time.[27]

At a general meeting in October 1989, the Group resolved to raise funds for the Hendry Road development, which the municipality had valued at R97 000. Things looked positive in this direction. They approached Essop Randeree, who gave his blessing and agreed to assist with fundraising. The support of well-connected men such as Yusuf Lockhat, AM Moolla, Essop Timol and Essop Randeree was necessary for the Group to successfully procure funds as their confidence and affirmation assured other contributors that the project was legitimate, above board and worthy. The Muslim Charitable Foundation, an organisation formed in Durban in 1982 to co-ordinate charitable projects and ensure that fundraisers were bona fide, gave the Group a letter of recommendation for the fundraising drive after interviewing Shairbanu Lockhat, Fatima Loonat and Zuleikha Mayat. The Hafisa Mayat Trust agreed to donate R50 000 and the AM Moolla Charitable Trust pledged R10 000.[28]

However, when the committee met again in November 1989, it was clear that many Group members had begun to have second thoughts because most of the major players in the Muslim community hedged on giving their full support. The pledges, while substantial, fell far short of the requirements. Zohra Moosa warned that to undertake 'such a big project was too much' and that the Group should settle for something more modest. She suggested that a hall with a properly equipped kitchen, which could be hired out, was sufficient to their basic and immediate needs.[29] As Zuleikha Mayat explained, she valued this counsel as 'Zohra is a very, very, good thinking person and moderate, so she would come up with that [idea].'

Some members, however, still favoured a full-scale centre. But when the architect went ahead and advertised the project in local newspapers in February 1990, as required by law, there were several objections from white residents in the area and the matter had to be placed before the City Council for discussion. Meanwhile, Zuleikha Mayat continued to approach possible

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funders but failed to secure firm commitments of a substantial nature.[30] At the Group's AGM in July 1990, Mayat made an impassioned plea linking the activity centre to the legacy of the Group. After outlining the achievements of the Group, she added:

> I mention all this not to boast but to give you, the members, pride in your own work. To make you remember what a magnificent contribution you have played in Community and National life. If this were to go overboard and forgotten then it will indeed be a pity. Should you decide to carry on in the proposed Activity Centre you will go down in the history of Durban. It is up to you what you wish to do in the future years.

In November 1990, Mayat met with local sporting icon Yacoob Omar, the husband of Hajira Omar, and secured his help to organise a golf tournament to raise funds for the centre. They attracted fifteen players, secured sponsors for each hole, and sold pre-packed lunches at the tournament, which took place at the Papwa Sewgolam Gold Course on 2 February 1991. The February 1991 meeting reported that the tournament was 'a very successful event and it went off very well', with a profit of R13 915 made. A joint Group effort and community support was crucial for this success. Reward also came in the form of appreciation from the public. One participant, a Dr NM Jugmohan, wrote to the Group on 3 February 1991:

> Golf is a game of ecstasy. One has to play it to experience this emotion. However, when it is married to a noble cause as yours, this ecstasy reaches new heights. I, on behalf of all the participants in your prestigious tournament, wish to thank you and your tireless workers for providing us with a wonderful opportunity to share in your glory. Women's Cultural Group…take a bow!'

At a monthly meeting of the Group in December 1990, Mayat reported that members had visited a site belonging to the Muslim Youth Movement in Roslynn Avenue with architect Rodney Harber. The inspection team felt that although the land was smaller than the Hendry Road property, the gradient was level and therefore it would be cheaper to build on. The Group debated swapping its Hendry Road plot for the one in Roslynn Avenue and building a more modest structure. Mayat worked feverishly on the project. She met with Baboo

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Jadwat of the Muslim Youth Movement, as well as the Orient Islamic Trust and the Orient Old Boys to ask them to assist financially with the building of the gymnasium and swimming pool. Some bargaining resulted in an understanding that women would use the facilities during the day and the men at night.[31] Harber presented a set of sketches in early January 1991 and yet another collection drive was launched. Essop Randeree got involved once again and went around with the women on their collection drive. Mariam Motala, Khurshid Nadvi, Khulsoom Moosa and Zuleikha Mayat were to visit women in their respective areas to secure pledges of R50 or R100 per month to make up R1 000 from each contributor. Mayat prepared brochures that illustrated their plans.[32]

There was yet another setback in August 1991 when the Orient Old Boys decided not to participate in the Roslynn Avenue project after all and proposed an alternative. This decision was finally conveyed to the Group in response to a letter that Zuleikha Mayat had sent a few months earlier, on 20 April 1991, to AK Lockhat, in his capacity as president of the Orient Old Boys, in which she questioned the Orient Club's commitment:

> Future income and expenditure on maintenance of centre was discussed in detail [by the Group] and it seemed that it could be feasible and viable to proceed. There are two questions that have perplexed me personally. After all that quizzing from your members, I have not been able to fathom to what extent the Orient Old Boys will be helping with the fundraising for building, and what income generating programme they would undertake once the Centre becomes operable. These are questions that my members will be asking and you will agree that they are pertinent. Perhaps you could verify from your members at one of your meetings.

Once the Orient Old Boys had clarified its position, members recognised that it was becoming increasingly difficult to realise their dream in a manner that would secure the activity centre as an independent Group-controlled outfit. Members did not wish to tie up the bulk of their energies and finances into a project that would be a compromise of their autonomy and vision. At the AGM in September 1991, the Group decided not to proceed with the project under these circumstances. They also felt that they 'owed it to the community

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not to allow the magnanimity of the Sultan family to go to waste'. This was a reference to ML Sultan, who had arrived as an indentured worker in 1893 and accumulated wealth through banana and tobacco farming. After the death of his wife, he created the Mariam Bee Sultan Trust in 1932 in her memory. His family contributed to numerous educational and social welfare projects, including the ML Sultan Technical College and the school in Kenilworth Road which had become dilapidated through disuse and was now being offered to the Group. The Group had already collected funds for the activity centre and had to decide what to do with it. Following the AGM, Mayat wrote to donors on 16 September 1991 outlining the reasons for putting the project on hold:

> Knowing that we did not have the woman power to tackle the task on our own, we approached several of our Societies which were involved in activities similar to ours. Unhappily some never had the time to meet us. Those that did, after several meetings, came to the conclusion that they too could not commit their members for the maintenance of the complex in future years. Most organisations that depend on voluntary help are faced with the problem of too much work and not enough hands coming forward to help on an ongoing basis. Besides the above, in all honesty we must admit that our timidity in collecting funds from the public has now brought about an embarrassing situation. The Women's Cultural Group has always taken pride in the fact that unlike other societies who depend on the public, we have always generated our own funds. Alhamdolillah, over the 40 years we have managed this by our own efforts. In this our first major effort at collecting funds, we found to the credit of our Community that they responded generously. If it did not come up to our expectations it is merely that our efforts were not aggressive enough. We know that you will understand our embarrassment at having to declare that we are not proceeding with our Centre, a Centre that despite our decision will be of vital necessity in the future when the coming generations will be faced with a barrage of challenges and an increasing erosion of our values.

Mayat said that the Group did not 'consider it appropriate to retain the money you donated' and they were willing to return it, but asked benefactors to consider donating their monies towards the Bursary Fund, which the Group

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was hoping to increase to R1 million. 'Should you entrust us with your money, you can rest assured that we will be helping the right people.' There was an overwhelmingly positive response to this appeal.

Mariam Bee Sultan School

While pulling out of the Asherville project, the Orient Old Boys proposed that the Group lease the Mariam Bee Sultan School in Kenilworth Road. The Group decided to accept the offer because the Hendry Road property was costing over R2 000 per month to maintain and they had received warnings from the city police that criminal charges against the Group were imminent because squatters were encroaching on the property.[33] The land was sold in August 1993 for R200 000. As had been agreed verbally, profits from the sale were shared equally with NICCA.

After inspecting the proposed premises in Kenilworth Road, Zuleikha Mayat reported in February 1992 that the various buildings were in a derelict state and that extensive renovations were required. The only condition stipulated by the Sultan Trust was that the dawah classes and the madrassah run in the building at the back would be continued.[34] When negotiating a lease the Group had understood this to be a joint project with the Orient Old Boys. At a meeting with Orient Old Boys and the Sultan Trust in March 1992, however, it became clear that the Group would have to fund the entire project. The trustees of the ML Sultan Trust emphasised that the premises were to be used solely for Islamic purposes and that the 'image of the place must conform to Islamic standards. No social functions were to be held there.' Mayat informed the Old Boys' representatives that as the Group had thought that this was to be a joint venture, they would have to (re)consider their involvement.[35] Following the meeting the Group wrote to AK Lockhat on 11 March 1992:

> The Sunday meeting has shaken my confidence. We were completely thrown off balance when Mr Abdullah said that the only consideration was to be what the Group proposed to do at the premises and that the financing of it was not on the agenda. Meeting was hurriedly terminated for on my part I just could not fathom how such a gap in the understanding between two parties could emerge. I came home with two committee members. We did not discuss the meeting at all even though sub-

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> consciously that was uppermost in our minds…I discussed the matter with members of my committee. Unanimously the verdict is that our perception all along has been that the Sultan Trust premises was to be a joint responsibility and you will recall that both at meetings and in telephone calls the words 'joint responsibility' had often been uttered.

They angled their argument with potently gendered metaphors:

> To us joint responsibility means just that. In other words, like a marriage partnership the two units together see to the welfare of the task at hand. In our minds we accepted that the premises revolving around, so to say, domestic issues, its day-to-day programmes, would be under our charge. Mothers do that all the time and mothers nowadays also subsidise family income, therefore we are prepared to pay not just our share towards the project but to go beyond that. The total assumption of the financial burden by us was not on our agenda…In reporting on where matters stand at the moment Mrs Nadvi requested that we get the Orient Old Boys commitment in writing. This is completely in keeping with Qur'anic hidayah, but I turned this request down saying: 'Khursheed, these are our sons. We know whom we are dealing with so there is no need for written attestation'…We continued to assume joint responsibility because you would in effect be helping the community.
>
> Should we commit the Education Trust funds into the Sultan project, just to see it slowly becoming anaemic like the Mariam Bee Trust, and we are left with somebody else's property to look after and no funds to continue? You may want to know – would this not have happened with the Hendry Road project? Emphatically *no*! With the prestigious building we envisaged…all the multifarious facilities would have ensured full occupancy. Its popularity would be an advertisement itself and the number of persons using it would have generated income necessary to keep it alive…We benefit the community through the activities of the Group. Like the Old Boys we only have the back[aches] and headaches and no fringe benefits to any of us.[36]

Mayat explained that the money they had raised for the building of the centre in Hendry Road was invested in the Educational Trust. They could not use that

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money at Mariam Bee because these were to be leased premises. She appealed, as well, to the growing paternalistic concern in the religious community around young women and implied that it was appropriate for a women's group to be addressing this through a special centre, writing: 'We wished to give something concrete to the Community, something that is going to be sorely needed for the hifazat of our daughters in the future years.'

Lockhat replied on 23 March 1992 that the Orient Old Boys was 'committed to assisting' but that the organisation's 'involvement will entail assistance in administration, maintenance, fundraising in respect of the physical plant…The "ownership" of the project must, and has always, rested with the Women's Cultural Group and that we merely assisted and acted as the catalyst in expediting your interests.'

'Ownership' settled, Mayat visited the site with a builder in May and estimated that renovations would cost around R150 000. The Group had already set aside R17 000 and the Educational Trust R13 000 for this purpose. There was much discussion among members at their meeting in May as to what to include, and especially whether a kitchen was viable, given the cost of building one. It was eventually agreed that although expensive, a kitchen could be turned into an income-generating enterprise. While the Hendry Road project was to have been an Educational Trust project, the proposed Mariam Bee project was designated as a Group project so as not to be excessively dependent on the Trust.[37]

A committee was tasked to write to the Department of Health and the Licensing Department and begin raising funds. Various fundraising projects were mooted including a jumble sale, a 'Ladies Morning' that would include guest speakers, a fashion show, yoga demonstrations, and finger lunch. Additionally, a dinner was proposed for September 1992, when, it was hoped (in vain as it turned out), visiting Pakistani cricketer Imran Khan would be a drawcard.[38] In negotiating with the South African Cricket Board, Mayat wrote:

> Wishing to spare as much money as possible for the needs of others, our Group members have deprived themselves of the comfort of an office, of the assistance of paid clerks. All the work entailed with compiling recipe books, typing, proofreading, scrutinising the over four thousand applications we receive from students asking for assistance, the selling of books,

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> etc., has been conducted from our homes and no member has ever been paid. All work is by voluntary help from members. We desperately need an administration centre and a cookery-teaching kitchen (which work too was conducted from our kitchens). We have most generously been given a doublestoried school, free of charge for twenty-five years. This building whilst very soundly built has been badly neglected and to renovate and furnish it is going to cost a lot of money. If we take the money from our bursary fund it will mean that no students will receive help for a few years. Therefore we are working the soles off our shoes to obtain more funds for our other projects.[39]

In March 1993, Group members visited thirty-two homes in Westville alone to raise funds. Groups of women also visited potential donors in other areas. A Ladies' Morning was also held in March at the Truro Hall, where the guest speakers were Zubeida Seedat and Shairbanu Sacoor. It was mainly members who ran the event while former members and other women in the community who had excelled professionally were usually given an opportunity to address such gatherings. A jumble sale was held at the West Street flea market in August. Another jumble sale on 31 October 1993 at the churchyard in Lorne Street raised over R1 200. A qawwali function at the Truro Hall made a net profit of R2 000 in December 1993. This was followed by a ladies-only fundraising lunch at the Truro Hall in January 1994, where the guest speakers included Shoaib Omar, who spoke on Islamic law, and dermatologist Dr Zubie Hamid. There were also talks on aromatherapy and reflexology. The minutes of the February general meeting described the luncheon as 'a really lovely function and was a fantastic success. Group members have to be commended for all the hard work they put in before and after the event. The guests were very pleased with the sumptuous menu, guest speakers and the free skin care products which were given to them.' A net profit of R15 000 was made. While fundraising was proceeding smoothly, plans for the centre, unsurprisingly given their history, did not pan out as hoped.

The Mariam Bee Sultan Trust complex consisted of a two-storey school building and a large cottage at the back that had been used as a madrassah. The lease for the building was secured for twenty-five years and that for the cottage for ten years. It was initially envisioned that the Women's Cultural Group and Educational Trust would use the offices on the top floor for administrative

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purposes, with the Trust subsidising the running costs of the Group for a maximum of R1 000 per month. The lower floor of the building and the ablution block was to be known as the Women's Cultural Group Activity Centre and was to be used to organise community programmes, including cooking classes. A memorandum prepared by Zuleikha Mayat for the Group in January 1994, however, expressed disappointment at the outcome:

> At last we are in a position to assess what programmes can be put up in the activity centre. First the bad news: instead of a cottage and a double-storied building we are left with truncated premises consisting of the Madrassah ground floor and the Jamaat Khana area on the top of our office/cum storeroom/cum consultation room. How did this come about?

That is a long and complicated story, as the Group was forced into sharing the premises with the Islamic Medical Association (IMA) and the Al-Ansaar Trust. The IMA was also looking for premises and in September 1992 the Group met with the IMA and Orient Old Boys and agreed in principle that the Group would enter into a lease with the Sultan Trust, and draw up a separate agreement with the IMA for use of part of the premises. It was also agreed that all the organisations would be involved in raising funds for the refurbishments. The centre would be known as the Mariam Bee Sultan Centre, with the Group's section known as the Women's Cultural Group Activity Centre.[40] While these negotiations were going on, according to Zuleikha Mayat:

> I got there one day and saw the cottage being used [by someone else]… [They were] putting things up and I said, 'What's wrong?' A member of Orient Old Boys was there and he said, 'Oh, they're going to have a madrassah there.' I said, 'But we've taken this on.' He said, 'But how can you do all this and part of [the agreement] was there must be a madrassah around here.' Alright, and [these newcomers were] also doing good work so we allowed that. [And] next thing is they've given the top floor to the IMA!

According to Mayat, AK Lockhat and Solly Suleman persuaded the Group to agree to the scheme 'in the interests of the community'. The Group felt pressured to agree because the Al-Ansaar Trust had lost its tenancy in Essendene Road, where it had been operating a madrassah. In terms of the agreement reached

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in 1992, the IMA was to share the upper floor of the building with the Group while the Al-Ansaar Trust would conduct a madrassah and nursery school in the cottage. The Group tried unsuccessfully to secure two rooms of the cottage for an office and a storage room. The Group sub-leased the properties to the IMA and Al-Ansaar Trust on the same basis that it leased them from the Sultan Trust. The IMA could use the premises until the expiry of the lease on 30 June 2017 and in the event of an extension of the lease, for the duration of the extended period. A Group memorandum dated January 1994 explained the complex and complicated negotiations and alluded to the strain that this put on the Group: 'intense pressure was applied on the Women's Cultural Group at meeting after meeting…[Eventually] Mr AK Lockhat, addressing Mrs Z Mayat in particular, his very words: "Bhaboo, I want to ask you a special favour. Please give half your office space to the IMA." With great reluctance, and really just to push the record off the track, where it had got stuck for so long, we agreed. Here the saga of space and areas ended.' As a result of this arrangement, according to Mayat, the Group was left

> with only a fraction of the space that we originally needed. Where are we to store our *Nanima's Chest*, old records for past years which by law we are required to keep (and this occupies an entire filing cabinet plus three large cartons in my garage), our three huge volumes, fifty copies each of the two editions of *Indian Delights*, the brochures, the transparencies and printing plates for *Best of Delights* and *Indian Delights* (and this occupies a large space in my linen room – this is valuable for if they are lost it will cost us something like a hundred thousand rands – not to talk of the months of hard work involved). Members must also remember that whenever we have jumbles and sales, we ask members to keep the stuff and invariably only two or three persons volunteer to do so. I am embarrassed whenever I have to ask Hafsa Mohamedy to keep our stuff for us. We must also remember that we lost a precious set of [stainless steel] pots…[41]

Reflecting on this period, Mayat believes that because the Group had become frustrated by its numerous attempts to find a suitable space, they became beholden to the Orient Old Boys for providing assistance; consequently the 'women's weaknesses were exposed. Instead of standing up we submitted!'

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Renovations began in September 1992. The work was onerous, and most of the negotiations over prices and the supervision of the renovations were done by Fatima Mayat, Ayesha Vorajee, Mana Rajah, Ayesha Solwa, Shameema Mayat and Khairunnisa Jazhbhay.[42] Many in the community assisted in various ways, according to Zuleikha Mayat. Mohamed Joosub was helpful with building materials; AK Lockhat and Solly Suleman provided advice and helped to supervise the renovations; Malls Tiles offered tiles at a special rate and contributed financially; Randeree Bros. provided a computer; Khurshid Nadvi an oven casserole set; Honey Bee an electric tava; and on and on went the list. The kitchen was a priority, but the costs remained prohibitive. Fortunately for the Group, Khairunnisa Jhazbhay 'came to the rescue and, with her husband, agreed to do the kitchen. The Group contributed to labour costs.' Dr Yakoob Jhazbhay also donated eighty upholstered chairs; Sabera Timol negotiated with Defy for the purchase of appliances such as fridges, a freezer, hob and oven; Laila Ally and Ayesha Vorajee were to get samples for tablecloths, overlays and aprons; Rabia Haffejee from the Islamic Women's Association donated a freezer; Mana Paruk donated twenty platters; Rabia Osman provided a water cooler; Khurshid Nadvi gave a set of Pyrex dishes; and Razia Haffejee donated a spice container. The involvement of community members in these little ways was crucial in getting the Centre off the ground, and access to such resources has always been significant in the successful implementation of the Group's many ventures.

Nafisa Mayat was appointed the first administrator of the Centre, which was officially opened on 11 June 1993 to coincide with the Group's 40th anniversary as well as the Eid Milan. In her speech marking the opening of the Centre, Mayat expressed gratitude to benefactors and friends, and a hope that the new space would benefit the new South African society that was coming into being with the end of apartheid:

> From the activities of the organisations housed in this complex, we hope to see to the needs of not only the Ummah but also that of all others who share this lovely country with us. May our joint activities help towards maintaining the peace and stability that we all crave for. We are living through historical times. Let us all help towards forging a just and compassionate future.

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The current Centre is not the envisioned haven of early dreamers, but it provides a practical meeting space and facilities for many activities.

When the Centre was completed, cooking classes took priority among the other activities that had been planned. Zohra Moosa, Laila Ally, Hafeza Paruk and Fatima Mayat were tasked with organising five six-week courses for the first year:

- For beginners: starting from how to cut, wash and prepare meat and vegetables for cooking, simple curries and rice dishes, simple savouries, sweets, breads and basic baking.
- Domestics: similar to beginners but oriented towards basic rice and curry dishes, how to look over things on stove or in the oven, breakfast dishes, sandwich fillings.
- Adults: planned menus revolving around dhal and rice; kitchdi and khudi; biryani; rotis and curries; breads and curries; savouries and sweets.
- Advanced: mithais, savouries, pickles, sweets, baking of breads, cakes, etc.
- Specialised: Chinese cooking; Italian, Eid menus; Diwali menus; embroidery; batik handcraft, etc.[43]

In recent years, cooking classes have become less regular, held only upon request. Reliance on volunteers is one reason for this, as Zuleikha Mayat explained:

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> It's working with voluntary helpers all the time. Sometimes you arrange a class and that particular person who was going to do [the demonstration] is not available and then she phones one of the other members and says, 'Look, I can't take it up now', so then you cancel the whole class. So unless we have a full-time person we will not be able to do that. But what we are doing at the moment – a lot of [groups] have sent batch[es] of women to be taught, so they come and we teach them.

But long-time member Fatima Patel, who conducted many cooking classes in the 1980s, points to a deeper reason – cultural changes in attitudes towards cooking – for the classes being irregular:

> Oh, we really enjoyed teaching, especially with the kids, we really enjoyed that but nowadays the kids don't want to come for classes. We tried last year [2008]. We, you know, put a feeler through the community. The kids say no, they like to eat out and they don't like cooking. The trends have changed now. There's very few of them that want to learn because this eating out business has really got into them. Even when we had the classes, the young girls would say, 'Oh, we came because our parents told us we must come, but when I get married I'll just eat out', you know, that concept many have got in them. The trend has completely changed now with this new generation of children.

The Centre is now used for the Group's monthly meetings and other administrative tasks. The hall is home to things such as Tae Bo classes for women and karate classes for underprivileged children. The kitchen is used for testing foods, occasionally for cooking demonstrations and fundraising breakfasts, or for preparing part of the menu for fundraising dinners. It is also a venue for the lectures that are periodically organised around relevant contemporary issues. While tensions between the Al-Ansaar Trust and Women's Cultural Group have occasionally flared up over space, this has largely been resolved 'behind the scenes'. As Vorajee wrote to the Al-Ansaar Trust on 17 October 2002, 'Our two organisations are, rightly or wrongly, regarded as role models in the community and we will be judged harshly if we inflame matters and get involved in ugly spats instead of displaying leadership qualities.' Overall, Group members believe that much positive has come out of the Centre. Ayesha Vorajee reflected

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The Centre's main hall (with a kitchen behind a removable panel) is the venue for luncheons, launches, dinners, lectures and meetings. Delectable food, beautifully presented, features on the agenda of every monthly meeting so that members can relax together and enjoy the fruits of their own skill and talent.

on this in a letter dated 17 October 2002 to the trustees of the Mariam Bee Sultan Charitable Trust: 'We have with the assistance of the Islamic Medical Association and Al-Ansaar Trust "resurrected" the Mariam Bee Sultan Centre, from which so much valuable work is being done…The Centre has become [a place], which all those actively involved and the Muslim community at large, can be proud of.'

Looking back

In the 1990s, the letterhead of the Women's Cultural Group bore the slogan 'Activity centre for all your needs as a woman'. Yet, in the end the Group settled for less than they had envisioned two decades earlier. They did not get

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the grand activity centre that they had had in mind, but a shadow of it; and it took a lot longer to achieve their dream than they had anticipated. Zuleikha Mayat is adamant that this delay was not due to a lack of ambition or effort on the part of members, but that the men, upon whose patronage they were sometimes forced to depend, did not believe that women were capable of running a centre of this magnitude and scale. She emphasises one single fact that played a huge role in stymieing their ambitions: the lack of resources.

> If Al Baraka [Bank] had been in operation at the time, we would have had our Centre and it would have been as successful as the Al-Ansaar is.[44] They and others have used Al Baraka money to put up their structures. At that time there was nobody who was going to give us that money. It was all just us collecting and I told you we said we were prepared to give the land plus half a million rands but we wanted men to come in with at least a million or two. We didn't get that support at all.

The failure to recruit committed and enthusiastic younger members has also been a contributory factor. As Nafisa Jeewa points out, enthusiastic younger members may not share the same sense of desire or need for the kinds of spaces and activities that a centre could offer, and therefore did not 'work in that direction…When younger members – when young girls join a group, their ideas of life [are] different.' This generational change was crucial in dampening enthusiasm for a centre. Also important is that the role of husbands within families has changed. Whereas previously most husbands spent their weekends attending sports matches or playing sport, or simply being with 'the boys', it is apparent that husbands are increasingly spending time with their families. Aside from men playing a more active role in childrearing, restaurants across the city are usually full on weekends as families dine out. Hundreds of couples can be seen at the promenade on the Durban beachfront on Sunday mornings, while the shopping malls bristle with Muslim families on Sunday afternoons. This is as much a social outing as a necessary shopping expedition, and points to changing family dynamics, which have reduced the need for a social outlet for women. Older members' commitments have also changed. Their enthusiasm and energy levels have wavered as outside commitments (to their grandchildren, for example) have increased. An additional factor is that with the end of apartheid many more

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Zuleikha Mayat has seen the talents of Group members blossom over many decades.

facilities, once the exclusive preserve of whites, are now open to Indians. Many Muslims, including women, have joined local gyms that opened in the early 1990s as well as the 'women only' gyms that have sprung up in recent years. Together, these changes made a grand Activity Centre superfluous.

Has Zuleikha Mayat any regrets about their Centre? 'No, no, no, no, we have done our thing, others have come into the scene, there's place – space for everybody. As long as the community work is on, that's fine.'

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CONCLUSION

This book tells the story of a voluntary organisation, the women who founded and developed it, and the civic and cultural work they engaged in under its banner of autonomy in South Africa's most infamously exclusionary historical period. It shows how gender, class, religion, and both generational and political change shaped the practical realities and meanings of their organisational work and collective self-understanding.

From 1954, the Women's Cultural Group has defined and pursued its vision of the social good. Marginalised in relation to formal and customary institutions of power, the Group aimed to make a contribution that would shape the life of the nation and community to which they belonged. Through an organisational form that both straddled, and made prosperous use of, the boundaries between political and non-political, secular and religious, and public and private, their history reveals an impressive range of accomplishments and successes. As brokers of culture, their agency in contributing to a local creole conception of 'Indianness' can be seen in a variety of activities and productions – plays, cookery books, poetry and music festivals, culturally themed fundraising events such as 'Oriental' dinners and 'Meena Bazaars' – that have galvanised a sense of community, inviting participation in a performance of being 'South African Indian'. Extraordinary labour in a wide range of fundraising activities and the dispersal of funds via educational bursaries and loans have made an

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impact on hundreds of individuals, and have had an even wider effect on class mobility for thousands more. Donations to charities and active involvement in welfare work have been nothing short of spectacular.

Documenting and celebrating the achievements of the Group and its work has been one important aim of this book. Dedicated civic labour, as an act of faith, duty, optimism or love, is an involvement that does not merely deserve, but also requires, more general acknowledgement, since the world continues to offer the challenges of poverty, inequality and suffering. Considered by some to be a quaint or redundant operation, especially when set against the professionalism of some non-governmental organisations which command large sums of money and trained personnel, the voluntary work of ordinary citizens and the motivations that inform collective charitable work should rather be seen as an endangered but crucial resource, a practice to be encouraged as a standard of good citizenship and self-empowerment. Seen in this light, the Women's Cultural Group provides an inspiring example.

Yet, in this book we have also presented a historical narrative with the aim of identifying some broader trends and patterns, humanised and specified through the life stories of individuals. The case of the Women's Cultural Group draws out the complex and shifting nature of the social worlds that Muslim women in Durban have inhabited over the last half of the 20th century. With women's gendered subjectivities largely defined within household structures as daughters, wives, daughters-in-laws and mothers, the Group's assertion of a civic and public agency was largely engineered as an extension of feminine roles. Some scholars have emphasised the limitations of this tactic, and the dangers to autonomy of working within (rather than challenging) patriarchally defined norms. It is certainly true that the Women's Cultural Group cannot be conceptualised within the framework of feminist movement politics, since its aim has not been to effect a deep alteration of the gendered order of power in society. Although egalitarian in orientation, the Group has benefited as an organisation from maintaining an ambiguity in regards to the overtly political world. It has situated itself within, and draws upon, local community networks and has made itself a conduit of action for the 'ordinary housewife', allowing large numbers of women to join. In this way, it has opened up a public life for many. The balance required of such an approach has, of course, sometimes created impediments to its autonomy and

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aspirations – with fraternal structures at times wielding their authority, as documented in Chapter 8. But, far from forfeiting power, it appears to be much more the case that the Group's valorisation of the domestic has in fact ensured its public standing and its remarkable longevity. This is most striking in the literary success of *Indian Delights*, an enterprise in which kitchen knowledge operated as the vanguard to economic and organisational independence, as well as national and international acclaim.

Another notable feature that emerges in this history are the complexities of class and status that have shaped Muslim life in Durban, rooted as it is in the histories of migration as well as apartheid-era engineering. Durban claims the largest diasporic Indian population outside of India, yet this population is characterised by its diversity as much as by a creolised sensibility – a sensibility developed historically in the racialised crucible of institutional discrimination and through solidarities mobilised in resistance to exclusionary governments. A number of Group members are progeny of powerful, dynastic trading families whose assets in the past included ships and chains of business enterprise linking port cities around the Indian Ocean basin. The elite ranking, entrepreneurial success and cultured worldiness of these families made them key agents in the development of Durban, despite the city's segregated, parochial character.

The Group's 'elitist' reputation, one that is sometimes invoked disparagingly by critics, has undeniably emerged from the generally middle- or upper-class socio-economic position of many members. Similarly, because of its avoidance of formal political action, it is sometimes labelled 'conservative', or cast as a society of tea-drinking ladies from the leisured classes with an interest in protecting the socio-economic status quo. But many members, including Zuleikha Mayat herself, hail from relatively modest petite bourgeois backgrounds, characterised by a strong work ethic that dictated long hours of labour for all members of the family, including children. Many were raised in modest economic conditions buffered by the strength of extended family ties, which shouldered the weight of financial losses or the death of a breadwinner. As is evident in the life stories of many women, marriage can effect transformations of fortune. And, while marriage has not been the inevitable fate of all women, family standing has influenced the ability of women to gain the education and training needed to fulfil professional aspirations and independence. The gendered structures of kinship and migration that long constituted a collective

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strategy for capital accumulation in Muslim trading families are not easily summed up through descriptive class rankings such as 'elite', particularly since access to formal political influence through state processes was so notably absent during the apartheid years.

Elite power – and, in particular, the power of men – has, however, been a historical force in the life of the Group. For the founders of the Women's Cultural Group, the figure of the modern woman and the modern housewife provided leverage for autonomy and a legitimate basis for civic participation. In grasping an ethos of modernity that had become prominent in imperial relations of British India and in the pre-apartheid South African state (advocated through the figures of Agents-General, through club life and voluntary societies), the founders of the Women's Cultural Group were riding a wave of community enthusiasm. Though clashes with particular religious institutions and tenets have also characterised their fifty-year trajectory, they have continued to view themselves – and to be viewed by others – as grounded in the principles of an Islamic way of life, motivated by calls to offer help and succour, mainly in the broader Durban context but also on occasion in other parts of the world. Seen in this light, the Group has been a powerful asset to the Durban Muslim community, strengthening its collective identity and circulating and redistributing its wealth, the beneficiaries of which have included many non-Muslims. In the absence of a functioning welfare state, the Group has operated as a non-political organisation, subsidised by the unpaid time, talents and labour of its members as well as the resources of their households and social networks.

The Group places an ethical premium on its voluntary nature, its model of civil servitude resting on the more spiritual principles of collective action than on productivity traded for individual remuneration. Gender as well as faith informs such a perspective, since women's work has often been associated with the emotions of caregiving: love, loyalty, dedication, selflessness, etc. This has shaped not only the Group's relationship with its beneficiaries, but also relationships within the Group itself. Much of this is very positive. The Group is made up of gracious civic agents, who enjoy a lively camaraderie as partners with a common, relatively egalitarian purpose. While disparities in media attention and recognition sometimes cause hurt and friction, the ideal of shared responsibility and shared satisfaction is deeply felt throughout the

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organisation. And the work has substantial and measurable rewards: the pleasures of friendship, the satisfactions of altruism, the admiration of patrons and associates, the stimulation of ongoing intellectual, social and ethical challenges. All members who choose to participate do so knowing that their work and rewards are – on principle – similar.

But there are also drawbacks to this model. There are, increasingly, limitations on time and human resources as women juggle formal employment, family responsibilities and Group enterprises. It is probable that skilled women who might offer something valuable to the group cannot always afford to, though a measure of remuneration might secure their ability to serve. Across the decades, it is clear that there have been some very worthy projects begun but not completed, and this may be related to the Group's status as a voluntary association. Finally, the formalities of egalitarian sisterhood have meant that personality, as much as portfolio and office, is able to operate as a means to claim power. Personality-defined hierarchies and cliques often operate informally in such associations to drive agendas and particular directions. While members we spoke to rightfully downplayed these types of power-struggles as inevitabilities common to most Groups, all could verify that feelings are sometimes injured and fall-outs do occur. On the odd occasion, feelings of being undervalued or marginalised have prompted women to leave the Group, as have personality clashes. But it is difficult to ascertain the extent to which an expectation of egalitarian treatment is responsible for the disappointments experienced. The Group has many strong personalities and the dynamics makes differences inevitable, as Hajira Omar pointed out:

> Of course, there are personalities that clash, you know. And Aunty Julu [Zuleikha Mayat] plays the perfect mother-in-law for everyone, she manages to calm things down, put things into perspective and she'll tell you – it's a strange diplomacy – but she will make you feel that you are right and I'm sure she does that to the other person as well, and somehow you feel that you have won, but she just manages to bide the time and after a month or two you realise that's not the issue, you know, it's a common goal that you are working towards.

Ayesha Vorajee observed, philosophically:

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> With any women's group, there will be bickering, but then we laugh it off eventually. There are sometimes tears – or sometimes the members can't talk to Mum [Zuleikha Mayat] about some issue. Then two, three of them would get together, come to me and tell me, 'You are the diplomatic one, please, we want you to speak to Mum.'

Most of the women that we interviewed, even those no longer active in the Group, believed strongly that it would not have survived for over fifty years if the friendship and companionship it cultivated were not genuine, outweighing the tensions. There are many opportunities for community service available in Durban, and even women such as Hajira Omar who are involved in several of these still find value in participating in the Women's Cultural Group.

Identifiable changes in the Group over its fifty years of existence have been observed in various chapters in this book. Firstly, the Group has moved from having an amateur to a more professional sense of its own status and abilities, a confidence that has come with skills and experience in fundraising, book production and charity work. With opportunities for women in education, younger members arrive with skills that can be put to good use in managing finances, marketing, design and recruitment. Secondly, the Group's age range has also changed over time: from its beginnings as a youthful, horizontal, single age-set enterprise, it now incorporates several generations of members and offers (as an asset) the nurturing and disciplinary age-spectrum sorority its founders – living in very different circumstances – once sought to escape. Such changes highlight not only the internal transformations of the Group but the society-based revolutions that encompass it – changes in family and gender relations, as well as political changes in relation to culture, class and race in South Africa. Finally, global shifts both in Islam and in the globalisation of western-style consumerism have created a tension-filled edge that middle-class Muslim women may face as a special challenge. As religion is politicised around the globe, and blocs within both Islam and Christianity reject modernity in favour of doctrinal fundamentalism, a 'mainly Muslim' organisation that was founded with progressive, modern optimism is bound to feel pressures as it moves into the future.

The Group is no longer 'mainly Muslim' but, in effect, squarely so. Over the years, it has incorporated more religious routines into its functioning – prayers at meetings, for example – and seems to be comfortable with its identification

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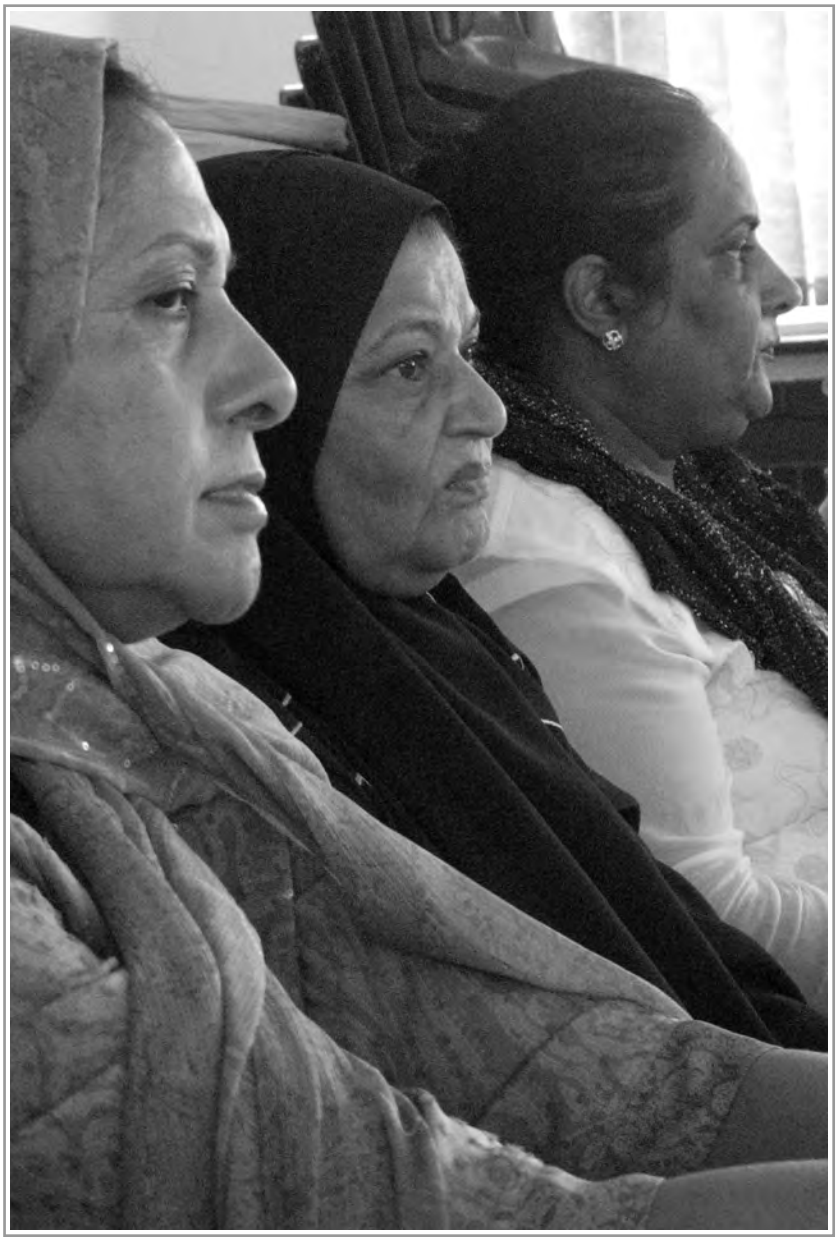

Group members at a meeting in February 2010.

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as a Muslim women's organisation. There may be a variety of reasons for this shift. Ironically, with the end of apartheid, racialised residential communities have in some cases become more insular. Without the moral imperative to defy state-engineered segregation, less energy has been focused on integrating into the broader rainbow of the nation. With the opening up of markets and the democratic election of a state that promises service delivery to the poor, there is a perception that the philanthropy of voluntary groups is now more supplemental than central in providing welfare.

Over the past five decades, the development of a solid Indian middle class has transformed the once dramatic polarisation between wealthy trading families and indentured working classes. With women now an established part of the wage-earning population, and with new commercial and institutional activities available, women's voluntary societies are no longer the only avenue for civic and public participation. Definitions of family and gendered respectability have incorporated many new forms of entertainment and socialising, and the recreational industry has burgeoned in a new climate of commercialism. Culture and cultural activities are valued in a new way, and with fewer speakers of vernacular languages the nature and meaning of cultural participation and practice has changed. Though poverty continues, the Group's focus seems less expansive – it is no longer proactive about reaching across boundaries, but rather has made its work about ameliorating the needs of tried and true charity organisations and addressing new kinds of needs among applicants in the Muslim community.

The new political visibility of Islam and the US-led 'war against terrorism' has certainly upped the stakes in relation to religious identity and places Muslim womanhood under fire. The way that global and national trends have influenced the Group can be seen in the issues they have taken up more overtly as political. In some ways it seems that the Group has almost come full circle with gender boundaries being vigorously policed once more. Mixed gender seating at the annual dinner, for example, became a bone of contention in 2008 when a large Muslim corporate body did not want to attend a fund-raising dinner because it was a 'mixed function'. The company offered a gift pack for guests in 'compensation'. But the Group chose to decline to distribute what would have amounted to free advertising for an enterprise keen to retain

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its public (and commercial) image by officially distancing itself from their event. Mayat wrote a sardonic reply, affecting concern for the company in question:

> The purchase of the tickets may or may not impact unfavourably on [you] since that will have a certain amount of anonymity, but the gift packs will clearly label the sponsors and therefore leave you with the smudge of being associated with an event that is not considered kosher. Because of my close relationship with [your institution] since virtually its inception I cannot permit this to occur. We therefore regretfully decline your gracious offer of the gift packs. There is no obligation on a donor to explain or apologise when refusing an application but since you have given a reason, our members recall that recently [you] sponsored and prominently attended [two] Dinners which were mixed functions.[1]

It remains to be seen what the reaction of the ulema will be when Zuleikha Mayat no longer leads the Group. She commands the respect of many stakeholders in the community and it is unlikely that anyone else in the Group would be able to write a similar letter without consequences.

This raises the problem of finding a successor for Mayat, whose iron dedication and ease of authority derives both from strength of personality and from her status as the Group's founding leader. Although the formal offices of president, treasurer and secretary rotate, Mayat has shown little hesitation in using her influence to direct how things run. Officially, she has moved away from this role on a number of occasions, to complete her own projects and research,[2] but appears unlikely to withdraw from the role of mentor as long as her energies and intellectual zest remain. Although her fear of nepotism has made her hesitant to promote her daughter-in-law to leadership, Shameema Mayat enjoys the support of many members and has the conviction and personal traits needed in a leader. It is clear that regardless of who takes the helm, the Group will continue to change.

For the women within the Group, both change and continuity are notable but these have been experienced differently by different generations of membership. Friendship is one of the key resources that many life members treasure. For example, at eighty-eight years of age, Gori Patel still remembers

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the camaraderie 'very much. I don't forget the members – I don't forget the old members. You know, Amina Moosa and myself, we do lots of jokes and laughing so that Mrs Mayat say, "Keep those two away from there", in the meeting too, like, you know, like a good team and we were enjoying ourself.'

Fatima Mayat, a second-generation member, confides:

> The Group has meant a lot for me because I met a lot of people, a lot of our old members like Mrs [Mariam] Motala, Mrs [Zohra] Moosa, you know, they were real hard workers. We learnt a lot. They were my seniors. When I joined the Group, I was very young then and really, with these ladies and their pushing, we really, you know, I grew up.

Zubeida Seedat also observed that there have been 'many changes' over time. 'We have progressed from time to time, our way of doing things has changed, older members like Zohra Moosa guided us – what to do and what not to do – but I always enjoy my time still.'

Zarina Rawat, a member for about ten years, is 'awestruck' when she 'looks at old magazines and brochures', as she perceives that older generations were much more involved: 'they did more'. But Rawat perceives this less as a change in work ethic and more because of the changes in women's lives over the decades. 'Younger women with children have many more commitments – in those days they did not worry about lift clubs, madrassah rounds, sports. We can't commit too much – we also like getting together but have lots of other things to do in the day, like taleem.' Hajira Omar makes a related point that different types of individuals join the Group and for different reasons. Some women have professional skills that have been developed outside of the Group, either in the business world or in non-governmental organisations, and want to contribute to social welfare work and view the Group as an avenue to do so – they may not necessarily be seeking social bonding because they have their own friends and networks. For others, Group membership is desirable precisely because of the friendships and camaraderie, as 'an extension of their social life'. And she added:

> That's a positive thing because I think there is such a strong social link between the women that they will want it to survive. They like seeing each other often, they like working together, You know, when I'm called in there and I have the time, I take my rolling pin and help with whatever is happening there, and there is a wonderful friendship between a lot of

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Friendship and fun: Fatima Manack and Ayesha Vorajee at a Group luncheon in 2008.

> the women and a lot of chirping and, you know, jokes about husbands and that kind of stuff.

Friendship, laughter, cooking – and, yes, many cups of tea. The half-century history of the Women's Cultural Group certainly reveals the strenuous labour and long-term vision of a remarkable set of women who crafted a modern citizenship for themselves in exclusionary conditions. But the history also conveys the delights of civic participation and the light-hearted spirit that has both guided and rewarded their ongoing exertions. Like a recipe for sutherfeni, that beautiful and delicate nest of complicated sweetness usually attempted only by expert mithai makers, their story shows how a combination of ordinary ingredients, determination, lots of practice and a fair measure of luck can combine to make something that sustains and delights us all.

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Notes

Preface

1 See Mayat (1996).
2 Zuleikha Mayat, address at book launch, 7 September 2006.
3 See Wardorp (2005).
4 In an effort to avoid excessive notes, direct quotes from interviews are not annotated in the text; similarly, where correspondence or other material is quoted, and the dates and other details are provided in the text, notes have been omitted and readers can assume that the relevant documents are available in the archive of the Women's Cultural Group. Please also note that we have deliberately remained true to the spoken language when quoting from interviews. We have also avoided italicising Arabic, Gujurati, Afrikaans or Zulu words for ease of reading and because these are in no sense foreign within the environment that constitutes the subject of this work. A glossary is provided for readers who are unfamiliar with these words.

Introduction

1 Extract from the *Leader*, reprinted in Women's Cultural Group, 18th Anniversary Brochure, 1972, p. 6.
2 We draw here on Christina Schwabenland's (2006) definition, which she attributes to a report by the UK-based National Council of Voluntary Organizations, entitled *Meeting the Challenge of Change: Voluntary Action in the 21st Century* (1996).
3 Schwanbenland (2006) explores this avenue of inquiry in relation to Indian and British women's societies.
4 Clemens (1993: 782).
5 Clemens (1993: 782).
6 Wedell (1991: 54).
7 Schwabenland (2006: 11).
8 Blair (1980: 19).
9 Watts (1993: 23).
10 Kendall (2002).
11 Boylan (2002: 218).
12 Boylan (2002).
13 Alvarez (1990: 29). See also Waetjen (2006: x).
14 Lloyd (1999: 484).
15 Wittberg (2006: 3).
16 Schwabenland (2006: 9).
17 Hashem Talhami (2001: 245).
18 Chioma Steady (2006: 120).
19 Chioma Steady (2006: 125).
20 See, for example, Endres (2006); Spain (2001).
21 For example, Rugow (1993); Johnson (2004); Wittberg (2006).
22 See Schwabenland (2006).
23 Address by Zuleikha Mayat to welcome and introduce Dr Yaqub Zaki, 1 April 1977.
24 See Chapter 7, this volume.

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25 Jayapraga Reddy, 'Women's Cultural Group – 25 years of service', *Sunday Times Extra*, 21 June 1981.
26 Mayat & Kathrada (2009: 86–87).
27 See, for example, Cabral (1973).
28 See, for example, Appadurai (2006); Mann (2004); Sen (2007).

Chapter 1 – The chow-chow pickle jar

1 'Letters from our Readers' *Indian Views*, 1 September 1944.
2 'Letters from our Readers', *Indian Views*, date unavailable, Zuleikha Mayat's archive.
3 Zuleikha Bismillah to Mahomed Mayat, 4 April 1945, Zuleikha Mayat's archive.
4 Zuleikha Bismillah to Mahomed Mayat, 4 April 1945, Zuleikha Mayat's archive.
5 Zuleikha Bismillah to Mahomed Mayat, 15 April 1945, Zuleikha Mayat's archive.
6 Zuleikha Bismillah to Mahomed Mayat, 8 October 1945, Zuleikha Mayat's archive.
7 Zuleikha's seven-page account describes how religious, political and customary arguments were advanced as rational and natural facts of gendered divisions of productive, reproductive and moral labour: 'A mother (referring to my Mummy) could during the busiest period [of shopkeeping] still attend to her babies, whereas a doctor was frequently called miles away. Again, since only a limited number of Indian students could be absorbed in the overcrowded medical facilities, should I not sacrifice my place there for a male student, since [the] latter could always devote more time towards patients, with the result that our community would benefit?' Additional arguments followed when Zuleikha inquired 'whether Maulana or Mr Mayat [Sr] had any objections to my being a nurse'.
8 Asiatic Enquiry Commission Report, 1921: 6. National archives, Pretoria.
9 The children were: Abdul Hay (1921), Sakina, also known as Bibi (1922), Abdul Haq (1924), Zuleikha (1926), Sadik (1929), and Rukayya (1935).
10 Mayat (1996: 51).
11 'Fahmida's World', *Indian Views*, 14 November 1956; 'Pampoensville' is Afrikaaans for Pumpkintown.
12 Zuleikha Mayat, memo to authors, February 2009.
13 Zuleikha Mayat, memo to authors, February 2009, emphasis in original.
14 Mayat (1996: 90).
15 Mayat interview, May 2002, by KwaMuhle Museum, transcript in Zuleikha Mayat's archive.
16 Zuleikha Mayat, memo to authors, February 2009.
17 Fatima Meer, who became a renowned anti-apartheid activist and sociologist at the University of Natal, became a close friend of Zuleikha and gave her unstinting support throughout.
18 Plath also wrote under a pseudonym, publishing her only novel, *The Bell Jar*, in 1963 using the name Victoria Lucas.
19 Friedan (1963).
20 University of Natal, Department of Economics (1952: 35).
21 See Bhana (1991).
22 Henning (1993: 81).

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23 The Franchise Act of 1896 disenfranchised Indians; the Immigration Restriction Act, also known as the Natal Act of 1897, and amendments in 1900, 1903 and 1906, imposed an education, health and means test, which virtually stopped further immigration of free Indians; and the Dealers' Licences Act of 1896 gave licensing officers wide-ranging powers to refuse licences. See Swanson (1983).

24 The Transvaal Asiatic Registration Act of 1907 required fingerprinting and registration. Led by Gandhi and the British Indian Association, Indians resolved in September 1906 to resist the Act. The Act was passed, and a passive resistance campaign ran until Smuts and Gandhi reached a compromise in January 1908 that the Act would be repealed on condition that Indians registered voluntarily. The compromise broke down and passive resistance resumed in August 1908. Around 3 000 Indians went to prison. The campaign lost vigour by 1910. See Bhana (1997).

25 Beall & North-Coombes (1983).

26 Swan (1985).

27 Swan (1985).

28 Joshi (1942).

29 See, for example, Burrows (1943); Davies (1963); University of Natal, Department of Economics (1952).

30 Supplementary statement submitted by the Natal Indian Organisation to the Judicial Commission on the Durban Riots, 21 March 1949, National archives, Durban.

31 Burrows (1943). Zuleikha's experience also bears this out. After spending five or six years with her in-laws, she and Mahomed moved to Foundry Lane, off Pine Street in central Durban, and, in the early 1960s, to Clare Road. Here, there were a few well-off families, such as the Singh, Jooma, Omar and Rajab families, but the mass of Indians around them were working-class descendants of indentured migrants, and she remembers that 'my children then started playing with all the Moonsamys and so on – this is how they grew up, very happily' [*laughs*].

32 University of Natal, Department of Economics (1952: 255).

33 University of Natal, Department of Economics (1952).

34 See Rosenberg (2007), which contains recollections by Omar Badsha, Fatima Meer, Rafs Mayat, Aziz Hassim, Ronnie Govender and others about different aspects of the Warwick Triangle.

35 Naidoo (2007).

36 Estates of the dead, National archives, Pietermaritzburg, NAB, MSCE 2108/1948.

37 That place was occupied by the likes of EM Paruk, AH Moosa, HC Coovadia, Dawud Mahomed Asmall and IM Bobat, who owned businesses with transnational links in India, Mauritius and Mozambique, or had multiple branches across Natal.

38 Freund (1995: 58).

39 *Leader*, 22 March 1947.

40 Zuleikha Mayat, memo to authors, February 2009.

41 Mayat interview, May 2002, by KwaMuhle Museum, transcript in Zuleikha Mayat's archive.

42 Zuleikha Mayat, memo to authors, February 2009.

43 See *Indian Opinion*, 18 September 1925; 18 November 1927.

44 *Daily News*, 15 June 1936.

45 Calpin (1949: 10).

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46 *Indian Opinion*, 20 August 1932.
47 Grice later joined the Women's Cultural Group and was a member for many years. Her husband was involved with the South African Institute of Race Relations and served as its president in 1972 and 1973.
48 Women's Cultural Group, Events Programme, 18th anniversary celebrations, 1972.
49 Bhana & Pachai (1981: 193).
50 Van den Heever Commission, *Report of the Commission of Enquiry into the riots in Durban* (1949: 5). Documentation Centre, University of KwaZulu-Natal, UG 36–49.
51 Supplementary statement submitted by the Natal Indian Organisation to the Judicial Commission on the Durban Riots, 21 March 1949. National archives, Durban.
52 For a discussion of the 1949 riots, see Edwards & Nuttall (1990); Freund (1995); Kirk (1983); Nuttall (n.d.); Webb & Kirkwood (1949).
53 Nuttall (n.d.).
54 Van Den Heever Commission, *Report of the Commission of Enquiry into the riots in Durban* (1949). Documentation Centre, University of KwaZulu-Natal.
55 Supplementary statement submitted by the Natal Indian Organisation to the Judicial Commission on the Durban Riots, 21 March 1949. National archives, Durban.
56 Elphick & Davenport (1997: 203).
57 Cited in Mukherji (1959: 161).
58 This was done through legislation such as the Prohibition of Mixed Marriages Act of 1949, the Immorality Amendment Act of 1950, the Population Registration Act of 1950, the Group Areas Act of 1950, the Suppression of Communism Act of 1950, the Separate Representation of Voters Act of 1951, the Prevention of Illegal Squatting Act of 1951, the Bantu Authorities Act of 1951, the Native Laws Amendment Act of 1952, the Abolition of Passes Act of 1952, the Bantu Education Act of 1953 and the Reservation of Separate Amenities Act of 1953.
59 Mukherji (1959: 161).
60 In the South African lexicon of racism, certain first names signaled a stereotype. This functioned to efface individuality and undermine dignity by playing on the contradiction between an intimate form of address and its generic application. In English-speaking Natal, the word 'Mary' became a racial reference to Indian women and the word 'Sammy' was used to refer to Indian men. One explanation for the appellation 'Sammy' is that many Indian surnames ended with a suffix similar to 'sammy', such as Ramsamy, Appalsamy and Coopoosamy. It is not clear why Indian women were referred to as 'Coolie Marys', but that this usage was common is reflected in a 1940s poem by schoolteacher BD Lalla (1946: 7), titled 'Coolie Mary':

    Is my wife a Coolie Mary /And thou a blessed fairy? /
    Is my wife a Sammy Mary? /
    Is she in any way contrary? / To thy door each bitter morning /
    Cold or hot or wind a-storming /
    Comes she with her breath a-panting- /
    'Nice fruits missus and greens' a-chanting. /
    Is she not a blessed fairy / Dubbed as a Coolie Mary? /
    If you choose to call her Mary / Think of the Blessed Virgin Mary.

61 Mayat & Kathrada (2009: 174).
62 Mayat (1996: 274).

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Chapter 2 – Stepping out

1 See Jeppie (2007).
2 Jeppie (2007: 50).
3 'Fahmida's World', *Indian Views*, exact date unavailable. Zuleikha Mayat's archive.
4 'The Hand that Rocks the Cradle', *Indian Opinion*, 12 July 1929.
5 *Indian Opinion*, 22 January 1909.
6 *Indian Opinion*, 14 February 1914.
7 The Magazine Barracks was a residential site for Indian municipal workers.
8 *Indian Opinion*, 19 June 1936.
9 *Indian Opinion*, 28 July 1938.
10 *Indian Opinion*, 19 June 1936.
11 *Indian Opinion*, 21 September 1934.
12 *Indian Opinion*, 2 October 1931.
13 See Vahed (1998). Thanks also to Julie Parle and Catherine Burns for discussion regarding societies in Durban, and to Catherine Burns for the concept of 'silos'. At the time of writing, Mwelela Cele was completing a Master's thesis on the Bantu Social Centre and its transformation from an instrument of industrial discipline to a space of political protest.
14 Durban Women's Zionist League, Golden Jubilee 1933–1983 (Commemorative Brochure) (p. 5). Killie Campbell Collection, University of KwaZulu-Natal, Durban. (With thanks to Catherine Burns for providing citations about the Jewish Women's Group.)
15 Union of Jewish Women of South Africa, Durban Branch, 1937–1977, 40 Years of Service (Commemorative Brochure). Killie Campbell Collection, University of KwaZulu-Natal, Durban.
16 Desai (1992).
17 Brochure of the Kathiawad Hindu Seva Samaj. Durban, 1956. Documentation Centre, University of KwaZulu-Natal.
18 Kuppusami (1993: 124).
19 Kuppusami (1993: 146).
20 *Natal Mercury*, 27 November 1935.
21 *Indian Opinion*, 6 May 1938.
22 *Indian Opinion*, 27 May 1938.
23 Letters to the *Natal Witness*, 8 October 1938.
24 Letters to the *Natal Witness*, 8 October 1938.
25 *Indian Opinion*, 17 June 1938.
26 *Indian Opinion*, 23 December 1938.
27 *Indian Opinion*, 10 March 1939.
28 *Natal Mercury*, 6 August 1934.
29 *Cape Times*, 12 August 1938.
30 *Natal Mercury*, 5 July 1938.
31 *Daily News*, 26 June 1939.
32 *Daily News*, 26 June 1939.
33 Podbrey (1993: 94).
34 VN Naik began his career as a schoolteacher and later became a very successful businessman who donated generously to the building of schools and clinics. The VN Naik School for the Deaf is named after him. He died c.1973.

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35 *Indian Opinion*, 3 September 1914.
36 *Indian Opinion*, 28 January 1921.
37 Estates of the Dead, National archives, Pietermaritzburg, NAB, MSCE 37673/1943.
38 Women's Cultural Group's 18th Anniversary Brochure, 1972.
39 'Fahmida's World', *Indian Views*, 14 March 1956.
40 Women's Cultural Group 18th Anniversary Brochure, 1972 (emphasis in original).
41 Halima, daughter of OHA Jhaveri, had married Aboobaker Moosa, the son of Moosa Hajee Cassim (1843–1921), an influential figure in local political and business circles at the turn of the twentieth century. Cassim's father, Hajee Cassim Tar Mahomed Sayani (1800–1895), was at one time the Prime Minister of Porbander. Like their father, Yusuf and his brothers were involved in social welfare, education and politics, and their memberships highlight the number of men's associations and organisations that helped to strengthen gender and class power networks: the Natal Indian Congress, Grey Street Mosque, Macohonocie Porbander State Club, Friends of the Sick Association (FOSA), Merchants Charitable Fund, Muslim Darul Yatama Wal Masakeen, Indo-European Council, All-India Memon Advancement Conference, Indian Surf Lifesaving Club and Porbander State Club. This ethic of organisational involvement was an additional impetus for Zohra's active leadership role in the Women's Cultural Group.
42 Women's Cultural Group, 18th Anniversary Brochure, 1972.
43 Constitution of the Women's Cultural Group, 20 October 1970, objectives c and d.
44 The Jamiatul Ulama KZN is a council of ulema established in 1952, which according to its website, aims to 'guide generally the Muslim public in complete consonance with the laws of Islam'. See http://www.jamiat.org.za. However, interpretations of sharia are contested, and not all Muslims adhere to the Jamiat's rulings.
45 Zuleikha Mayat, 'Weekly letter: Razia, Queen of India', *Saturday Mirror*, recorded 21 January 1975, broadcast on SAFM on 25 January 1975.

Chapter 3 – Indian delights

1 A version of this chapter was published in 2009 as: Kitchen publics: *Indian Delights*, gender and culinary diaspora, *South African Historical Journal*, 61(3): 575–593.
2 Frene Ginwala was introduced to Group through Tehmina Rustomjee, who was related to her by marriage. Ginwala, who was exiled as an ANC member, completed her doctorate in History at Sussex University and worked as a journalist while based in London. After her return to South Africa, she was appointed Speaker of the National Assembly from 1994 to 2004.
3 Mayat interview, May 2002, by KwaMuhle Museum, transcript in Zuleikha Mayat's archive.
4 Mayat interview, May 2002, by KwaMuhle Museum, transcript in Zuleikha Mayat's archive.
5 *Indian Views*, 25 June 1960.
6 Women's Cultural Group, 18th Anniversary Brochure, 1972.
7 Mayat (1961: 14).
8 Mayat (1961: 14).
9 Mayat (1961: 15).
10 Mayat wrote in the Preface to *Indian Delights* (1961) that if there was one lesson for the 'new bride' to absorb it was that 'both her in-laws and her husband have stomachs to be placated, and haphazard cooking will not justify'.
11 In Mayat (1961: 3).

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12 A writer named Yaar submitted a review on 31 May 2007 on Amazon, describing the book as having 'Great recipes Indian Pakistani and Memoni…This book is written by the Indian minority of South Africa, many of them Memons, and hence the recipes are different from the usual Indian Pakistani recipes. I feel that most of these recipes call for a lot more "turmeric" than needed so adjust it to taste or no more than 1/4 tsp. A very unique book.' Accessed at http://www.amazon.co.uk/Indian-Delights-Zuleikha-Mayat/dp/0620056886. This points both to the attempt of the compilers to cater for the diverse range of Indian cooking and the ways in which Indian cooking has transformed in South Africa.
13 Mayat (1961: 16).
14 Mayat (1961: 5).
15 In Mayat (1961: 3–4).
16 Mayat (2007: 5).
17 Mayat (1961: 15).
18 Mayat (2007: 19).
19 Mayat (2007: 168).
20 Mayat (2007: 161).
21 Mayat (2007: 20).
22 Mayat (2007: 70).
23 Mayat (2007: 289).
24 Members prepared the foods used in the photographs. For example, Bhen AK Vawda prepared kopra lagan; Hafsa and Mariam Gori Mahomedy made biryani; Rokayya Motala the jardo; Aisha Mahomedy the mithais; Khatija Ahmed Paruk the stuffed fish; and Amina Yusuf Moosa the falooda. Zuleikha Mayat also thanked Hawa Bibi Moosa, Hafeza Paruk, Bari Paruk, Amina Moosa, Zohra Moosa, and Sakina Mall for assisting in various ways.
25 Women's Cultural Group, 18th Anniversary Brochure, 1972.
26 Despite 1961 being the date of first publication given in subsequent editions, the first edition was probably published in late 1960. 'Fahmida's World' of 25 June 1960 describes all the sections in the book and concludes: 'I can see many people solving their gift problems this year so let us hope that it is in print soon.'
27 On 14 Feburary 1961, shortly after the book was published, the rand replaced the South African pound as legal tender and *Indian Delights* was then priced at about R1.95.
28 The guarantee was for R27 452. At a conservative growth rate of 10 per cent, the equivalent amount in 2010 is just under R800 000.
29 Women's Cultural Group, Treasurer's Report, 1975/76.
30 By placing the larger order, the Group was able to wholesale the book at R4.75 per copy instead of R5.50 in the hope of quicker sales. The equivalent rand prices in 2010 would be a drop from a wholesale price of R154.00 to R133.00 (Treasurer's Report, 1975/76).
31 Treasurer's Report, 1975/76.
32 Mayat & Kathrada (2009: 61). Andrew Verster was based at the University of Durban-Westville at the time and was interested in the aesthetics of Indian art. He was also associated with progressive political circles and it was through Fatima Meer that Zuleikha Mayat met Verster and was able to call on his expertise. GST stands for general sales tax, which was a precursor to value added tax currently imposed on most retail goods in South Africa.

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33 The Group made a profit of R82 000, of which R50 000 was kept as working capital, R10 000 was set aside for an activity centre they were trying to build, and the balance was given to charity (Monthly General Meeting, August 1982).
34 Monthly General Meeting, December 1982.
35 Treasurer's Report, 1983/84.
36 Secretary's Report, 1983.
37 The *Red Edition* was printed as follows:

First impression	1982	25 000 copies
Second impression	1983	25 000 copies
Third impression	1985	25 000 copies
Fourth impression	1987	10 000 copies

The Group always insisted on getting quotes from different printers with a reputation for quality and reliability in printing high quantities. They avoided smaller printers that, in Mayat's words, 'may not deliver to expectations…As long as a printer satisfies our requirements, we stick with them. We only move on when more competitive terms are received.' The Group has worked with a few printers over the years including Robprint, Interpak and Impress.
38 Zuleikha Mayat to Grace Kirschenbaum, editor, *World of Cookbooks*, 16 February 1988.
39 See Chapter 6, this volume.
40 Treasurer's Report, 1984.
41 Mayat & Kathrada (2009: 23–25).
42 Monthly General Meeting, January 1986.
43 Zuleikha Mayat to Grace Kirschenbaum, editor, *World of Cookbooks*, 16 February 1988.
44 'Women's Cultural Group launches new book', *Post*, 3–6 August 1988.
45 Zuleikha Mayat to Grace Kirschenbaum, editor, *World of Cookbooks*, 16 February 1988.
46 Zuleikha Mayat to Grace Kirschenbaum, editor, *World of Cookbooks*, 16 February 1988.
47 Mayat (1998: Preface).
48 Zuleikha Mayat to Grace Kirschenbaum, editor, *World of Cookbooks*, 16 February 1988.
49 Mayat (1999: 12).
50 Monthly General Meeting, February 1988.
51 Monthly General Meeting, September 1987.
52 This and the next two quotes: Mayat (1999: 12).
53 Monthly General Meeting, January 1999.
54 President's Report to Committee Meeting, July 1999. Mayat thanked Shirin Mayat and Nafisa Jeewa and singled out Mana Rajah, Ayesha Vorajee and Shameema Mayat for assisting with proofreading.
55 The full title of this book is *The Cambridge Encyclopedia of India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Nepal, Bhutan and the Maldives*. It forms part of the Cambridge World Encylopedias series, edited by Francis Robinson.
56 'Zuleikha Mayat', *Impact News*, 29 July 2001. (*Impact News* is a Mauritian weekly newspaper with a focus on the local Muslim community.)
57

6th impression	1990	20 000	10th impression	2000	10 000
7th impression	1993	20 000	11th impression	2003	10 000
8th impression	1996	10 000	12th impression	2006	10 000
9th impression	1998	10 000	13th impression	2007	20 000

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Those who assisted with the *Red Edition* are acknowledged in every issue, namely: Sabera Desai, Nurjehan Raboobee, Khorshed Nadvi, Hawa E Moosa, Mariam AH Mahomedy, Mariam EG Paruk, Manjra Beemath, Ayesha EA Mayat, Zulekha Kadwa, Zuleikha Bobat, Fawzia Kajee, Laila Ally, Khadija Mall, Fatima Mahomedy, Fazila Shaik, Farida Jhavery, Gori Patel, Bibi Shaik, Khatija Vawda, Zohra Moosa, Ayesha Vorajee and Shameema Mayat.

58 Monthly General Meeting, October 1987.
59 Treasurer's Report, 1977/78.
60 Treasurer Report, 1977/78.
61 Monthly General Meeting, September 1982.
62 Monthly General Meeting, November 1985.
63 Zuleikha Mayat to Grace Kirschenbaum, editor, *World of Cookbooks*, 16 February 1988.
64 Monthly General Meeting, January 1986.
65 Monthly General Meeting, April 1986.
66 Monthly General Meeting, March 1986.
67 Joint President's/Treasurer's Report, July 1988.
68 See Chapter 4 for more about this book.
69 Monthly General Meeting, November 1988.
70 Monthly General Meeting, January 1989.
71 Correspondence dated respectively: 9 March 1998, 16 July 1998, 11 September 1998, 17 March 1992, 25 June 1993.
72 Correspondence dated respectively: 18 January 1999; 2 October 1996; 4 May 2005; 5 January 1994; 17 February 1994.
73 Correspondence dated respectively: 26 February 1998; 5 May 1998; 23 November 1993; 27 May 1998; 2 August 1994.
74 Correspondence dated June 2000.
75 Article republished in Women's Cultural Group, 18th Anniversary Brochure, 1972. The date of the article is not stated.
76 'Indian Cook Book launched', *Natal Mercury*, 27 June 1960, cited in Women's Cultural Group, 18th Anniversary Brochure, 1972.
77 Reprinted in Women's Cultural Group, 18th Anniversary Brochure, 1972. The date of the article is not stated.
78 Roughly translated, this reads as follows: 'From Zuleikha Mayat's *Indian Delights*, the South African woman will therefore be able to learn many of the things that have, until now, only been known in Indian homes. The recipe book is adapted to South African conditions.' An undated photocopy of this article appears in Women's Cultural Group, 18th Anniversary Brochure, 1972.
79 Mayat (2007: 5).
80 Correspondence dated 11 August 1998.
81 Correspondence from Lorgat to Mayat, 8 February 1990; and from Mayat to Lorgat, 2 March 1990.
82 Correspondence from the fast-food franchise manager to Zuleikha Mayat, 12 October 1999.
83 Correspondence from Zuleikha Mayat dated 13 February 2000.

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Chapter 4 – Fahmida's worlds

1 Mayat (c.1958). Original in Gujarati; this translation also by Zuleikha Mayat.
2 This was the translation of the title that appeared on the official programme. The title has also been translated as 'A Few Moments of Sorrow' as, for example, in Women's Cultural Group, 35th Anniversary Brochure, 1989, p. 6.
3 This and the next quote: Zuleikha Mayat, notes to authors on *Be Ghadi Ghum*, 27 February 2009.
4 Women's Cultural Group, 35th Anniversary Brochure, 1989, p. 6.
5 Zuleikha Mayat, notes to authors on *Be Ghadi Ghum*, 27 February 2009.
6 Mayat (c.1957).
7 Women's Cultural Group, 18th Anniversary Brochure, 1972.
8 *Leader*, 13 September 1957 (reprinted in Women's Cultural Group, 35th Anniversary Brochure, 1989, p. 6).
9 'Fahmida's World', *Indian Views*, 14 March 1956.
10 'Fahmida's World', *Indian Views*, 7 January 1959 (emphasis added).
11 Beteille (1969).
12 Beteille (1969).
13 Passenger migrants from Gujarat were divided ethnically, but there were further divisions related to class and region. For example, Memons were divided into the (wealthier) Porbanderites, who came from Porbander, and Jodhyas, who came from the surrounding villages; Surti status was determined by distance of migrants' homes from the city of Surat – generally, the further one's village from Surat, the lower one's standing. Then there were the Hyderabadees, a term into which all the descendants of indentured migrants were collapsed even though very few of them came from Hyderabad. Marriages between descendants of passenger migrants and those of indenture background, as well as between passenger migrants divided by ethnicity, were not common.
14 'Fahmida's World', *Indian Views*, 24 October 1956.
15 'Fahmida's World', *Indian Views*, 18 September 1957.
16 See Meer (1968).
17 Women's Cultural Group, 18th Anniversary Brochure, 1972.
18 Mayat (1981: 8).
19 Mayat (1981: 8).
20 Verster (1981: 7).
21 Verster (1981: 7).
22 Mayat & Kathrada (2009: 45), letter dated 11 April 1981.
23 Models included Bushra Ansari, Zakera Jadwat, Shameema Mayat, Khadija Moosa, Kulsum Moosa, Ahmed Lockhat, Fatima Ismail Paruk, Bibi Ismail Paruk, Gori Patel, Nafisa Jeewa, Zubeida Seedat and Rashida Vaid.
24 Mayat & Kathrada (2009: 43).
25 Verster (1981: 7).
26 Constitution of the Women's Cultural Group, 20 October 1970, clauses 2d and 2e.
27 See Jeppie (2007: 67–71, 84–95). The Baha'i faith was founded by Bahá'u'lláh (1817–1892), an Iranian who claimed to be a messenger from God in fulfilment of the eschatological prediction of Islam. In 1947, the Al-Azhar Fatwa Committee in Egypt ruled that the Baha'i faith was a mixture of various religions and could not be considered part of Islam.

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28 The widely accepted interpretation is that Jesus was not crucified but was substituted and will return before the Day of Judgement as a follower of Islam.
29 *Leader*, 19 September 1978; 4 October 1978.
30 Zuleikha Mayat's archive, memo dated 1976.
31 Mayat & Kathrada (2009: 30–32), letter dated 28 September 1979.
32 The anthology was compiled by Mawlana Imdaad Saabree and published by the Saabree Academy, New Delhi, in 1978.
33 Mayat & Kathrada (2009: 30–31), letter dated 28 September 1979.
34 Monthly General Meeting, 7 May 1980.
35 Funagalo is a pidgin dialect based on Zulu, English and Afrikaans.
36 Zuleikha Mayat's archive, Memorandum of the Jamiatul Ulama to the Orient Institute, dated 1958 (in author's possession).
37 'Fahmida's World', *Indian Views*, 17 September 1958.
38 Zuleikha Mayat's archive, Memorandum of the Jamiatul Ulama to the Orient Institute, dated 1958.
39 Jeppie (2007).
40 Jeppie (2007: 109).
41 Jeppie (2007).
42 Olivier (1968: 40).
43 Mayat & Kahrada (2009: 166).
44 See Vahed (2003).
45 Schulz (2006: 213).
46 'Muslim Culture', *Indian Opinion*, 10 October 1938.

Chapter 5 – Iqraa

1 Qur'an, 96: 1–5, translation by Mahomed Jasser.
2 'Muslim Culture', *Indian Opinion*, 10 October 1938.
3 'Fahmida's World', *Indian Views*, March 1956.
4 Metcalf (1994: 11).
5 Red Square is now known as Nicol Square, and is at the corner of present-day Yusuf Dadoo and Monty Naicker streets.
6 Khatija later became Khatija Vawda, a member of the Women's Cultural Group.
7 Until the 1970s, the law confined Indians to Natal and required them to obtain permits to enter the Transvaal.
8 'Fahmida's World', *Indian Views*, 12 March 1958. After serving her internship, Fatima Mayet worked at King Edward, McCord and RK Khan hospitals and taught at the Medical School, where she became a professor. She retired in 1988.
9 Woods (1954: 80–81).
10 'Education has freed South Africa's Indian women', *Daily News*, 10 July 1967.
11 'Fahmida's World', *Indian Views*, 17 December 1958.
12 'Letters from our Readers', *Indian Views*, 1 September 1944.
13 Brain (1983).
14 Previous quote and this statistic cited in Henning (1993: 167).
15 The Indian government agreed to co-operate with a repatriation scheme that offered financial inducements to Indians to return to India. In return, the South African government agreed to 'uplift' the condition of those Indians who remained (Pahad 1972).

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16 Ginwala (1974: 292).
17 'Neglect of Indian Education', *Indian Views*, 30 July 1949. See also Woods (1954: 84), who notes that in 1952, only 33 of Natal's 237 schools (14 per cent) were government schools.
18 Kajee et al. (1947: 48).
19 'Relief for Barracks' children', *Indian Views*, 3 May 1941; the Hajee Moosa Charitable Trust was run by the family of Group members Amina and Zohra Moosa.
20 This and the quote from AI Kajee above are from 'School for Wyebank', *Indian Views*, 26 March 1941.
21 Broome Report and Corbett Report cited in Corbett (1947: 74).
22 Broome Report, par. 421, cited in Corbett (1947: 75).
23 Burrows (1943: 25).
24 Corbett Report, par. 339; cited in Corbett (1947: 74).
25 Corbett (1947: 79).
26 Palmer (1957: 165).
27 'Shortage of schools for Indians', *Daily News*, 25 February 1971.
28 'Fahmida's World', *Indian Views*, 15 February 1956.
29 'Fahmida's World', *Indian Views*, 28 January 1959.
30 'Fahmida's World', *Indian Views*, 28 January 1959.
31 Woods (1954: 84).
32 'The education of Indian people in Natal', *Natal Mercury*, 2 November 1960.
33 MacMillan (1961: 99).
34 'Fahmida's World', *Indian Views*, 14 November 1956.
35 *Indian Opinion,* 5 February 1910.
36 'Report of May Street Mosque AGM', *Indian Opinion,* 15 April 1921.
37 Mahida (1993: 57).
38 'Moolla Pledge', *Indian Views*, 26 February 1958.
39 Palmer (1957: 167).
40 'Fahmida's World', *Indian Views*, 28 January 1959.
41 'Fahmida's World', *Indian Views*, 4 February 1959.
42 Manjoo (1972: 381).
43 Woods (1954: 84).
44 'Fahmida's World', *Indian Views*, 28 January 1959.
45 *Daily News*, 24 March 1969.
46 *Daily News*, 24 January 1973.
47 'Indians can cope too', *Daily News*, 29 January 1967.
48 Naidoo (1989: 116).
49 'English usage among Indian children', *Daily News*, 9 August 1972.
50 Cited in 'Education has freed South Africa's Indian women', *Daily News*, 10 July 1967.
51 'Fahmida's World', *Indian Views*, 14 March 1956.
52 'Fahmida's World', *Indian Views*, 22 February 1956.

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53 The Women's Cultural Group's archive shows the following figures:

1972 – R 2 000	1981 – R 15 922	1996 – R250 000
1975 – R 2 886	1982 – R 12 000 (29 students)	1997 – R241 767
1976 – R 4 661 (19 students)	1983 – R 16 032 (31 students)	2000 – R350 000
1977 – R 5 826 (19 students)	1984 – R 19 049 (27 students)	2003 – R420 000
1978 – R 4 953 (19 students)	1988 – R 27 852 (23 students)	2004 – R451 200
1979 – R 8 513	1990 – R 35 385	2005 – R480 000
1980 – R11 735	1995 – R200 000	2009 – R600 000

54 Treasurer's Annual Report, 1993.
55 Memorandum issued during restructuring in June 2004.
56 Women's Cultural Group, Annual Report, 2003.
57 Other examples include donations from the Assanjee-Haffejee family, DA Mayat, Ahmed and Fatima Mayat, Mahomed and Zuleikha Mayat, MH Cassim Bhabha and family, MS Mall, Amina Moosa, Noor and Mariam Jhavary, GHA Mayat, SA Parak and family, Sol M Paruk, Yusuf and Fawziah Jamal, Sakina Mall, MH Bismilla and family, Ebrahim and Hawa Moosa, CI Mahomedy, Aboobaker and Zuleikha Dinaat, and several others.
58 The Group has received an average of R50 000 per annum over the past five years in zakaat funds, though 2007 was exceptional, when the Group received around R250 000 due largely to a very large contribution from a single donor.
59 1976 – R4 661 (18 bursaries given to Ayesha Barmania, Banu M Shaheen, Betty Chiliza, Wadival Govender, Rokaya Kharwa, S Ahmed Mall, Shenaaz Mehtar, Joyce Mhlungu, Lawrence Mkhizi, Patience Mkhizi, AH Moola, Fawzia Motala, Xoliswa Nguhana, Sagela Pewa, Joseph Phlahla, Dawood Shaikh, Prakash Singh, Gideon Shpago. In 1983, the 14 non-Muslim recipients were Michelle Nicholas, Nomusa Mnzani, Prudence Nxumalo, V Naidoo, Padmini Thaver, N Singh, Sandhya Singh, Frank Anderson, Dianathee Naidoo, Dhanpal Govender, D Madurai, Lucky John Swaartbooi, B Ndlovu, and Sibongile Dube).
60 'The Loan Bursary Fund', Women's Cultural Group, Jubilee Brochure, 2004, p. 10.
61 'The Loan Bursary Fund', Women's' Cultural Group Jubilee Brochure, 2004, p. 10.
62 'Dangers of secular education', *Al-Jamiat*, May 1998.
63 See Vahed (2000).
64 Statistics South Africa. *Census 2001*: *Key results.* Accessed at http://www.statssa.gov.za/census01/html/C2001KeyResults.asp

Chapter 6 – Bake, jumble and trust

1 Adapted by Zuleikha Mayat from verse Surah Al-Ĥadīd 57: 7.
2 Women's Cultural Group, 18th Anniversary Brochure, 1972, p. 28.
3 See, for example, Women's Cultural Group, Meena Bazaar Report, 1983, p. 1.
4 Memorandum to the South African Cricket Board, c. August 1992. The Group was trying to get visiting Pakistani cricketer Imran Khan as guest speaker. The visit did not materialise.
5 Following a visit from Dr Saleha Mahmood, then editor of the *Journal of Muslim Minorities*, the Group wrote to her on 19 August 1996: 'Group members bemoaned that life had lost its lustre after your departure. But not to worry for they have since rolled up their sleeves for our annual Food and Fun Fair and the Centre kitchen stalls are full of atchars and chutneys.'
6 Zuleikha Mayat's speech at the 18th AGM, June 1972.
7 'Fahmida's World', *Indian Views*, 5 August 1959.

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8 'Fahmida's World', *Indian Views*, 19 August 1959.
9 Zuleikha Mayat, speech at the 18th AGM, June 1972.
10 Zuleikha Mayat, speech at 2007 Banquet, Zuleikha Mayat's archive.
11 The event was named after the famous Meena Bazaar in India, renowned for its wide range of products and excellent craftsmanship.
12 Zuleihka Mayat to Essop Randeree, 28 June 1978.
13 Mariam Moosa, Nafisa Jeewa, Fatima Mayat, Shairbanu Lockhat, Bibi Paruk. Zuby Paruk (Mobeni Heights), Selma Motala, Gori Vahed, Rabia Patel, Zuby and Fazila Shaik, Laila Ally and Farida Jhavery were mentioned by name.
14 The duties allocated reveal the extent of planning and the involvement of a wide spread of members. Public Relations: Mariam Moosa; Information: Orient Old Boys; Co-ordinator: Nafisa Jeewa; Personnel Office: Fatima Loonat; Reception: Gori and Zuby Patel; Cosmetique: Rejoice and Laila Ally, Bibi Paruk; Flora: Mrs Seedat and Tehmina Rustomjee; Old Magazine Stall: Halima Iman, Aisha Gani; Villa Victoria: Shairbanu Lockhat; Indian Delights Stall: Shehnaaz Mehtar; General Nuisance: Zuleikha Mayat; Harem: Zubeida Seedat; New Clothing: Hawa Bibi Moosa, Albertina Nguni, Hafsa Mahomedy; Old Clothing: Hafeza Paruk; Underwear: Khatija Moosa, Zakira Motala, Muna Munee, Zubee Paruk; Arts and Crafts: Bibi Sheikh; Grocery Stall: Sayedah Ansari; Auctioneer: Albertina Nguni and Shairbanu Lockhat; Kitchen: Amina Moosa; Jhavery's Shoe Shop: Farida Jhavery; Piece Goods: Khaja Ma; Rajah's Greengrocer: Mana Rajah; Dry arrangements: Mana Paruk; Cooking Demonstrations: Mariam Motala, Aisha Kajee, Khaja Ma, Khurshid Nadvi, Raziya Mayat, Zubie Ganie, Zubieda Seedat, Mrs M Mohamedy. Zohra Moosa and Fatima Mayat went around every half-hour to update floats and provide a signed 'chit' for money taken.
15 Monthly General Meeting, August 1978.
16 Treasurer's Report, 1978/79.
17 Women's Cultural Group, Meena Bazaar Report, 1983, p. 1.
18 Zuleikha Mayat, Zohra Moosa, Laila Ally and Shairbanu Lockhat.
19 Monthly General Meeting, September 1983.
20 Report presented at the Annual General Meeting, 23 May 1984.
21 Women's Cultural Group, Meena Bazaar Report, 1983, p. 1.
22 The library opened on 24 January 2009. Many South Africans contributed towards its construction and to the training of its staff.
23 The poem was read in Urdu and the full English translation was printed and given to guests.
24 Ferial Haffejee to Women's Cultural Group, 6 July 2005.
25 Monthly General Meeting, October 1998.
26 Monthly General Meeting, July 1998.
27 Monthly General Meeting, October 1998.
28 In all, 8 members worked for 3 hours on 11 Tuesdays; 30 members for 5 hours on 11 Wednesdays; 5 members on 11 Thursdays for 1 hour; and 40 members for 6 hours on 5 days. Zuleikha Mayat to Al Baraka Bank, 14 October 2000.
29 The 'Currie Cup' is a provincial rugby competition and this food pun helped to popularise the Group's event.
30 Sakina Mall died on 1 April 1979 and was replaced as a trustee by Hawa Bibi Moosa on 15 August 1979; Fareda Habib relocated to Johannesburg and was replaced by Khatija Shaikh on 8 September 1980; Amina Moosa died on 11 October 1983 and was replaced by Shairbanu

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Lockhat on 9 November 1983; Mary Grice resigned in 1992 and was replaced by Fatima Mayat; Khatija Shaikh resigned in 1993 and was replaced by Farida Jhavery on 20 January 1993; Hawa Bibi Moosa died in 1993 and was replaced by Ayesha Vorajee on 8 June 1994; Mariam Motala resigned in December 2002 when she moved to Newcastle and was replaced by Shameema Mayat in June 2003; Hafeza Paruk was replaced by Zarina Moolla on 20 March 2002; when Fatima Loonat passed away in October 2003, her place was taken by Fatima Randeree on 15 October 2003. At a meeting of the Trust on 16 November 2005, Hajira Omar was co-opted as reserve trustee. At the time of writing, in 2009, the trustees were Zuleikha Mayat, Ayesha Vorajee, Shameema Mayat, Zarina Moolla, Fatima Randeree, Fatima Mayat, Hafsa Mahomedy, Zohra Moosa, Farida Jhavery, Shairbanu Lockhat and Hajira Omar.

31 Treasurer's Annual Report, 1998.

32 Women's Cultural Group, Meena Bazaar Report, 1983, p. 1.

Chapter 7 – In the family of humanity

1 Qur'an, verse 107, trans. Marmaduke Pickthall.

2 *Indian Views*, 15 February 1956.

3 Payton (2008: 27).

4 Payton (2008: 27). Such organisations are variously referred to in the literature as non-profit, non-governmental, voluntary organisations, or civil society organisations.

5 Payton (2008: 29).

6 Payton (2008: 28). Payton makes a distinction between charity and philanthropy. Philanthropy is an umbrella term for all voluntary action, while charity is used more narrowly to refer to actions to relieve immediate distress, such as, for example, providing blankets and food to refugees. Philanthropy from this perspective would include actions to get the refugees 'back to their homes and on the road to recovery' (Payton 2008: 35). For Payton, charity is therefore accommodated under the umbrella of philanthropy. However, in keeping with their everyday usage, these terms are sometimes used interchangeably in this chapter.

7 The 'racial' composition of Durban's population, 1904–1949:

Year	White	Coloured	Indian	African	Total
1904	31 302	1 980	15 631	18 929	67 842
1911	31 903	2 497	17 015	17 750	69 165
1921	46 113	4 000	16 400	29 011	95 524
1931	59 250	4 240	17 860	43 750	125 100
1936	88 065	7 336	80 384	63 762	239 547
1949	129 683	11 280	123 165	109 543	373 671

Source: University of Natal, Department of Economics (1952: 35).

8 Burrows (1940: 29).

9 University of Natal, Department of Economics (1961: 19).

10 Report of the Assistant Estates Manager to Town Clerk, 6 July 1946. National archives, Durban.

11 Natal Indian Association, 'Memorandum submitted to the Secretary for Public Health setting forth its objections to the expropriation proposals of the Durban City Council', 22 December 1941. National archives.

12 Kuper et al. (1958: 243).

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13 CS Smith to Town Clerk, 14 February 1940. National archives, Durban.
14 Cited in Ginwala (1974: 303).
15 'Malnutrition rife among Indians', *Daily News*, 8 June 1944.
16 Woods (1954: 87–89).
17 'Fahmida's World,' *Indian Views*, 8 February 1956.
18 Palmer (1957: 169).
19 *Indian Opinion*, 21 July 1922.
20 Govender (1987: 14).
21 'Administrator praises Indians', *Indian Opinion*, 28 January 1921.
22 Mahida (1993: 68–69).
23 This and the previous two quotes: 'Fahmida's World', *Indian Views*, 18 February 1959.
24 'Fahmida's World', *Indian Views*, 16 July 1958.
25 'Fahmida's World', *Indian Views*, 1958, exact date unavailable, Zuleikha Mayat's archive.
26 'Fahmida's World', *Indian Views*, 16 May 1956.
27 Zuleikha Mayat, speech at 18th AGM, June 1972.
28 Women's Cultural Group, 35th Anniversary Brochure, 1989, p. 10.
29 These organisations run the gamut from the the Natal Indian Blind Society, the KwaZulu Water Development Fund, Imbeliyezwe Primary School, the Inchanga Centre, the VN Naik School for the Deaf, the *Daily News* Milk Fund, Zamokuhle, the Sibusiwe Child and Welfare Society, the Golden Gate School for the Handicapped, Natal Indian Cripple Care, the Durban Diabetes Association, and the Nosizwe Community Project.
30 J Reddy, 'Women's Cultural Group – 25 Years of Service', *Leader*, 1979 (exact date not available). This article appears in Women's Cultural Group, 35th Anniversary Brochure, 1989, p. 9.
31 Farida Timol and Mariam Moosa publicised it in the press; Farida Jooma spoke to Mall's Hardware for timber to manufacture furniture; Fatima Loonat and Zubie Ganie approached Mr Joosub of Atomic Demolishers for donations. Zuleikha Mayat, Rashida Vaid and Zohra Moosa then registered the school with the Department of Indian Affairs and the City Health Department in February 1980.
32 'Fahmida's World', *Indian Views*, 15 February 1956.
33 Women's Cultural Group, 18th Anniversary Brochure, 1972, p. 28.
34 This was the launch of *Dear Ahmedbhai, Dear Zuleikhabehn* (Mayat & Kathrada 2009) at the Women's Cultural Centre, which was also attended by Ahmed Kathrada.
35 See Tayob (1995).
36 During 1996, 135 complaints were recorded, mostly from married women subjected to physical and emotional abuse, often resulting from substance addiction, gambling debts or stress caused by the husband losing his job.
37 'Women's Counselling Line', *Daily News*, 28 January 1997.
38 The first committee consisted of Hajira Omar, Aziza Mayat, Zuleikha Mayat, Shirin Minty, Zarina Moolla, Jamila Patel and Fatima Randeree.
39 'Fahmida's World', *Indian Views*, 7 November 1956.
40 Letter from AB Mahomed to Zuleikha Mayat. Zuleikha Mayat's archive.
41 Letter from Zuleikha Mayat to AB Mahomed. Zuleikha Mayat's archive.
42 The first committee consisted of Mana Rajah and Nafisa Jeewa (beds and linen); Fatima Patel (crockery); Ayesha Vorajee (sewing); F Patel and K Amra (counselling); Latifa Latkaya (nurse aid); and Zuleikha Mayat, Aziza Mayat and Zohra Moosa (funding).

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43 F Patel and K Amra agreed to provide counseling; MA Lockhat and Z Methar were tasked with organising an activity hour once a week; Shameema Mayat and Mana Rajah volunteered to teach sewing skills; Fatima Patel was to organise a hobby club; and Zarina Moolla was to take care of accounting. It was also agreed that volunteers would take residents shopping for personal items. Residents were to be allocated kitchen duties.
44 Proposal to Iqraa Trust Board, re: Retirement Village, February 2006, Zuleikha Mayat's archive.
45 Proposal to Iqraa Trust Board, re: Retirement Village, February 2006, Zuleikha Mayat's archive.
46 'Market debate continues', *Daily News*, 13 April 1973.
47 Submission to the South African Law Commission by the Women's Cultural Group, 15 January 2003.
48 See, for example, Jane Duncan, 'Anti-Terrorism Bill will stamp on Human Rights', *Sowetan*, 14 January 2003.
49 See Buccus & Nadvi (2005) for a more detailed discussion of this process.
50 See D Strumpf and N Dawes, 'Khalid Rashid: Govt's cover is blown', *Mail and Guardian*, 9 June 2006. Accessed March 2010 at http://www.mg.co.za/ article/2006-06-09-khalid-rashid-govts-cover-is-blown.
51 Accessed March 2010 at http://www.justice.gov.za/salrc/reports/r_prj59_2003jul.pdf.
52 See Amien (2006: 742).
53 'Muslim Marriage Law Case: Judgement Reserved', 29 May 2009. Accessed 31 May 2009 at http://www.dispatch.co.za/article.aspx?id=317019.
54 'Muslim Marriage Law Case: Judgement Reserved', 29 May 2009. Accessed 31 May 2009 at http://www.dispatch.co.za/article.aspx?id=317019.

Chapter 8 – Haven of our dreams

1 'Fahmida's World', *Indian Views*, 2 September 1957.
2 Monthly General Meeting, July 1979.
3 Monthly General Meeting, November 1979.
4 Monthly General Meeting, 7 May 1980.
5 Fatima Loonat, Bibi Shaik, Fatima Mayat, Shairbanu Lockhat, Zohra Moosa, Farida Jhavery, Sayedah Ansari and Zulekha Moolla.
6 Monthly General Meeting, 15 October 1980.
7 Monthly General Meeting, 14 March 1981.
8 Monthly General Meeting, August 1982.
9 According to the minutes of the Monthly General Meeting of December 1982, the negotiation team was made up of Fatima Loonat, Zohra Moosa, Amina Moosa, Mariam Moosa and Zulekha Moolla. In addition, a special committee was constituted to supervise the kitchen development that included Amina Moosa, Zulekha Moolla, Hawa Bibi Mehtar, Gori Patel, Zohra Moosa and Khatija Ganie.
10 Secretary's Report, 1983/84.
11 Monthly General Meeting, April 1985.
12 Monthly General Meeting, November 1985.
13 Monthly General Meeting, March 1986.
14 Monthly General Meeting, September 1986.
15 Monthly General Meeting, October 1986.

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16 Including Laila Ally, Shameema Mayat, Zuleikha Mayat, Fatima Mayat, Shairbanu Lockhat, Zohra Moosa and Zulekha Moolla. The kitchen co-ordinator was Shaida Ebrahim.
17 Monthly General Meeting, November 1987.
18 Monthly General Meeting, March 1985.
19 Monthly General Meeting, February 1987.
20 Monthly General Meeting, August 1985.
21 Joint President/Treasurer Report, July 1988.
22 Monthly General Meeting, August 1988.
23 Letter to various donors advising them that the project had been put on hold, 16 September 1991.
24 Monthly General Meeting, November 1988.
25 Monthly General Meeting, September 1988.
26 Monthly General Meeting, November 1988.
27 Monthly General Meeting, September 1989.
28 Monthly General Meeting, October 1989.
29 Monthly General Meeting, November 1989.
30 Monthly General Meeting, February 1990.
31 Monthly General Meeting, December 1990.
32 Monthly General Meeting, January 1991.
33 Monthly General Meeting, October 1991.
34 Monthly General Meeting, February 1992.
35 Monthly General Meeting, March 1992.
36 The letter was signed by Zohra Moosa, Khurshid Nadvi, Fatima Coovadia, Hawa Mehtar, Hawa Moosa, Subuhi Choudree, Laila Ally, Fatima Mayat, Shameema Mayat, Fatima Ismail, Zulekha Moolla, Shairbanu Lockhat, Mariam Lockhat, Mariam Motala and Khajama Gani.
37 Monthly General Meeting, May 1992.
38 Monthly General Meeting, May 1992.
39 Memorandum from Mayat to the South African Cricket Board, no exact date but according to Zuleikha Mayat it was early August 1993.
40 Monthly General Meeting, September 1992.
41 Memorandum prepared by Zuleikha Mayat, January 1994.
42 Memorandum prepared by Zuleikha Mayat, January 1994.
43 Memorandum prepared by Zuleikha Mayat, January 1994.
44 Al-Ansaar, established in 1993, focuses on education – tarbiyah and dawah. The organisation currently publishes a monthly newspaper, conducts Hajj seminars, has a radio station, holds regular fêtes, and is in the process of completing a multimillion-rand building, which will include a bookshop, library, hall and sports centre. In many ways, the establishment of a centre such as that being constructed by Al-Ansaar is what the Group had aspired to.

Conclusion

1 Letter from Zuleikha Mayat, 20 September 2008.
2 Most recently, this involved a book titled *The Muslims of Gujarat,* published by the Women's Cultural Group in 2008.

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Glossary

aalim	scholar (see also ulama/ulema)
aaprawalla	literally 'our own kind' and generally used by Gujaratis to refer to fellow Gujaratis or fellow villagers
abaya	cloak
abla embroidery	mirror work
achaar/atchar	pickles
aloo	potato
amanaah/amaanat	trust
arad	tumeric, also known as haldi or borrie
badla work	a type of embroidery where very thin metal wires are attached to the surface of a fabric
bhajans	Hindu chants
bhajias	Indian vegetable fritter
bhangra	music and dance that originated in the Punjab region of India but has become hybridised and is found in various forms across the globe – including in pop music and film soundtracks
bhurkoo	porridge-like dish made with crushed wheat, oil dhal and mealie rice and served with khuri
bibi	wife
bidah	innovation
biryani	a dish that originated in Persia and is made with spices, lentils, rice (usually basmati) and either meat, fish, or vegetables
Bismillah	'In the name of God'
boere	farmers
braai	process of roasting food over an open fire (Afrikaans)
bunny chow	hollowed out loaf of bread filled with curry
burfee	sweet typically made from condensed milk and chickpea flour and flavoured with nuts
chaat	sauces and chutneys
chotli	hair plaiting
dadabajee	paternal grandfather
dadi	paternal grandmother
dahi	yoghurt
dawah	propagation of the Islamic faith
dhal	lentil stew
dhania	coriander
dhikr	remembrance of God through specific acts of devotion
do baare	encore
downie	large scarf used as a head covering
duas	prayers/invocations

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ematsheni	beer hall
fajr	dawn prayer
fatwa	religious edict
fitra	a donation to charity paid before the morning sermon on the occasion of Eid-ul-Fitr, which marks the end of Ramadan, the month of fasting
garara	a divided skirt, similar to culottes
ghaam	village
ghaamariya	villager or peasant
ghawla	Indian pancake
ghazzal	poem of five or more couplets in the same metre
ghusal khana	ablution place
ghusl	ablution performed before prayer
godris	duvets
haal	trance-like state
hadith	narrations originating from the deeds and/or words of the Prophet
hafez	one who has memorised the entire Qu'ran
haleem	thick soup made from meat, wheat, lentils and spices
haraam	forbidden by Islamic law
hidayah	advice
hidayat	faith
hifazat	protection/security
hijab	scarf or veil worn by Muslim women
Hyderabadee	someone from Hyderabad
iqraa	read
izzat	honour/reputation
jalebi	chewy orange-coloured sweet made by deep-frying batter in the shape of a coil and soaking it in syrup
jalsa	annual prize-giving ceremony at a madrassah
jama'at khanas/jamaat khana	prayer room
jamboo/gulab jamboo	finger-shaped sweets made from flour and dipped in syrup
janaza	Muslim funeral prayer said before burial
jardo	sweet yellow rice
jeek	hand embroidery using variegated satin thread
jeera	cumin
Jodhya	Memon-speaking Muslim from one of the smaller villages around Porbander
Kabah	cube-shaped building in Makkah, Saudi Arabia, which is the most sacred site in Islam
kafan	white cloth in which Muslims are wrapped before burial
kala	maternal aunt
kalam	In Persian and Urdu, kalam refers to a poet's complete works
kalas	Muslim women who provide domestic assistance

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kameez	a tunic worn by females over slacks or a skirt
kanikar	woven shawl
katayef	a dessert usually made from shredded pastry and filled with nuts
khitchiri/kitchdi	yellow spiced rice
khudi/khuri	spicy yoghurt prepared with cumin and turmeric and served with khitchiri
khurma/kurma	a sweet noodle soup
Kokni	Konkani-speaking Muslim
kopra lagan	coconut sweet
kunchas	trays on which nuptial gifts are borne when exchanged between families prior to marriage
kundi	mortar
kurta	a loose-fitting long-sleeved shirt that falls to any point between the mid-thigh and ankle
kutum	clan
laarwas	ball-shaped Indian dessert made with chickpea flour
lassi	yoghurt-based drink
lavang	clove
lillah	optional donation to charity for spiritual benefit
madrassah	Islamic religious school
majlis	gathering
masoor	lentils
maulana/mawlana	title used for an Islamic scholar
mealie	corn on the cob
Memon	refers to both a language and a linguistic group who speak it
mendhi	the application of henna as a temporary form of skin decoration
me'raaj	the heavenly journey of the Prophet
methi	fenugreek
Mia-bhai	passenger migrants from Rander who spoke Urdu
mir-e-musha'ira	compère
misar	triangular scarf worn to cover one's hair
mithais	sweetmeats
moorkhoos	savoury crispy snack made from flour
Moulood Sharief	a public salutation/tribute to the Prophet Muhammad
mubarak	blessed
mugh-ni-dhal	mung dhal
mushaera/musha'ira	poetry festival
naan kathai	a round biscuit made from chick pea flour, cardamom and cashew nuts
Nabee	the Prophet
namaaz	formal prayers directed towards Makkah
nani	maternal grandmother
nasheed	Islamic songs
nawaabi	Moghul elite
nikah	marriage ceremony

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papad	thin crispy Indian wafer or flatbread
patta	appetiser made from yam leaves
platteland	literally 'flat land'; refers to rural or farmland areas. A plattelander is someone from the platteland
pukka	authentic
pur/purh	pastry
purdah	a curtain or screen; also refers to the system of segregating women from men
puri	small Indian flatbread in which patta is wrapped
putu	cornmeal porridge
qasidas	Urdu songs
qawwalis	devotional events accompanied by musical instruments such as the tabla and harmonium
roti	chapatti, soft unleavened bread
sabbaq	lesson from the Qu'ran
sadaqah	charitable works or financial contributions from persons facing misfortune and seeking assistance from God
sadaqah jariyyah	ongoing charity or charitable acts that assist the beneficiaries in perpetuity
salaamat	peace
salaat	formal prayers directed towards Makka
sehri	a meal consumed early in the morning before fasting
sev	salty snack made from flour
sha'er	poet
shairs	poems
Shamshul Ulema	honorary title meaning 'the son of all ulema'
shariah law	Islamic law
shehnai	an oboe-like musical instrument
shukar	to give thanks
Subhan'Allah	'Glory be to Allah'
Surti	an inhabitant or a descendant of an inhabitant of Surat or the surrounding area in the state of Gujarat in India
sutherfeni	delicate nest made of thin strands of dough, fried crisp and drizzled with syrup
tafsir	teaching and meditation on Qur'anic texts
takhallus	pen name used by Urdu poets
taleem	Islamic educational programmes held in groups
tarbiyah	an education curriculum that places God at the centre of a child's learning experience, aiming to address the heart, mind, body and soul
tava	frying pan or griddle
tughras	the calligraphic seal of an Ottoman sultan
ulama/ulema	educated Muslim scholars engaged in the study and interpretation of Islamic law; plural of 'alim'

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Ummah	Muslim community/community of believers
umrah	pilgrimage to Makka undertaken at any time of the year
vadde	a savoury starter made from lentils, spices and herbs
veena	Indian musical instrument consisting of a long, hollow stick to which strings and gourds are attached
volk	'a people' with connotations of 'chosen race'
wah wah	similar to 'bravo' or 'ole'
wayez	lecture
winkel	shop
wudhu	ablution
yakhni	a rice dish usually cooked in meat stock
zakaat/zakaah	the 2.5 per cent of their wealth that Muslims pay annually in the form of a 'charity tax'. This is one of the five pillars of the Islamic faith and is obligatory for those with the means to pay

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