

**WOMEN AND ACTIVISM:  
INDIAN MUSLIM WOMEN'S RESPONSES  
TO APARTHEID SOUTH AFRICA**

by

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## Abstract

*The aim of this thesis is to explore the activism of South African Indian Muslim women in the liberation struggle, to uncover the nature and form of their activism, to explore the social factors which influenced this activism and to relocate them in the history of the anti-apartheid struggle.*

*The study begins with a review of South African literature firstly on the women's movement and then on the Islamic movement against apartheid, attempting to identify the Indian Muslim women within it. Common to both fields of literature is a focus on organisational activism and on the nature of this activism i.e. was it feminist? While both fields of literature make occasional reference to Indian Muslim women, neither one offers a history of their involvement nor an analysis of their activism, motivations and concerns under apartheid.*

*This lacuna stems from the absence of historical information on Indian Muslim women's activism. To rectify this the next step in the study is the reconstruction of this history. This is achieved through an archival review and interviews with three activists.*

*Their nature of their activism that emerges necessitates a redefinition of 'activism' to include women's experiences. The study offers suggestions for this a redefinition.*

*Having confirmed the historical fact of Indian Muslim women's activism, the study proceeds to analyse the social forces which determined the nature and form of their activism. Five dominant forces emerge i.e. nationalism, race, class, religion and family affiliations. In addition two primary strategies for activism emerge. The manipulation of traditional roles and the creation of 'women only' spaces were strategies successfully employed by Indian Muslim women.*

*The final aspect of the study is to re-locate Indian Muslim women in the anti-apartheid struggle after which it concludes by highlighting avenues for future research on Indian Muslim women.*

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## CHAPTER ONE Introduction and Thesis

### **A. INTRODUCTION**

This chapter begins with my motivations for this study and introduces the thesis.

Amidst this is a discussion of the elements that have impacted on this study, particularly common understandings of 'activism' and 'women's movement', that the women studied here are a minority and the impact of traditionally prescribed roles on women's political potential.

### **B. MY MOTIVATION FOR THIS STUDY**

Once the political transformations of 1994 were complete South Africans began a journey toward the constitution of their South African selves, defined within the context of a 'New South Africa' and consequently, the New South African. For those previously classified as Indian, the path toward a South African identity was not a simple one. As a young South African Indian Muslim woman, I too traversed this time of change with trepidation.

Nothing confirms a national identity like emigration. Living outside the country for 5 years in the late 80's confirmed to me my South African identity. But, soon after the changes of 1994, it became unclear as to what it meant to be South African.

Indeed, a very significant aspect of claiming a South African heritage lies in links with the history of struggle. Apart from a brief experience of student politics in 1986-

7 and exposure to the political activity of some distant family members, my own experience of South African politics and of the struggle against apartheid had, until that point, been limited.

Apart from race, struggle credentials seemed to appear out of two areas: either poverty (implying economic disadvantages) or active political involvement. I could claim neither. Neither, I felt, could the community with which I associated myself, whose race, though part of the disadvantaged, had also spared it from the most sinister aspects of apartheid.

This is not to say that there was no poverty or disadvantage amongst Indian Muslims. On the contrary! However, I can say that the people we lived with, the areas of Durban where we went to school, where we shopped and socialised were not what you would call poor. They fell neatly into the middle class of traders and professionals.

To my mind, this community of Indian Muslims in Durban could claim to have made some contributions, but could not claim any extensive involvement in the liberation of the country. Until then I had not seen or heard of any great strides made by the immediate community in which I was raised. Consequently, I didn't feel I could claim any struggle credentials of note.

On my return and through the transition to democracy I constantly tried to find a place for myself within the New South Africa. Having developed a strong Muslim identity during my stay abroad, I first identified with Muslim Indians in the structures

of the New South Africa. In so doing I was constantly drawn to the dearth of Muslim women in these structures. While there were a few women who were known to have had some influence and had made some sacrifices in the struggle against apartheid, these seemed to be the exceptional few. Nonetheless, the number of Muslims in the structures of the New South Africa far outweighed their proportions in terms of the numbers of Muslims in the country. As it became apparent that Muslim Indians were involved in the struggle, so too did the dearth of Muslim women become evident.

The politically active Muslim women I knew of were Professor Fatima Meer (a sociologist and academic) and Naledi Pandor (Chair of the National Council of Provinces), both of whom have strong histories in the liberation struggle. In addition, there were three members of Parliament who do not have extensive national profiles: Fatima Hajaj, Farida Mohamed and Fatima Khota. Five women out of a community of more than a million – only two of whom are internationally known i.e. Meer and Pandor.

By contrast, Muslim men in the New South Africa were to be found everywhere: Ministers and Deputy Ministers (Aziz and Essop Pahad; Dullah Omar; Kader Asmal), the Chief Justice Ismail Mohamed, and a whole host of members of parliament (Moosa; Manie; Karrim; Jasat; Saloojee; the Ebrahim brothers and more!).

In summary, my discomfort both with my own precarious sense of belonging and the limited visibility of Muslim women in South African politics, have led me to undertake this thesis.

The main goals of this study are to explore the activism of South African Indian Muslim women in the liberation struggle, to uncover the nature and form of their activism as well as the social factors which influenced this activism and to relocate Indian Muslim women in the history of the anti-apartheid struggle.

## **C. THESIS**

### **a. Background**

The majority of Muslim women in South Africa historically formed part of the minority Indian and Malay apartheid groupings, with a small number also forming part of a group that arrived from Zanzibar. It is my contention that being Indian and Muslim determined the activities of Indian Muslim women during apartheid times.

I propose that where women had a strong Muslim identity, understandings of themselves and what was required of them as Muslim women were influenced by the histories of women's activities in the early days of Islam. Where women found greater belonging in terms of race their activism was influenced by what it meant to be 'Indian'. The combination of Muslim and Indian identity formed the mainstream discourse on women's roles, which was to a large extent determined by Indian Muslim men who dominated social discourses.

I propose the idea that through their regular activities, designed to fit acceptable notions of womanhood, women engaged in covert challenges to the state and their local communities. When women functioned outside of these circumscribed roles they risked various forms and degrees of community censure. Consequently women's

activism occurred through prescribed traditional women's roles and may therefore have been less obvious than other forms of activism.

I contend that Muslim women's activism during apartheid years was determined and often constrained primarily by the community or communities with which they identified. Given that 'the general consciousness of a society about itself, its future, its structure and the role of men and women, entails limitations for the women's movement' (Jayawardena; 1986:11) the link between community affiliation and women's activism is a strong one. (op.cit.)

Consequently, for Muslim women to resist apartheid required them to negotiate multiple limitations. The capacity for resistance was also shaped by whether they chose to challenge the numerous and competing limitations imposed by the State, race, class, religion and families. The political aspects of their resistance to the social forces discriminating against them have been overlooked. This resistance has not been documented nor have its political implications been assessed. Nonetheless it was a form of activism, through which Indian Muslim women resisted both the apartheid state as well as the community based forms of discrimination.

The limitations of the definition of activism, the minority status of the women studied here and the impact of tradition are particular aspects which impact this study.

#### **b. Defining Women's Activism**

Studying 'women's activism' immediately highlights the undefined nature of what is termed the women's movement. The term has been used with reference to a range of

activities wide enough to capture everything from women in parliamentary politics to grassroots organisations. As a result

“... the literature has not yet produced a definition of women’s movements that can be employed for comparative political purposes. ... initial working definitions guided research in progress and have produced a range of competing definitions that have yet to be assessed and culled.”  
(Beckwith;200:434)

Ambiguities in the naming of ‘women’s movement’ are replicated in the naming of women’s activism, with myriad forms of activity subsumed under it. It includes issues of feminist movements, women’s social movement as well as or political party activity into a single bundle called ‘women in politics’. The range of definitions extend from ‘the emergence of women’s groups’ which include the actions of individual women, to a ‘sum of campaigns around issues of importance to women’ (Beckwith; 200:435) A tentative categorisation creates three spheres: women’s movements, feminist movements and women in social movements. (Beckwith; 200:435)

Activism occurs as a process through which women exercise their agency to determine the environments in which they live. Consequently, categorising this activity as social movement, women’s movement or women in politics becomes problematic. It risks excluding certain types of activities from any classification at all. Given that women who enter the public realm often need to do so through the combination of a variety of avenues, using strategic alliances, the three categories outlined above risk losing crucial aspects of women’s activism.

The strategies employed by women activists show a significant degree of fluidity, allowing them to move from one type of activity into another with ease. This fluidity

of movement and the varied types of activities women engage in may compound the difficulty of categorising women's activism. It may also be further cause for the interchangeable use of terminology. The established terminology or categorisation has not been adequate for those who write on women's activism, and signals the need for an alternative conceptualisation of women's activism.

Studying South African Indian Muslim women's activism, it is indeed difficult to separate it into any one of the areas that outlined above and the tendency to use the terminology interchangeably is admittedly great. What women did, together with what influenced them in these different fields, is what this study seeks to establish.

Consequently, this study will engage with the definition of 'activism' using Molyneux's suggestions for understanding women's activism.

Molyneux (2001) suggests an understanding in terms of the differentiated nature of women's collective action. Reviving Tilly's work of the seventies she proposes an understanding in terms of 'collective action'. For Tilly collective action is 'joint action in pursuit of common ends' (Tilly; 1978:84). It is "purposive, proactive and political" (op. cit.).

However, historical attempts at understanding motivations and mechanisms involved in collective action have evolved in an almost gender-neutral manner, making little distinction in the ways in which collective action occurs amongst women, except to note 'the women's movement' as one aspect or one means of collective action.

(Oberschall; 1997:327)

Molyneux offers an analysis of women's movement which considers the two criteria proposed for determining a women's movement – autonomy and the pursuit of women's interests. Autonomy stems from authority which in women's movement's may function independently, through an associational linkage or directly. (Molyneux; 2001:147) However, 'there is no necessary relationship between forms of organisation and interest articulation' (Molyneux; 2001:151)

### **c. Minority women in National Liberation Struggles**

The historiography of women's participation in African liberation struggles while noting women's presence in nationalist struggles pays attention to the predominance of women's activity 'supported by male nationalists' and the enthusiasm with which it has been documented to various degrees. (Geiger; 1990) It also notes a shift in the seventies away from purely political histories, toward an increasing level of sophistication in the reconstruction of social history taking into account women's personal life histories and experiences. In further developments it notes studies revealing greater levels of cultural, traditional and community awareness, addressing issues of identity. In this second development South Africa stands out as particularly pioneering in its efforts to develop such studies. (op.cit.)

There are however, only a spattering of studies focusing particularly on the activism of South African Indian women, and none focusing on South African Indian Muslim women. Few studies identify minority women in nationalist struggles. This study will first uncover the history of women's activism and then the forces determining it.

Nationalism, race, class, religion and other societal forces appear as significant determinates of activism for the women of this study; however, they are not addressed in existing literature. Consequently, this study will briefly address these in order to understand how Indian Muslim women mediated the complex range of forces that determined their lives.

**d. How culture and tradition affect activism – and those who write about activism**

While it is true that women form part of the social collective 'there are always specific rules and regulations which relate to women as women. (Anthia and Yuval-Davis; 1992:45) Women in Indian and in Muslim communities are frequently tasked with preservation of culture, tradition and established values. As a result, activities which seek to change the terms upon which the collective works, i.e. which challenge social norms are discouraged. For women who do want to challenge, they do so at great risk. While this study does not seek to reinforce the concept of women as 'custodians of culture, community and tradition', it recognizes this as a social force influencing women's activism. The impact of cultural prescriptions on women's political activities must be factored in when assessing the work women do which may not appear political, radical or feminist to others.

Focusing on the impact of religion and culture in the self-perception and the formation of political consciousness, this study will also analyse the ways and means through which women used available cultural and other resources to achieve their personal visions. It explores the creative manner in which women adapted in order to resist apartheid, while simultaneously having to resist the patriarchy of their own communities.

Consequently it more appropriately falls into that category of literature on women in

African nationalist struggles i.e. as a

'documentation of variability in women's expressions of individual or collective action and political resistance ... some similar to men ... others emerging out of the gender specific positioning, where ordinary restrictions and disadvantages have been turned into spaces for struggle and resistance' (Geiger;1990:235).

Nuancing this perspective, this study focuses on a non-indigenous, ethnic and religious minority group.

There is not much in available literature that focuses on either Indian or Muslim women's contributions to nationalist struggles in Africa. It is not uncommon for the efforts of minority groupings, particularly minority women's groupings to be overlooked. This is both an indication of colonial understandings of particular subgroups of women and a means through which these (often stereotypical) understandings are perpetuated. Women's studies literature remains focused on majority women's groupings. The absence of literature on minorities is reflective of colonial assumptions about Indian and Muslim women's political realities and leads to an elision of their political contribution.<sup>1</sup>

Walker's chapter on Indian women in the Natal Indian Congress (Walker;1991) takes a similar approach. It cites the 'restrictive' nature of Indian and Muslim cultures as reasons why they were unable to engage extensively in politics. Not only does this

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<sup>1</sup> Even Geiger's analysis of trends in the African women's struggles concludes that the reason why northern Nigerian women received the vote late was due to the prevalence of Islamic fundamentalism in the area. The underlying assumptions are that the vote is a measure by which to determine an improvement in the conditions of women, and that women in that area also used the vote a measure of their own progress! While the assumptions may be founded, and they may well be so, the conclusion is too easily drawn, and even less seldom challenged.

analysis assume that culture is singular and unchanging, it also serves to minimize the importance of these women's activism. While her assumption about the restrictive nature of culture is not wholly unfounded, further analysis is necessary in order to unveil the ways and means in which women dealt with these restrictions. The absence of such critical inquiry feeds the notion that those who were constrained by cultural and religious norms accepted them, and in so doing also accepted the national status quo. The effect is to pass an indictment against these women, discounting their efforts and dismissing their own struggles, both against local patriarchies and against the patriarchy of the state!

To address this, this study will uncover the strategies and the terms upon which women negotiated the prescriptions placed on their lives and consequently determined their own lives. Consequently, it is both a study revealing new information and an affirmation of women's capacity to determine their own lives and their will to do so through individual and collective action.

#### **D. CONCLUSION**

In summary, the purposes of this dissertation are two-fold:

- a. to describe and document women's activism during apartheid times and the various forms that it might have taken and
- b. to understand the motivating and restricting forces that determined Indian Muslim women's activism.

## CHAPTER TWO Scope and methodology

### **A. INTRODUCTION**

This chapter outlines the scope of the study, the methodologies employed as well as the layout of the study.

### **B. SCOPE OF THE STUDY**

I began with the ambitious task of looking at the full spectrum of Muslims - Indian, Malay, Zanzibar and indigenous African Muslims across the country. Realities of field research and the limited gender analysis available in existing literature caused me to curtail my thesis, limiting myself to Indian Muslim women in Durban and Johannesburg. The period of study spans two decades, the 1940's and 1950's, selected as it represents the time before and after the beginnings of apartheid.

### **C. METHODOLOGY**

#### **a. Locating Myself**

A further reason for limiting my research scope to Indian Muslim women arises from the fact that I am one. A feminist standpoint requires an engagement

“with the intellectual and political struggle ... to see nature and social life from the point of view of that disdained activity which produces women's social experiences instead of from the perverse perspective available from the 'ruling gender' experience of men” (Harding: 1987)

Though I cannot claim to speak for all Indian Muslim women, using the benefits of a standpoint approach I feel confident that when I do speak my voice carries the value of a researcher who is herself located within the system which she studies.

I am equally aware of the pitfalls associated with both my personal location and that of my interviewees. Amongst the potential areas for concern was my own vested interest, as an Indian Muslim feminist, to blindly find a role for Indian Muslim women in the struggle against apartheid. (Nkululeko;1987)

### **b. Locating this Study**

This area of research stands at the nexus of a number of other fields of study - amongst them minority studies; Islamic movement studies; women's' movement studies; collective action studies; social movement studies etc. etc. The challenge in developing this work was to choose one or two particular areas within which to confine this work. I chose to look at literature on the South African women's movement and the South African Islamic movement against apartheid. Naturally this means that not everything that can be said about the archival and interview material produced here, will be said in this thesis. There remains a significant amount of analysis that can occur if the material is treated through other lenses.

### **c. Choosing Research Methodologies**

I have used a variety of research methods. These include a scholarly review and field research in the form of archival searches and interviews.

#### Literature Review

In the literature review I have covered literature dealing with the struggle against apartheid from two perspectives i.e. South African Women's Movement and South African Islamic movement.

### Historical Review

The absence of a history of Indian Muslim women's activism required that I develop my own. To do this I have attempted to reconstruct the social discourse of the forties and fifties through an archival search, reviewing the prominent press for these two decades. The publications I have reviewed are the Leader, the Muslim Views, Al-Hadil Ameen and the Muslim's Journal as follows

- twenty years of the Leader, (1942-1962),
- ten years of the Indian Opinion (1950-1962)
- all of Al-Hadil Ameen (1958-1969),
- two years of the Indian Views (1950-1952) and
- the Muslim's Journal (1951 –1952: it only ran for two years)

During the archival review four primary themes emerged, through which I found women's lives to have been reported, written or commented upon. They are Marriage, Education, Politics and Purdah (or seclusion). I have used these four themes along which to reconstruct a woman-specific social discourse of the period.

### Interviews

The archival review, which required a deep reading to uncover women's activism, which was seldom presented as such, is supplemented by three interviews. To further develop the history of women's activism, according to how women saw themselves (as apposed to how they were reflected in publications) I selected three popular female activists to interview. The interviews were loosely structured and are NOT intended as life histories (the scope of this work does not allow for the intensity of

interview that a life history would require). Instead, I use the outcomes of these interviews to develop brief biographies for each activist from which to understand the activism of these women, their motivations and the identities that shaped their activism.

The interviews began with an explanation of the thesis and a question to the interviewee about her activities during apartheid times.

The women I've interviewed are the women that always caught my eye in the community, women whose names I grew up hearing. They are –

- Amina Cachalia – someone whose name I had always heard in discussions amongst women from Johannesburg and who'd become somewhat of a mythical creature to me. Cachalia founded the Women's Progressive Union which also features here;
- Zuleikha Mayat – founder of the Women's Cultural Group and widely known for publishing a cook book 'Indian Delights' (which is currently sold internationally), is a woman I've heard of and heard speaking at community functions. I'd always considered her unique amongst the women in the community. Mayat founded the Women's Cultural Group, and that features here too;
- Fatima Meer – a family relative, known by all to have very strong 'struggle credentials' and to have spent her entire life devoted to the liberation of South Africa and an individual highly respected in political circles. The interview with Fatima Meer was interrupted. The interview ended prematurely therefore information about her activism is supplemented by her writing.

### Analysis

The analysis reflects back on the activism uncovered in the archival review and the interviews in an attempt to understand the factors influencing it. The first step toward this is to suggest a redefinition of 'activism' so as to incorporate the activism uncovered here.

Next I have analysed the social dynamics which determined and constrained Indian Muslim women's activism. Five primary influences emerge and are treated briefly. They are nationalism, race, class, religion and family affiliation.

Activists were forced to negotiate their activism through these forces. I have analysed two of these strategies here.

### Relocating Indian Muslim Women

The final aspect of the thesis is to return Indian Muslim women to the history of the anti-apartheid struggle. The gaps in women's studies literature and Islamic movement literature show the absence of Indian Muslim women. This requires that the history of Indian Muslim women in the anti-apartheid struggle be written and that their activism be honoured. The study concludes with suggestions for future research.

## **D. LAYOUT**

Briefly the study can be divided into two parts – a. locating Indian Muslim women's activism and b. understanding that activism.

### **a. Locating Indian Muslim Women's Activism**

The study begins with a review of the literature on the South African Women's movement (Chapter 3) and the Muslim involvement in the struggle against apartheid (Chapter 4). Both bodies of literature reflect two common threads – i.e. a focus on organisational activism and discussion on the feminist nature of that activism.

Concluding that neither body of literature directly addresses the experiences of Indian Muslim women highlights the absence of a historical review of Indian Muslim women's activism in the forties and fifties.

Chapters 5 and 6 are an attempt to fill this gap and to confirm the historical fact of women's activism. These chapters are an attempt to develop the basis of a historical review (too extensive to complete here) and to provide some insight into what those years were like. Chapter 5 is an archival review of journals and the press. Four common themes emerge here. They are Marriage and Divorce, Education, Purdah and Politics. Chapter 6 consists of brief biographies of three activists.

#### **b. Understanding Indian Muslim Women's Activism**

Chapter 7 reviews the historical and interview material and addresses the second aim of this thesis – i.e. what influenced, motivated, promoted and retarded Muslim women's activism in the liberation struggle. It begins with suggestions for the redefinition of 'activism' and proceeds to assess the social dynamics influencing women's activism. Nationalism, race, class, religion and family affiliations emerge as crucial influencing factors. Women developed strategies to negotiate these forces. The chapter concludes with an outline of activist strategies.

Chapter 8 advocates the relocation of Indian Muslim women in the struggle for liberation. It concludes with avenues for further research on Indian Muslim women in apartheid South Africa.

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## CHAPTER THREE Women in the Struggle against Apartheid

### **A. INTRODUCTION**

In this chapter I will review the literature on the South African women's movement, reading for the trends in the literature as well as the presence of Indian Muslim women. In summary the literature appears to have taken two forms – i.e. political and historical. Both contest the feminist nature of women's activism and both adopt a strong focus on organisational activism.

### **B. OVERVIEW**

Most available studies and expertise on the South African women's movement have emerged either from a historical or a political perspective. The historical studies such as Walker's (1991) study reclaim the historical fact of women's participation, while political studies such as Hassim's works (Hassim;1991, Hassim;n.d., Hassim: n.d.-a, Hassim and Walker;1993) have aimed more directly at assessing the impact and the nature of women's presence in the national liberation struggle and the broader women's movement.

A substantial proportion of scholarship focuses on women in the formal and associated organisational structures of the liberation movements and contests the feminist nature of these activities. As a result little attention has focused on activism outside these spaces. Arguably, much of, if not most, women's activism occurs outside formal structures. While some studies have focused on these they have not yet

focused an equal amount of attention on independent women's groupings, neither have they looked specifically at Indian Muslim women.

Noting the dearth of literature on Indian women generally, in 1997, Betty Govinden observed in her paper on Indian women's experience of indenture in colonial Natal that:

'more critical reflection is required on the construction of the 'Indian woman' in the context of the dominant ideologies of patriarchy, colonialism and capitalism in Colonial Natal of the late nineteenth century. What were the ways in which Indian women ... were being constructed and culturally determined, what were their self-representations; what were the ways in which they claimed 'liberatory spaces'? And what were the differences amongst them?' (Govinden;1997:19)

I have not located any studies since then which engage this issue either in the time period that Govinden focuses on or in later times.

I have divided the works I have consulted on the South African women's movement, into historical studies and feminist studies.

### **C. HISTORICAL STUDIES**

Historical studies such as Walker's are limited, with Walker having established a baseline and others building upon her work. Meintjes (1996) and others who use her as the historical reference, have also reproduced the lacunae and emphases of her work. Her *'Women and Resistance in South Africa'* includes a chapter on Indian Women's involvement through the structures of the Indian Congresses. However, Muslim women never feature as a defined group. Her view is that Indian women were 'isolated, poorly educated and almost totally dependent on the network of their families for both social and economic support' (Walker;1991:108). While her work is valuable in that it acknowledges Indian women's presence in politics, it is limited in

its understandings of Indian women's participation and ignores the extensive network of women's activism that provided support to and a framework for the liberation movement.

Bernstein's (1985) review is also useful for its historical content. On Indian women she notes Meer's (1975) earlier publication on Indian women whom she says

'at the beginning of the century virtually made Ghandi and proved the efficiency of the new liberation dialectic of satyagraha that he introduced.' (Meer; 1975)

With Walker's work forming the baseline for other studies, there has been little work aimed at understanding Indian Muslim women's resistance to apartheid.

#### **D. FEMINIST STUDIES**

The question 'What is feminism?' or more precisely 'Was women's activism feminist?' is a recurrent theme in writings on South African women's political involvement. I detect three viewpoints having emerged.

##### **a. Activism was not Feminist**

Wells and Lodge have taken the view that women's efforts in the struggle, while commendable, have not had a feminist orientation.

Julia Wells (1991) considers the efforts of African women in the struggle as 'motherism' which she finds un-feminist. In her view opposition to the pass system was a means of maintaining women's access to their husbands and mothers' access to their children.

For Lodge, the 'social dislocation of colonialism ... the migrant labour system ... (and) the insecurity of urban existence'(1983) created

"marital instability, a growing number of female breadwinners, an increase in spinsterdom and single parent families as well as domestic conflicts engendered by the humiliations and subservience of most men's work experience.' (Lodge;1983:140)

While he finds this might have contributed in making women 'more socially assertive', it was the 'fresh intervention by the state into the lives of African women that helped to create a vast new political constituency'. He does not consider this a feminist movement 'since women were not seeking an extension of rights or an alteration in their domestic relationships and responsibilities.' While he finds traces of 'a feminist consciousness', he decides that the motivating factor in their protest activity was the fear of a system aimed at 'subverting their traditional domestic roles.' (Lodge;1983;150)

Both Wells and Lodge make the error of assuming that the 'traditional domestic role' which women fought for was an oppressive one. And clearly they may have been, seen from the neo-colonial perspective of early western feminism. But as Walker concedes, family realities across the country could not be viewed as a monologue between oppressed women and patriarchal men.(Lodge;1983:140-150). The nuances in the discourse on the family and the function it serves in various contexts cannot be ignored.

Fouche's (1994) work argues the difference in perspectives of White and Black women in their separate struggles, concluding that the White women's struggle was classist, and not feminist.

### **b. Organisational activism was not Feminist**

Hassim, Kadalie, Gouws and Mc Fadden contest the feminist nature of women's activism in the recent liberation movements highlighting the limitations placed on women's advancement both during apartheid and since.

Gouws and Kadalie define feminist activism as that 'which opposed patriarchal structures, rather than reinforced them' (1994:215). They conclude that organisational activism of the anti-apartheid struggle was not feminist.

Mc Fadden argues that the nationalist struggle

'claims that the national question is primary to all other questions and therefore must be resolved before other issues of power between men and women are addressed' (1992:517)

Hassim has written extensively on women in South African politics revealing valuable insight into the ways in which national struggles are unable to meet feminist demands. She separates women's movements from feminist organizations; defining women's movements as 'women organising on the basis of their identities as women in exclusively female organisations, taking up issues that they consider important' (Hassim;1991:72). For Hassim feminism has 'a direct political dimension, being not only aware of women's oppression but prepared actively to confront patriarchal power in all its manifestations' (Hassim;1991:72). With this in mind she differentiates between a women's movement and a feminist movement (Hassim;1991:72) and also identifies two periods during which a women's movement prevailed in South Africa i.e. in the 1950s and the 1990's. (Hassim; n.d.).

She shows how organisations such as the Inkatha Freedom Party and the ANC used women's support to bolster their own political influence, without much impact on the prevailing gender dynamics, concluding that these were not feminist activities. These forms of activism would not fit Hassim's definition of feminism; they were not used to challenge patriarchy directly. (Hassim;1991)

The studies reviewed above make very clear distinctions between what is and isn't feminist. They differentiate between a direct as opposed to an indirect challenge to patriarchy. However, the effect of women's presence in these structures and their access to power (until then unavailable), along with its long-term impact on gender dynamics, cannot be wholly dismissed. This is addressed in other studies.

### **c. African Feminism**

Walker's reading of the proliferation of women's movements during the 1950's as synonymous with the rise of a feminist consciousness at the time (Hassim; Date Unknown), bears mention. However, Walker does not foresee the rise of a uniquely African feminism.

Amongst others, Hassim shows how with the unbanning of the liberation movements in 1990, came possibilities for the emergence of an indigenous feminism. (Hassim;1991:65)

Kemp et al (1995) concur to some extent. They argue that women's activism be valued for itself rather than measured against an imposed standard of feminist activity. They place value in the strategic choices which women make to facilitate

their empowerment at a pace and in a manner best suited to them. These strategies are determined by local women and according to their unique community contexts. The outcome is the emergence of a uniquely South African feminism.

Kemp, Madlala, Moodley and Salo find that the existing feminist discourse alienates many Black women. They argue against

‘theorizing a single patriarchy without accounting for the multiple experiences created by race, class privilege and oppression’(Kemp et al; 1995:142).

The absence of women’s experiences risks marginalizing Black women’s resistance, and undermining its ‘feminist consciousness’

Hassim(1991) is also hopeful for the emergence of a new feminism in the South African women’s movement and express concern at the shape it will take.

## **E. EMERGING THEMES**

The aspects of relevance to the women in this study, in the literature reviewed above are:

- a. the concern with the feminist nature of women’s activism and
- b. the focus on women’s activism within organisations

### **a. What is Feminist Activism?**

In most instances within the international women’s movement, ascribing the quality ‘feminist’ to an activity is a positive ascription. Where women’s activism is studied to determine whether or not it is feminist, this is often to indicate that it has not met a prescribed standard, has failed to address the ‘real’ needs of women or that it has

maintained an oppressive status quo. However, in third world struggles the ascription of the label 'feminist' is potentially alienating. (Kemp et al; 1995:141)

Hassim uses the differentiation between feminist and women's movement to avoid being prescriptive. Nonetheless a uniform and a predetermined paradigm for defining feminist practice i.e. 'the active confrontation against and challenge to patriarchy' sets up clear parameters for what is and isn't feminist. Essentially, it demands that activism be direct and entails some form of confrontation. Though it does not prescribe how overt this confrontation need be in order to qualify as feminist, it is often the case that less overt confrontations also have lesser feminist credentials.

This has the potential to devalue and marginalise activism which promotes changes in gender relations without overt confrontation. It also discounts the value and impact of more covert challenges to patriarchy. Placing a higher value on overt and direct challenges to patriarchy risks devaluing less confrontational and covert forms of activism. Since these covert challenges may require equally demanding efforts on the parts of some women to improve their own lives, both within and outside of organisational structures, they cannot easily be dismissed as 'unfeminist'.

To illustrate, are African women who set up local collectives to save money and then choose to spend that money on their children any more or less feminist than German women who organise so as to earn a government grant for child rearing? Or as Kemp et al ask, are women who organise rent boycotts more or less feminist than women who organize a rape support group? (1995:142)

To avoid ascribing a particular notion of feminism to the activism of women who feature in this study, the study employs Hassim's idea that 'feminist practice is historically specific' (1991:71). According to Hassim and Walker feminism must 'encompass a political project'. (1993:531) It must 'challenge the subordination of women, as well as recognize that women are subordinated.' (1993:531) Rather than an analysis of the feminist nature of their activism, my approach has been to enquire as to whether or not this activism caused Indian Muslim women to confront entrenched gender dynamics (either overtly or covertly). Finally, the value of this activism is not measured in terms of the success of the confrontation, rather in the acknowledgement that women were subordinated and a willingness to confront that subordination – directly or indirectly.

#### **b. Focus on Women in Organisations**

The greater portion of literature focuses on women in organized liberation movements and associated groupings. Much less attention has fallen on women outside of these groups and on their achievements.

The multiple levels of oppression experienced by South African women necessitated multiple responses. Faced with an oppressive state, and living within patriarchal family and community structures, women had to assert themselves not only against the state, but also against the local patriarchy of their communities.

To be successful they had to choose which challenges to take on, when and how. The choices they made were necessarily strategic, based upon an analysis of possibilities and potentials within their communities. Strategic alliances were crucial to these

decisions. (Kemp et al,1995:142-143) With the achievement of some goals, new ones could be set and again worked at strategically.

Further, the focus on organizational activism risks marginalizing less formal activism occurring in smaller women's groups.

### **C. CONCLUSION**

The literature on the South African Women's movements has to a large extent developed as historical reviews and political analyses. Both forms of literature have focused on women's activism in organisations, with a concern as to the feminist nature of that activism.

The focus on Indian Muslim women is minimal, mentioned amongst other women. Analysis of their gender-based experiences of the liberation struggle does not feature.

## CHAPTER FOUR Muslims in the Struggle Against Apartheid

### **A. INTRODUCTION**

This chapter will present an overview of the literature on the Islamic movement as it engaged in the struggle against apartheid. I will be looking for mention and analysis of Indian Muslim women during the forties and fifties.

Like the writings on the women's movements in the preceding chapter, this literature also discusses the feminist nature of women's activism with a strong focus on organisational activism.

To a large extent the literature in this field can be categorised as historical and socio-political. The works of Naude, Sicard and others confirm the historical fact of Muslim involvement and more recent works such as those of Jeenah and Esack provide a more reflexive analysis of that involvement. Tayob's work straddles the two forms, at times recording historical involvement and at times analysing its political and social impact.

The majority, however, deal primarily with the period immediately prior to the first democratic elections, the fall of apartheid and the time since. I have found none that reflect purely on Muslim women in the struggle of the forties and fifties. In the literature on the more recent struggle against apartheid too, there is little more than passing mention of women. Tayob, Esack and Jeenah make some mention of

women's presence in more recent studies, however, there appear to be no studies which focus exclusively on Muslim women in the struggles of the forties and the fifties.

## **B. HISTORICAL ANALYSIS**

Naude (1992) writes on the 'role of a Muslim minority in a situation of change' focusing on the South African Muslim community during the apartheid struggle. Apart from a single reference to 'Dr Cissy Gool'<sup>2</sup>, no other reference is made to women or to the period 1940 – 50.

Sicard's (1989) analysis of Muslims and apartheid looks at a range of organisations but focuses mostly on the Cape. Cissy Gool features under her maiden name Zainunissa Abdurahman, as one of the leaders of a group of 'intelligentsia'. She is mentioned again as someone who has 'left a legacy for Muslim struggle against apartheid'. (Sicard;1989:213) The other women who get mention are Dr Zainab Asvat and Professor Fatima Meer, but in no more than the concluding paragraph and as individuals who are continuing the struggle.

Tayob's (1995) 'Islamic Resurgence' is a reflection on the development of the Muslim Youth Movement. It includes the early parts of the twentieth century and covers various aspects of what he calls Islamic Resurgence in Natal and other parts of the country. The sections on Natal and Transvaal make passing commentary on women's involvement in the work of other organisations, where women feature in a number of auxiliary roles. In Natal they feature as occasional writers in the Arabic

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<sup>2</sup> Dr Gool is a Muslim women from the Western Cape

Circle Journal. They also feature in the development of a 'Gender Desk' within the Muslim Youth Movement (MYM). The analysis does not investigate the development of women's activism within the MYM. Neither does it track the development of an existing feminist or gender-based consciousness that might have pre-dated the MYM and provided the foundations for later developments.

### C. SOCIO-POLITICAL ANALYSIS

Meer, writing about women in production labour in the Durban region covers religion briefly. Of Muslim women she comments succinctly:

"Muslim women in South Africa continue to suffer the consequences of orthodox interpretations of Qur'anic injunctions skewed in favour of male dominance and female subservience"  
(Meer, 1990)

Tayob's brief reflections on women in *'Islam in South Africa: Mosques, Imams and Sermons'* (1999) provide a momentary glimpse of women's activism. He shows how informal women's religious gatherings became restricted and were later removed due, initially, to a growing influence of traditional interpretations and later to the phenomena of Islamic resurgence. He observes that this Islamic resurgence, represented in groups such as the MYM, was unable to revive or maintain independent public spaces that women had created for themselves.<sup>3</sup> To ensure its own acceptance by the orthodoxy, and to 'prove its credentials' to the religious authorities, the MYM in Brits, would not allow women to attend its regional meetings. As a result, the women in Brits broke away from this group, eventually formed their own study groups and pursued their goals independently, with 'neither the Islamic

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<sup>3</sup> "Women in Brits (in the Transvaal) regularly convened a Muharram majlis, a gathering popular in Dundee, to commemorate the martyrdom of the prophet's grandson Husayn. For ten days they would gather together to listen to the epic journey of Husayn from Mecca to Kufah in opposition to the Umayyad Dynasty. Two or three of the women would be chosen as the lead reciters of the epic. Each reciting would conclude with a salami invocation similar to that described earlier for the dhikr jamat. The ten day ceremony was criticised for a number of reasons, the most prominent being that women adorned themselves at these meetings with make-up and lipstick!" (Tayob; 1999:99-100)

resurgent groups nor the ulama', being aware of these developments (Tayob;1999:100-101).

The crucial point that emerges from Tayob's study is the affirmation of a prior culture of women's celebration and involvement in religious rituals and that women developed these independently and pursued them with little or no support from the surrounding patriarchy. After the resurgence of Islam, women continued to organise independently of men, in separate spaces, which they could control. Rather than direct confrontations against men, and attempts to enter 'male' spaces they created exclusively female spaces, separate from the males.

In a more recent presentation however, Tayob has begun to examine the dynamics of identity in the South African Muslim community, pointing to three types of identity usage amongst Muslims – legitimating, defensive and project identities. (Tayob:2001) Proposing a 'project identity' model, he suggests that individual Muslims take on particular identities suited to a time and place. However, he does not specifically address how women feature in these assertions of identity.

In *On Being a Muslim* (1999), Esack writes on the concept of a 'gender jihad' wherein he highlights the activism of Shamima Sheikh. His focus is on the nineties with no reflection on the history of a feminist consciousness, or on how Sheikh's activism and other gender-based activism might have built upon what had preceded it.

Esack's 'gender jihad' is explored further in Jeenah's (2002) work, which is the most relevant in its analysis on Muslim women's activism. Located in the eighties and the

nineties he highlights the emergence and decline of 'gender' as an area of study and a matter of concern for the Call of Islam and the Muslim Youth Movement. He finds the roots of this gender awareness in two areas: the impact of international literature (that of Leila Ahmed, Fatima Mernissi and Amina Wudud, introduced into the Islamic movement by its male leadership); and the development of political Islam in the context of the liberation struggle.

#### **D. FEMINISM IN MUSLIM WOMEN'S ACTIVISM**

Analysis of the feminist nature of women's activism features briefly in this literature.

Jeenah concludes that pre-existing activism was not feminist.<sup>4</sup> Defining feminism as

'a general concern with women's issues; an awareness that women suffer discrimination at work, in the home and in society because of their gender; and action aimed at improving their lives and changing the situation' (Mir-Hosseini; 1999:6),

it is difficult to see how he concludes the absence of a prior feminist consciousness.

In Tayob's 'Civil Religion for South African Muslims' he shows how the very real 'history of the struggle against white minority rule' has taken on the 'role of a founding myth' (1995:25). The history of a 'gender jihad' amongst Muslim women appears to have taken on similar dimensions in Esack's presentation of the concept of a 'gender jihad'.

Esack presents the 'gender jihad' as an integral part of the very beginnings of the Call of Islam and a significant part of later developments in Muslim involvement in the liberation struggle. His *Qur'an Liberation and Pluralism* (1997) presents the 'gender jihad' as a formal aspect of the Muslim struggle against apartheid. What might have existed of such a 'gender jihad' within the ranks of the Call of Islam can only be

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<sup>4</sup> This is based on Mayat's assertion that she is not a feminist

gleaned from Esack's writings on it, as a member of the group. There is little to suggest a popular base for a 'gender jihad' and insufficient information to assess whether it drew on existing activism or if it occurred as something the organization innovatively developed of its own accord. He also makes no reference to what might have been the experiences of other women (outside the group) as well as older women whose activism preceded the 'gender jihad'. There is no allusion to a pre-existing feminist consciousness or to existing practice which might have lent a feminist flavour to the Muslim anti-apartheid struggle. Hence my labelling of it as 'mythical'!

That the literature does not investigate a pre-existing a feminist or woman's activist consciousness is problematic. It gives the impressions that such awareness had not existed prior to the developments within the Call of Islam and the MYM. Given the levels of activism that this study reveals, this is highly improbable.

A further concern is the absence of literature on Muslim women in the earlier times of the struggle and since. The actual feminist nature of Esacks 'gender jihad' must be questioned on the grounds that the literature available on it is not produced by women.

This silence may be the result of the inability of the nationalist struggle to respond to women's needs. It may also be because Esacks 'gender jihad' was waged by men, for women; a strategy which puts its feminist credentials into serious doubt. A third possibility is that the women who may have waged this 'jihad' did not see it as feminist at the time, in the way that the men who now write on it do! Once again this

raises the concern with wanting to categorise women's activism as feminist or otherwise.

The denial of a pre-existing feminist consciousness may also be the result of the organisational focus of these studies, which restricts what qualifies as feminist practices. In this it mirrors contemporary scholarship on the South African women's movements.

### **E. EMERGING TRENDS**

The need to determine the feminist nature of women's activism, and the focus on organisational activism replicates the trends in writings on the South African women's movements. Jeenah's focus on feminist analyses of the eighties and nineties follows the trend in South African Women's movement literature.

The difference in the Islamic movement literature, however, is the absence of any historical record of the activism of Muslim women. Neither does the literature delve into the past history to analyse the preceding decades for the development of a feminist consciousness prior to the sixties. Jeenah's work on the eighties and nineties does present some insight into historical developments, but is limited in that it focuses almost exclusively on organisational activism.

### **F. CONCLUSION**

In this chapter I have reviewed the literature on Muslim women's involvement in the struggle against apartheid. I have shown that the literature on Indian Muslim Women in the struggle against apartheid is at best sparse. The majority of literature addresses

the eighties and onwards with only a limited focus on any pre-existing or emerging feminist consciousness.

Amongst the Islamic movement literature there is some allusion to women's activism, however, crucial events like the 1956 Women's March are not mentioned.

Nonetheless there does appear to be a consensus amongst the writers reviewed here that a 'gender jihad' has or is occurring, with no argument for where or how this appeared amongst women – as opposed to how it was brought to women by the male leadership of the relevant organisations.

#### **G. CONCLUSION ON FINDINGS OF CHAPTERS THREE AND FOUR**

What is evident from both sets of literature is that Indian Muslim women were active but that this activism has not received any academic treatment to date. Indeed their activism was subsumed both by activism in the broader women's movement and in the broader Islamic movement. Consequently, there is no particular analysis of Indian Muslim women's struggles in the fight against apartheid.

The writings on women in the Islamic movement appear to have mirrored the arguments presented in discourse on feminism in the South African women's movement. Consequently, both use organisational activism as a measure of feminist consciousness. However, writings on women in the Islamic movement differ in that, unlike Walker and Hassim, they do not give credit to the existence of a feminist consciousness amongst women in the fifties or at any period prior to the developments of the late eighties and the nineties.

The obvious gap in the literature on South African women's movements is that it has failed to study Indian Muslim women's activism in depth. It has also failed to challenge colonial perceptions of Indian and Muslim women's political potentials and realities. It focuses on women in formal liberation movements and similar organisations, paying little attention to activism outside of these groupings.

The debate on feminism appears in both fields of literature. In the literature on the South African women's movement, the conclusion favours the emergence of a uniquely South African feminism, premised on a history of women's struggle, and most significantly the 1956 Anti-Pass March. The literature on Muslim women, however, does not do the same.

Neither set of literature focuses in any way on the nature, form or dynamics of Indian Muslim women's activism.

This review also reveals the absence of a history of Indian Muslim women's activism in the forties and fifties, which requires that this history be written. Chapters Five and Six will do this.

**CHAPTER FIVE**  
**Muslim Women in the News –**  
**Marriage, Education, Purdah and Politics**

**A. READING THE TEXTS**

Self-definition of gender in a group is discernible through the political movements, legislation and social discourse of the group (Moghaddem;1994:2). In reading this discourse, critical feminist analysis must locate ‘contradictions and clashes that emerge’(Emberley; 1993:21). It must also “read against the grain of representations engendered in the textual violence of colonial discourse.” (Emberley; 1993:21)

This chapter is a historical review of the press and journals of the forties and fifties, beginning with an introduction to the South African Indian Muslim community. The press review will draw a sketch of the issues affecting women as they were presented in public discourse. Reading against the grain, I will look for the underlying social discourses which determined and were determined by perceptions of gender.

As I reviewed the publications, I looked for avenues which provide insight into women’s activism. Apart from some articles on the formal or informal aspects of political activism, three other themes emerged from the text. These are Marriage and Divorce, Education and Purdah<sup>5</sup>. I have therefore presented the social discourse under these four headings – Education, Marriage and Divorce, Purdah and Politics.

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<sup>5</sup> Purdah in this study refers to the seclusion of females. Purdah was practiced by Indians in general, Muslim and non-Muslim alike and referred to the practice of limiting women’s mobility outside the

The chapter begins with a background on the salient features of Indian community life. This is followed by an introduction to the publications and a discussion of the four themes highlighted above.

## **B. OVERVIEW OF ARCHIVAL ANALYSIS**

### **a. An Introduction to the Indian Muslim Community**

The South African Indian community arrived both as indentured labourers and merchants during the latter part of the nineteenth century. By the mid-twentieth century a number of community organisations had developed, many along religious lines<sup>6</sup>.

In terms of the State, by the forties apartheid ideology was well on its way to being formalised as State policy. In Natal, race relations were tense, culminating in riots of 1949, which left thousands homeless. There was a steady rise of an elite, middle class Indian<sup>7</sup>. The year 1942 saw the establishment of the ANC Women's League, 1954 saw establishment of the Federation of South African Women and 1956, the march of 20 000 women to Pretoria in protest against pass laws.

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home. It required that women only venture outside when necessary and accompanied by either older women or by male relatives.

<sup>6</sup> The press details regular gatherings and community functions organised by religious groupings The Leader, Durban, 16 January 1943:5 'Momentous meeting in Transvaal'; 27 February 1943:3 'Muslim body for Port Shepstone'

<sup>7</sup> The movement of middle class Indians out of the squalor of traditionally Indian communities into existing white areas during the 40's was conceptualised as a problem of 'penetration'. It led to heated debates between the white and Indian community, and was a precursor to the Group Areas Act.

Amongst Indians in Natal, the notion of Purdah persisted and breaking purdah was an issue meriting community censure. Child marriage was not common but did occur<sup>8</sup> and was strongly discouraged.

This was the backdrop against which Indian Muslim women's activism occurred.

#### **b. The Leader**

*The Leader* is a local newspaper, established in 1940 and continuing into the present.

In the forties it carried a 'women's page', which over time included birth, death, marriage and other community notices.

Reporting on women's issues shows a graduated progression from the forties into the fifties. The 'women's page' begins as a page of community notices and develops with other features added occasionally. The tenor remains one of conservatism and caution, particularly when women challenge social norms.

It includes a column with social commentary provided by 'The Faqir' (later 'The Columnist'). Despite their anecdotal nature, the Faqir's comments reveal a community concerned with preserving a sense of original identity while a new identity struggles to emerge. Women's dressing and purdah are central aspects of this concern.

#### **c. The Indian Opinion**

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<sup>8</sup> Though limited, newspapers did report on the continued practice of child marriage

*The Indian Opinion* was founded by Mahatma Gandhi and edited by his grandson Manilal Gandhi from 1918 to 1956. It was published in English and Gujarati. It reflects more deeply on political developments and presents an alternate political paradigm based on Gandhi's principles of Satyagraha, passive resistance and non-violence.

It too carries only a few reports which focus specifically on women. When it does, it reports issues such as the 'unique qualities of womanhood' presented in an article titled "Japanese Mothers Fight for Happiness". It is more consistent in reflecting on women's activities but pays no attention to women's issues specifically. There is some attention to women's movement activities outside of the country and little on women within the country.

#### **d. Indian Views**

*Indian Views*, was considered a 'Muslim paper'<sup>9</sup>. It was published at first in English and Gujarati. It was founded, edited and managed by ...Meer.

It presents some opinions regarding Muslim women, however, with an incomplete set of records in the national archives, research on the *Indian Views* is limited. For some months it ran a host of pictures on women in Pakistan, using Muslim identity to make a link between SA Indians and former-Indians (Pakistanis) using Muslim identity.

Apart from presenting pictures of Pakistani women in different occupations, it provides no further analysis on the implications of this for local women.

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<sup>9</sup> Interview with Fatima Meer 11 August 2001

According to one of the interviewees, Fatima Meer, the daughter of the founder of the news paper:

“He (her father)... tried to radicalise the local Muslims as well ... in fact he opened out his columns to Nagdi – Halima Nagdi – who married Gool. And she wrote a number of articles on women and so on. ... Now she wrote under the *nom de plume* of ‘Muslim Girl’. And oh she, she created quite a stir because now people began writing to my father and saying that it is no Muslim girl that is writing, it is a man that is writing, insinuating that it is him that’s writing. And then, that was kind of a mystery business. And eventually he said we will disclose this ‘Muslim Girl’ to you and he used her photograph and all the rest of it. And when she got married to Goolam Gool he took out a special on glossy paper with photographs of the two of them. And that was how much he respected her and he respected her views. And the other person whom he gave free reign to in his paper was Julu (Zuleikha) Mayat.”

#### e. Al-Hadil al-Ameen

*Al-Hadil Ameen* (1959-1967) began publication in 1959 and continued until the sixties when it stopped due to the ill health of its founder. It was prepared by Imam Khatib of the Grey Street mosque and appears as an authoritative voice. It claims to present ‘a scholarly, informed opinion’. Its contributors are professionals, community leaders and experts. Articles in *Al-Hadil* appeared in English, Afrikaans and Urdu.

It features questions on jurisprudence and law, detailed articles on issues such as Nationalism, Islam and Politics, Islam and Racial Prejudice, Marriage in Islam and social commentary on issues such as dancing and the demise of local leaders. There are numerous articles on Women in Islam.

#### f. The Muslims Journal

*The Muslim's Journal* in the Transvaal was admittedly against the likes of *Al Hadil*, established as an alternative to the “Moulvis’ sermons who follow the same

stereotyped pattern of waez (sermon) without any interesting variation as has been the custom of Moulvis before them.”<sup>10</sup>

The journal is a response to:

"a period of spiritual inertia and general lackadaisicalness ... (filling) a long-felt need for a magazine ... to serve as a vehicle through which the message of our religion could be conveyed as simply and lucidly as possible..."<sup>11</sup>

Only two years are available in the national archives i.e. 1953-4. It has a regular section on women as well as feature articles on women's status in the community. It advocates for women's presence in the mosques, segregation of the sexes, women's intellectual activity and fair grounds for divorce.

As an alternative journal, it aims at the reasoned and reasoning tendencies within the religion claiming 'it has nothing in it that is illogical and contradictory'<sup>12</sup>. It presents the "opportunity to know your religion better, and upon understanding it, to pass on the information to those who seek the truth."<sup>13</sup>

Articles focus on the problems Muslims experience in adapting to life in South Africa, choices in terms of their beliefs and other issues particular to the life of Indian Muslim South Africans. The first issue advertises for a women writer for the Women's page.

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<sup>10</sup> *Muslim's Journal*, Johannesburg, 1953 No.1 Vol.1: p1

<sup>11</sup> Ibid

<sup>12</sup> Ibid

<sup>13</sup> Ibid

### C. UNCOVERING THE SOCIAL DISCOURSE<sup>14</sup>

In all the publications, over the decades women feature in writings on marriage, divorce, purdah and education. Women's involvement in politics is noted briefly. Following is a presentation of the issues as they appear in the press together with a deeper reading aimed at capturing the subtext that lies beneath the articles for what it may reveal of the realities of women of the time.

#### a. Education

Education plays an important role in defining the community and its ambitions. At the beginning of the forties there was a reluctance to allow girls to attend school. This changes by the end of the fifties when girls' schools begin to overflow with the number of enrolments, necessitating an increase in the number of schools.

Muslim girls had less access to education than other girls. In 1943 a reader asks why Muslim girls are not taught English, while Muslim boys are. He laments:

"We have to marry illiterate Muslim girls which I am positive will make it very difficult in our lives"<sup>15</sup>

An article in 1943 comments on the ability of "the Indian women, if given a chance, (to) go forward". Illustrating this is the success of a

"married Mohammedan woman who shattered all tradition and coming out of the seclusion peculiar to the Muslim community, wrote the PSC examination and passed it".<sup>16</sup>

Still, the situation for Muslim girls remained precarious. The Faqir reports on Mr. Shaikh, who received numerous complaints since his daughter began attending

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<sup>14</sup> For a full list of reporting on women see Appendix One.

<sup>15</sup> *The Leader*, Durban, 21 August 1943:4 "English for Muslim Girls"

<sup>16</sup> *The Leader*, Durban, January 16 1943:7 "PSC Pass Success of Married Women"

school. Orthodox voices objected, informing Mr. Shaikh 'this was a wrong step and that he should not do this'<sup>17</sup>

By March 1952, the large number of girls enrolling for high school led to a shortage of classrooms, two years in succession, forcing the Department of Education to build temporary structures<sup>18</sup>. A girl's school reached a new high in enrolment to the point where "girls had to be turned away owing to shortage of accommodation". In one year enrolment went up from 265 to 382 students,<sup>19</sup> an increase of 44%.

A social science conference in 1955 reported on the number of women attending the ML Sultan Technical College, Natal University and schools under the Natal Education Department. It noted:

"the traditional attitude of opposition to education of girls after puberty is fast diminishing ... Both Muslim and Hindu girls attend"<sup>20</sup>

Later in 1955,

"of the 21 non-European students who received degrees at the University of Natal graduation ceremony ... five were Indian women. ... A greater number of non-European girls are now at the University than ever before, particularly in the Arts and Social Sciences"<sup>21</sup>

Amongst the Indian women, three were married.

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<sup>17</sup> *The Leader*, Durban, 9 July 1944:7 "Talk of the Bazaar"

<sup>18</sup> *The Leader*, Durban, 21 March 1952:5 "No room for girls at high school"

<sup>19</sup> *The Leader*, Durban, 11 April: 5 "Girls School Reached a new High in enrolment"

<sup>20</sup> *The Leader*, Durban, 11 February 1955:12 and 13 "Westernising Easterners"

<sup>21</sup> *The Leader*, Durban, 1 April 1955:3 "Women graduates"

By March 1957 a girl's school was opened by the Muslim Jumma Masjid Trust to address the shortage of Indian schools. Noting the earlier struggles to establish a decent schooling for Indian girls, the chairman of the Trust, Mr. Moosa:

“was glad to think that the Jumma Masjid Trust was doing something to meet that need, a need to equip their daughters to take their proper place with their sons in a progressive community”<sup>22</sup>.

Natal's first Indian female doctor Dr Goonam had graduated in 1936 from Scotland and returned to begin her practice as one of only four Indian doctors in Durban.

(Goonam;1991:54) In October 1957 Miss Panumathay Muthu Krishnan of Stanger who started as a teacher and a secretary in her brother's legal firm became “the first Indian women attorney in South Africa”.<sup>23</sup>

Muslim women were not far behind. Hot on the heels of Miss Krishnan was “Natal's First Muslim Woman Doctor, Dr Fatima Mayat”. Graduating out of the Wentworth Medical School, Dr Mayat said:

“In the past Muslim women have not had the opportunity to pursue higher studies. Girls are in most cases given only standard six education and the fortunate ones are lucky enough to complete their matric. Today most Muslim parents are encouraging their daughters to take higher education. ... I only hope more of our women will be given the privilege so that the avenues of higher education will be offered to them and that they too will be able to serve the community”<sup>24</sup>

## **b. Marriage and Divorce**

### Marriage as Social Status

Marriage, particularly marriage ceremonies, served a host of functions in the Indian community. Marriage ceremonies were prolonged events, with a build-up that took a number of days and functioned as a means of linking both individuals and families.

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<sup>22</sup> *The Leader*, Durban, 15 March 1957:9 “Juma Masjid School for Girls “

<sup>23</sup> *The Leader*, Durban, 25 October 1957

<sup>24</sup> *The Leader*, Durban, 29 November 1957:1 “Natal's First Muslim Woman Doctor”

*The Leader* is full of wedding announcements, details of extravagant weddings and pictures of bridal couples. Families consulted widely to ensure a suitable match, using education, class and status as selection criteria. Depending on these factors weddings could easily place families into debt. Such was the impact of this that at one point the Memon community met to discuss means of limiting wedding expenses. Noting how wedding expenses had risen so as to cause an 'unnecessary burden upon the community', they encouraged more consideration in this regard.<sup>25</sup>

### Islamic Law on Marriage

The community's relationship with the State was profoundly affected by the State's attitude to its marriages. In the latter parts of the 17<sup>th</sup> century the government of the time announced that it would not recognize the marriages of Muslims in the Cape. The main reason for not recognising Muslim marriages was that they were potentially polygamous, therefore did not accord with an acceptable notion of marriage. Today Muslim marriages remain without legal recognition<sup>26</sup>. The consequences of this non-recognition were significant for women and children of these marriages. Where husbands held control of property and finances, divorced or widowed women were often at the mercy of the State or their relatives, with few legal protections. Not surprisingly then, in 1952, the community in Waschbank sought out a marriage officer, and was denied this service by the State. Marriage officers would have meant that Muslim marriage ceremonies would result in legal marriages which could

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<sup>25</sup> In December 1943 *The Leader* reports 'To Cut Down Marriage Costs – Memons to meet in Conference' The Durban Memon Association met to discuss the high costs of marriages which were too lavish and expensive, and as such, "a burden to the poor man and a waste to the rich". Other customs agreed to, have outgrown their time and usefulness, and were also considered. Also see Appendix A

<sup>26</sup> The South African law Commission is currently engaged in the process of providing legal recognition for Muslim marriages. The process – begun some 13 years ago is fraught with difficulty as contending community opinions vie for recognition.

have been registered, recognized by the State and become legally valid for the purposes of South African marriage and divorce law. As a result of the State's refusal to recognise Muslim marriages, the Muslim community took upon itself the regulation of its marriages and divorces. This was achieved through a number of Muslim judicial bodies practicing a form of Muslim Family Law, imported, along with the religious scholars who implemented it, mostly from India and Pakistan. These bodies were funded by local merchants and socially indebted to them. Much of their thinking is determined by the needs of the social classes they served. Some of this thinking is reflected in *Al-Hadil*.

Support for the application of Muslim marriage and divorce came from various parts of the community. In 1952 Fatima Meer rose to the defence of easy access to divorce under Muslim Family Law<sup>27</sup>. Given that the current application of Muslim marriage law works against the interest of women in South Africa, this is unexpected.

However, her argument rests on the utility of non-State structures at a time of increased opposition to the State. Community based structures provided a useful alternative, affirming the community's independence from the State. Further, the preference for the Muslim marriage and divorce laws indicates that the practice of the time might have been more equitable, adaptable to the local environment and responsive to the experiences of women.

However, this utility appears short-lived. In 1954 Fatima Variawa voices her concerns on the tendency to keep women in unhappy marriages by limiting their access to divorce, under Muslim divorce law. Her article shows how Muslim men were not

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<sup>27</sup> *The Leader*, Durban, 11 April 1952:1 "The Muslim law of divorce"

Seemingly chastising of men, it encourages men to be 'leading partners' in their marital relations, rather than toward a shared leadership!

It advocates for marriage amongst Muslims while allowing, but only with grave caution, for marriages with Christian or Jewish women, even though Islamic law does allow it. It promotes the idea of 'Kofu' (known in Arabic as kafa'a and in reference to social equality amongst marrying partners). It advocates a preference for marriage between

"man and woman belonging to the same level of culture and status so that true sameness of upbringing expected of both the parties is guaranteed."<sup>37</sup>

By September, with the fundamentals established, the discussion in *Al-Hadil* moves into the legal aspects of marriage in Islam, beginning with the Mahr (dower) as the 'first responsibility' of the man in a marriage, the second being maintenance of the family and the marital household.

'The sphere of activity of the woman is the home in which she is to perform her duties; while it is the man's duty to work in order to earn for the support of the home and provide for the necessities of life for his wife and children. ... If the husband does not perform the responsibility of this exalted office, the law of Islam will force him to do so or make his marriage null and void.'<sup>38</sup>

While the journal claims to only clarify the 'Islamic' position on the matter it also chastises men and warns them of the consequences of non-fulfilment of their expected roles. It appears oblivious of the fact that at this point in time many women were working outside of the home and that in many instances, their earnings were indispensable to an adequate standard of living. In spite of this the journal it does not advocate for shared responsibility or leadership.

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<sup>37</sup> Ibid: 9

<sup>38</sup> *Al Hadil Al Ameen*, Durban, September 1959:8

However there is recognition of the challenges to Muslim marriage and divorce law.

One article encourages readers to:

“examine the Law of Shariat in the light of experience and it will be clear to you that the law is not a tyranny but a challenge to the ideal of better development of society”<sup>39</sup>.

In November 1959 an article comments on the merits of the ‘segregation of the sexes’. The article is striking in light of other developments. Only three years before that Amina Cachalia had represented Indian women in the march of 20 000 women to Pretoria. Four years prior to this Zuleikha Mayat had begun the Women’s Cultural Group. Six years before Zainab Asvat had lead women in the Passive Resistance Campaign and that eight years earlier Fatima Meer had been a part of the Defiance Campaign. In spite of this the journal finds that

“The social system which surrounds us – the Muslims in South Africa ... with its chromium-plated glamour obscures our vision. The march of civilisation ... creating fashionable wants ... is exclusively meant not to satisfy any cultural or biological need but merely to feed the vanity of women. Women as mere female, a high percentage of whom are mercifully devoid of the power of discrimination, fall for this glamour and indulge in pursuits which make for the disintegration of the social structure.”<sup>40</sup>

What the journal calls social ills are actually an increasing reliance on women’s income, increasing levels of education for women, increased mobility and women’s activism; all of which are a minority community responding to the changes required living in a non-Muslim and an apartheid context.

The matter of kafa’a is manipulated. Intended in its legal formulation as a means of ensuring compatibility in selecting mates, particularly in situations where matches are arranged by families, the concept is later used by the religious authorities to restrict inter-racial as well as inter-religious marriages with little sensitivity to the way in

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<sup>39</sup> Ibid: 9

<sup>40</sup> *Al Hadil Al Ameen*, Durban, November 1969:1

which this furthered apartheid principles and subverted the aims of the struggle against apartheid!

### Polygyny

Polygyny appears to have been a rather unacceptable practice! Local opposition to the polygynous marriage of the Prime Minister of Pakistan was serious. The issue resurfaced in an article on White perceptions “about the number of wives each Indian has, that he is alien because he is polygamous, that he has large families because he has several wives and so on”<sup>41</sup>.

### **c. Purdah**

Purdah is constantly problematised in the newspapers. It is used primarily as a reference to the practice of restricting women’s mobility into public areas and does not appear to be limited to Muslim women.

The range of letters on the subject from Hindu and Muslim women attest to a widespread practice which implied a significant degree of control over the mobility of young women in public, in some, though not all families. It was expected that young girls would be accompanied by older women, and that older woman would be accompanied by other males of the family. It was also not uncommon for public gatherings to be segregated along gender lines.

The public debates in the press make it obvious that the practice was under severe challenge from all quarters. Signs of its decline are also evident. It is often cited as

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<sup>41</sup> *The Leader*, Durban, 2 December 1955:5

the major impediment to education and hence progress. The political events of 1943 appear to have struck a crucial blow against it, and by the mid-fifties schools were unable to cope with the influx of female students. The only letters that support it come from males. Where women write to the editor, they challenge it. Below is a particularly interesting example of such support.

In December 1942,<sup>42</sup> a reader complains of an instance of sex-segregation at a cinema:

“the third time in succession, pictures have been shown in a Northern Districts theatre where a certain portion of the theatre was set aside for the sole use of the Muslim women; meanwhile Muslim men folk were allowed to mingle with the other sections of the Hindu community which included Hindu womenfolk ... (is) the Muslim women (are) superior to the Hindu women ... I understand the purdah system, but surely women can mix with women”.<sup>43</sup>

The reader does not question the issue of segregation of men and women. What his complaint is about, is the apparent segregation between Hindu and Muslim women, which he finds no different from the segregation practiced in the rest of the country. He does not question the segregation between male and female. The response in the next issue says that Islam affirms the equality of all women “whether a princess or a house wash-girl”<sup>44</sup> and commends and encourages the leaders in the fight against (racial) segregation. However, it does not at any point question the issue of male-female segregation.

In other letters to the editor purdah is cited as the primary obstacle to

‘... economically well-off Indian woman who was in a position to do so, to come forward and take part in social welfare work. Social welfare workers could not very well be drawn from the working class’<sup>45</sup>.

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<sup>42</sup> *The Leader*, Durban, 19 December 1942

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>44</sup> *The Leader*, Durban, 26 December 1942

It argues that purdah is practiced and can probably only be afforded by economically well-off women and that it is maintained firmly in place by “the educated group of Indian men, who should be the first”<sup>46</sup> in challenging it.

Purdah remains a common practice through the forties and well into the fifties. One reader uses the link with social advances in India to promote change:

“Today our Motherland has got her independence, so why not let the ladies enjoy a free and contented life. Today there are many Muslim ladies who are anxious to visit places of amusement but are stopped because the parents ignore the march of civilization and enforce the laws of the purdah. Today the ladies of Pakistan and India have shed the purdah. Why not follow suit here?”<sup>47</sup>

By the early fifties, though advocating for an end to purdah and for access to mosques, Muslim women continued to subscribe to the separation of the sexes in mosques. An article in the *Muslim’s Journal* argues that since:

“(t)here is no promiscuous intermingling of the sexes in any respect of Islamic life, not even in prayers ... some decent device for segregation must be adopted at least a screen. A screen separating the women may be given a place in one of the wings of the Mosque. In no case, however should intermingling be allowed.”<sup>48</sup>

In 1957 the issue still required comment. A reader writes:

"Modernism is sweeping the world but our girls are still living behind the veil of purdah -- or in the feudal age. They're not given the chance to advance in the social sphere of life or to adapt themselves to their present environment. Girls today should experience a new freedom in living: new ways of dressing, new customs in love and marriage, freedom to go to cinemas, to play games, to go to Sunday services and parties, to say to their parents "I won't marry the person you have chosen for me. The custom of keeping boys and girls apart and of women living in seclusion should be abolished. Co education should be enforced, to create a healthy mode of living for both sexes. Women's activities should not be confined to housework and bringing up children. They should fight for their freedom: today they are held in slavery to their households and to their men folk. Japanese women won their freedom in 1945. We South African Indians ask the government

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<sup>45</sup> *The Leader*, Durban, 9 October 1943:1 “Men blamed for the “Purdah””

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>47</sup> *The Leader*, Durban, 15 October 1949:4

<sup>48</sup> *Muslim’s Journal*, Johannesburg, 1953, No.1 Vol.1: p11

for the franchise; why not give our girls freedom? Parents should treat their sons and daughters on a footing of perfect equality”<sup>49</sup>.

Toward the end of the fifties purdah is questioned by both young women and men and in terms of the struggle against apartheid. Their opposition questions how in spite of the national struggle for freedom, young women have yet to gain their own freedom! Miss Sputnik (the name symbolic perhaps of her reaching for the stars, or her quick thinking) writes:

"being an Indian girl, I know what it is to be kept behind the purdah. While our Coloured and African sisters are leading a carefree life we are tied to our mother's apron strings. If ever we do step out to some social functions our mothers or some older people must accompany us. ... Even in dressing an Indian girl must have the approval of her mother, whereas coloured and African girls go in Jeans, swimsuits and shorts. We are not allowed to mix with the opposite sex so ... parties, dancing and drives are unthinkable. No wonder girls of other races look upon us with pity. The worst comes when an Indian girl is of marrying age. The parents look for a boy for her and there and then she is drawn into a loveless marriage ... she cannot voice her opinions .... She enters into a strange home with a strange husband. Strange faces surround her and the poor girl scared out of her wits. Where is the girl's happiness? At her parents home she is under her mother's thumb and now she is under her husband's and mother-in-law's thumbs. Just as non-Europeans cry 'down with the Colour bar' we Indian girls cry 'down with the purdah'"<sup>50</sup>

The religious authorities remain firm in their stance on Purdah. Advocating it as a "protection for the morals of men and women ... The intermingling of the sexes (being) the chief agent for all these vulgar crimes which are so prevalent in our modern world of today."<sup>51</sup>

#### **d. Politics**

##### *It's for Men – and taciturn women*

Early in the forties Dr Goonam, a Tamil women strikes the headlines for her

uncompromising attitude at an SAIC meeting. She had the 'audacity' to suggest that

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<sup>49</sup> *The Leader*, Durban, 6 December 1957:9 "Indian Women are Held in Slavery" and Letter to the Editor from Bissesar Ramauthar, Wasbank Natal "Give freedom to our Indian Girls"

<sup>50</sup> *The Leader*, Durban, 20 December: 11 "Woman Hails Bachelor Champ" Letter to the Editor

<sup>51</sup> *Al Hadil Ameen*, Durban, December 1959

a fellow member decline his nomination, as she had done, to allow new people to take on leadership positions. Called to order by all at hand, the newspaper recalls her 'taciturn' attitude! Clearly the terrain was not suited to such a feminist form of leadership

In terms of both Muslim and non-Muslim (such as Dr. Goonam) Indian women it is unclear as to what impact their leadership and participation had on the local political milieu. There are too few reports on women's presence in mainstream politics to discern this. However, there is one incident which must bear mention.

#### Purdah Politics

In 1943, Purdah became the centre of a heated political crisis:

"In a never-forgotten scene ... incidentally, history was being written, with a start of a new chapter in the public life of the South African Indian, when men and women combined in a common purpose."<sup>52</sup>

A contest for political leadership in the Transvaal Indian Congress was finally to be decided by a vote. Both parties found themselves looking for ways to boost their constituencies. In turn each side brought with them a contingent of women to add to their vote count. For most of the women this was their first political involvement.<sup>53</sup>

"... women who have never attended such a gathering before came in their hundreds. To them who had observed purdah during their whole lifetime, it must have been a novel experience; stranger still it must have been to vote. Men's differences had secured their emancipation from the thralls of custom, and it was the first time that women of all sections had become active participants in the affairs of the community; formerly it was only the Hindu woman, today it is her Muslim sister."<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> *The Leader*, Durban, 30 January 1943:5 "Women make History in Transvaal: Nana fires the Purdah for Victory"

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid*

The aesthetic impact of their presence is not lost on the reporter who comments on how the women added “a dash of colour through their sequins.”<sup>55</sup>

A series of discussions ensues through the newspapers. The contending politicians defend their actions as against letters questioning both their motives and the prudence of the move. Yusuf Dadoo hailed it as a recognition of “the equality of women and their right to play their proper role in the struggle for the community in this country”,<sup>56</sup> and expressed concern that this not be as opportunistic an event as it appears and that the politicians not

“reserve their women supporters only for the purpose of voting them into office, but will allow them all opportunity to participate in the affairs of the community.”<sup>57</sup>

One astute commentator notes that no woman had been given a place in the winner’s leadership structure.<sup>58</sup>

Some alleged that the laws of Islam had been broken while others opined it was quite clear that

“meetings were men’s job and Muslim women should not be brought in, for this was contrary to Islamic laws. Women also have not the same understanding as men<sup>59</sup> ... two women were equal to

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<sup>55</sup> Ibid

<sup>56</sup> Ibid

<sup>57</sup> Ibid

<sup>58</sup> *The Leader*, Durban, 20 February 1943:4 IC Meer comments on the impact of the Transvaal elections for women by noting “position of the Indian women in the fabric of the South African Indian life”, he says that “there is no reason why women should not play a greater part in the affairs of the Indian community”. “Unfortunately” he notes “the Nana group although it had 500 women voters, had not given any woman a position on its list of officers. He also corrected the figures for the numbers of women who voted – 500 for Nana and 250 for Dadoo.

<sup>59</sup> These views do not go unchallenged. *The Leader*, Durban, 20 February 1943:4 - A letter from AIS (in Ladysmith) contests that the Moulana Hanieffs views are “hard to swallow” While the reader confirms that “man is the protector of woman, because, because he is endowed with greater physical strength and toils and earns a living for the woman and himself quoting the Q 4:34. He asserts: there is no difference between man and woman materially, spiritually and morally” Another letter from CMP

one man, and all Muslim documents, including that of witness to marriage certificates, if witnessed by two men, four women witnesses were accepted as equivalent. This was the law and those who broke the purdah to bring women out to vote also broke the laws of Islam”<sup>60</sup>

In response, the successful contender cites the examples of Begum Shah Nawaz (of Punjab, a member of the Viceroy's Executive Council and the only woman in the world to be a member of a war council) and Begum Ali Fatima Jinnah of Pakistan.<sup>61</sup>

The objector recalls the example of Fatima, daughter of the Prophet as the “best example of womanhood”. He cites the Qur'an, sura 24 verses 30-31, which he says need no explanation. It is likely that he is alluding to the idea that women should not have been present in the polling. He is adamant that he has responded as a Muslim and not in terms of his political association.<sup>62</sup>

Some appear ambiguous. One individual believes this to have been a ‘reprehensible act’ but finds good reason for it! According to him:

“... of their own free-will and enthusiasm, the Transvaal womenfolk came in the field to save their religion. The men allowed them to come out, not for the sake of office but for the sake of their nation and their religion. These brave women have acted in the true spirit of Islam, in helping to save degradation of their nation and through it of Islam itself ... On the other hand, Islam has gained thousand fold strength through the boldness and courage of the Transvaal Moslem Women”.<sup>63</sup>

His language illustrates the paradox which the event represents; ‘of their own free will’ women were ‘allowed’ to enter the political arena! The utility of the event in the

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asks Nana to “quote a verse from the Koran where it says that our women folk can participate in meetings”.

<sup>60</sup> *The Leader*, Durban, 6 February 1943:5 “Breaking Down of Purdah – a “Reprehensible Act””

<sup>61</sup> *The Leader*, Durban, 13 February 1943:5 “Begum Shah Nawaz Breaks Purdah”

<sup>62</sup> *The Leader*, Durban, 20 February 1943:4

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid*

interest of 'male-stream' politics is apparent and borne out by the fact that it turned out to be a once-off event without repetition!

*Passive Resistance and the Women's March*

It might be expected that the 'Purdah Politics' incident above, provided the impetus for other types of involvement; that a new active, rather than reactive (as this incident was), presence of women in politics, may have taken form after this. This is an issue which would benefit from further study. The research here can only confirm that Muslim women did eventually ally with other women in broader mass based national activism, the highlight of which was Women's March of 1956.

By 1952 comments in the *Muslim's Journal* indicate more frequent participation of women in political meetings<sup>64</sup>.

In September of 1952 *The Leader's* report on the resistance campaign noted,

"21 resisters followed by 4000 marchers marched through the streets of Durban. Amongst those arrested were four women – two African and two Indian women, one of whom was a Muslim women. They are Miss Nomntu Myikiza, Miss Teresa Mofokeng, Mrs. Fatima Seedat,<sup>65</sup> and Mrs. Janapathy Singh. Incidentally, the articles notes that the march also included "four well-dressed European girls"<sup>66</sup>

Reporting on the Women's Anti-Pass March in 1956, *The Leader* falls back onto familiar ground and headlines the article "*No Fury Like a Woman Scorned*"<sup>67</sup>. The article fails to make the front page, features on page six and is outdone by a report

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<sup>64</sup> *Muslims Journal*, Johannesburg, July-Oct 1954:3

<sup>65</sup> Fatima Seedat a prominent activist of the time was one of the only women later charged as a co-conspirator in the treason trial. She was the wife of one of the Trialists – Dawood Seedat.

<sup>66</sup> *The Leader*, Durban, 5 September 1952:1 "Thousands in Solemn March along main Streets"

<sup>67</sup> *The Leader*, Durban, 24 August 1956:6

calling for the end of the 'manhandling' of Indian women by Indian businessmen in their stores.<sup>68</sup>

The next month Indian Women marched 'in their thousands' defending their homes in a protest against the 'All-In Group Areas Conference'; an act 'reminiscent of the Passive Resistance days when many women demonstrated against the Pegging Act'<sup>69</sup>. The accompanying picture shows a column of women holding banners and placards. Though no numbers are given in the article, there are about 100 women in the picture wearing saris, dresses with pants, some with scarves draped over their shoulders.<sup>70</sup>

In 1957, Dr Zainab Asvat, Mrs. Amina Cachalia and Miss Hajira Saloojee, (all Muslim women and well known Transvaal leaders), were summoned to appear in court. The charges against them arose from

'the procession which was organised on the evening of June 26 to demonstrate the solidarity of the Indian people on the second anniversary of the adoption of the Freedom Charter.'<sup>71</sup>

It was

'alleged that those summoned were the organisers of the torchlight procession'<sup>72</sup>.

#### Conspirators, Leaders, Resisters and Prisoners

In 1958 although not one of the accused, Mrs Fatima Seedat is cited as a co-conspirator, in schedule B of the indictment against the Treason Trialists.<sup>73</sup>

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<sup>68</sup> *The Leader*, Durban, March 1956

<sup>69</sup> *The Leader*, Durban, 7 September 1956:pg 1

<sup>70</sup> Ibid

<sup>71</sup> *The Leader*, Durban, 30 August 1957:3 "Women to appear in Court"

<sup>72</sup> Ibid

<sup>73</sup> *The Leader*, Durban, 5 September 1958

Other articles report that women were amongst the elected officials of the South African Indian Congress (SAIC), spoke at rallies, joined the passive resistance campaign, marched with men, marched alone, were arrested, appeared in court, gave evidence, served banning orders and prison terms.<sup>74</sup> While we may gather that women did participate, the extent or impact of their participation is more difficult to discern.

Further, there is little in the newspapers to distil the views and perceptions of the community on women activists. Apart from the narrative of events, there is little commentary on the women themselves. Rendering activists invisible in this way is most likely the result of the bias of the reporter. However, it may have served the activists interests. In a situation where purdah was still practiced, it might have served them better to remain un-noticed and un-observed in their activism.

#### **D. CONCLUSION**

In this chapter I have presented the primary aspects of the social discourse of the forties and the fifties.

Education, marriage and purdah provide an insight into the gender dynamics of Indian Muslim society of the time. Individual members of the public and reporters used these and other avenues to debate, affirm, question and entrench a host of gendered

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<sup>74</sup> "If a statistical analysis were made of all the intellectual and political gatherings, it would be found that our women were always present at political meetings, rather than gatherings of a cultural nature, because the former are more important to them from the point of view of our position in general in this country." *Muslims Journal*, Johannesburg, July-Oct 1954:3.

relationships. Through these reports and letters they commented on women's aspirations and their political participation.

Reviewing the archives women appear as active participants in communal life, however, their presence in formal politics is less obvious. Nonetheless the political impact of their presence in communal life is apparent. Through their presence they were able to advocate for change. It appears that once change began it was built upon quickly and expeditiously. Once the debates on purdah began raging, it was not long before education became available. With more education more women ventured into public spaces, opening avenues for employment and for charitable work. It also allowed women to publicise the problems they encountered under Muslim divorce law.

Through this discourse we can discern public opinions on women's aspirations for independence and personal development.

To supplement the information gathered here, the next chapter will introduce three individuals, women activists of the time.

## CHAPTER SIX Women as Activists

### **A. OVERVIEW**

This chapter will enhance the picture of women's activism sketched in the last chapter. Through brief insights into the activism of three prominent Indian Muslim women, this chapter provides personal accounts of women's experiences as activists. The interviews were conducted with Zuleikha Mayat, Amina Cachalia and Fatima Meer. Through the interviews, the various social forces determining women's activism become discernible. These forces will be discussed in the next chapter.

This chapter begins with Cherryl Walker's presentation of Indian women's activism as an example of common perceptions of Indian Muslim women's activism. The interviews provide a useful contrast. The interviews present three brief biographical sketches which highlight the activism of the women interviewed. The interviews are not intended as life histories - the scope of which is beyond this study.

The three women interviewed here were prominent activists of the forties and fifties and continue with some form of activism today. During these interviews I listened for how their activism began, what influenced the types of activism they engaged in, how they understood their activism as well as the social influences that helped or hindered their activism.

### **B. INDIAN WOMEN'S RESISTANCE**

In Cheryl Walker's *Women and Resistance in South Africa*, her presentation of the Indian women focuses on activism in the SACP and the SAIC. In her analysis, political activism among Indian women during the 1940's (Walker, 1991:108) is the consequence of broader national developments, coinciding with an internal division within the SAIC<sup>75</sup>. Referring most likely to the Transvaal Indian Congress purdah politics (outlined above), her suggestion is that this splinter group may have advocated for greater involvement for women. While it is true that one of the contesting leaders i.e. Yusuf Dadoo did advocate for greater women's involvement in public life generally, this was not the reason for the split.

In her observations Indian women appear

“isolated, poorly educated and almost totally dependent on the network of their families for both social and economic support” (Walker, 1991:108).

### C. AMINA CACHALIA

#### a. The Early Days<sup>76</sup>

Motivated by the political involvements of her family i.e. her father and elder sister, Cachalia became an active political figure whose experiences include leadership of the Women's March to Pretoria in 1956.

She grew up in Fordsburg, attending Youth Congress meetings at Kolvert House. She taught at a Hindu school, loved wearing saris and was rather unrestricted in her movements and political involvements. She recalls growing up knowing that she was

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<sup>75</sup> The reference is very clearly to the 'break' in purdah and woman coming out to vote (see previous chapter). Contrast this to *The Leader's* presentation of the event.

<sup>76</sup> Interview with Amina Cachalia 12 December 2001

Muslim and that Islam was a central aspect of her early life. Her family's political involvement encouraged her own involvement, through which she got other women involved too. Canvassing amongst the homes in her area she convinced other women to join public protests, but not all families were willing to allow the women amongst them to be involved. Often fathers or husbands would refuse their daughters' or wives' involvement.

Her experience is that women were not encouraged to pursue an education, most leaving school at an early age. Her sister was only the second female Muslim doctor to qualify in Johannesburg. She observes,

“A lot of women, because of the environment on the home front and so on, and because I suppose being women, ... were discriminated against in the families or in the communities. I mean in the community there was a men-women thing always. Women were always regarded as (though) they were the fairer sex and should really be treated with kid gloves and they were not allowed to do what the men were. There was no equality really on that score. ... But as the years went by, the women fought back and it was also a result of the political movements. The Indian Congress had a great deal of say on women generally and talked about equality of people, of men and women. So ... it fell away after a bit, because our girls went in to do all kinds of things. They went to study, and became nurses and much more than that. They went into every field really.”

#### **b. Cachalia's Activism<sup>77</sup>**

Cachalia belonged to the Youth Congress, the Transvaal Indian Congress, the Women's progressive Union and later to the Federation of South African Women. She says her motivation for her activism did not come from being Muslim. It came from 'being an Indian in South Africa, being of those less privileged and being black'.

In 1945:

“...I was instrumental in starting an organization called the Women's Progressive Union. It was not a political organization. I and other people, Muslim and other Gujerathi women and ... a few Coloured women in the area, there were Malay women and so on. They all joined this organisation. Because we realized that women on the whole were really not a voice at all. They had to really take the permission from their husbands, or their sons for that matter, to do anything.

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<sup>77</sup> Ibid

They weren't economically independent! Very few of them worked and went to earn a living. And we thought that if we can inspire the younger women to start working, to go out and find a job, no matter what it is, or to do nursing or whatever, then that might make them economically independent. And once you are economically independent you're not so dependent on your brothers and fathers. So we started this organisation with that idea in mind. And we did very well. We were very well received by men, Indian men and everyone else. And we had no political agenda for this organisation. ....

... We started shorthand and typing classes. We started dress making classes, baby care classes, first-aid classes, with the hope that if some women start with first-aid it they might go on to nursing and things like that. And it did happen. We influenced a number of young women. They came and did shorthand and typing. We got free teachers, people who gave their services free of charge and we got the madressah hall in Vrededorp (free) where we had our classes at night. We had other classes in homes all around. We started literacy classes. We sent women to the various blocks of flats and in one flat in the block all the women would gather who wanted to learn to read and write. Old women, young women. ... it was a very lovely organisation, and a very successful one. ... We had qualified dressmakers at the end of 4-5 years. We had people finding office jobs, doing short hand and typing. We had people going into nursing."

The organisation continued for 4 years before it waned as her attention was diverted to other activities.

The Federation of South African Women was established in 1954 and Cachalia was involved from its inception, holding the position of National Treasurer for a number of years.

She spent a total of 17 years under banning orders. At times both she and her husband were banned together. She was imprisoned in the fifties and in the sixties she was forced to go underground, leaving her two children with her mother. She says there was always a feeling of resistance amongst other women too. According to her there were many women who became involved in political activity and who actively fought apartheid. They attended meetings, provided safe houses, and discussed the issues amongst themselves and with others. Those that couldn't be actively involved provided a solidarity that she found invaluable. The quiet support that came from the community spurred her and other activists on in their work.

### **c. Observations**

Cachalia was no doubt fortunate in her lineage. It provided her a position of privilege from which to launch her struggles. She did not move forward alone. Her impact was felt widely. Appreciating the value of women who did not share her privileged position, she sought out means for other women to also become involved. Being Indian was important, it mean she had to fight. However, her faith remained a matter of private awareness for her.

## **D. ZULEIKHA MAYAT**

### **a. Early Days<sup>78</sup>**

Zuleikha Mayat (often referred to by others as Julu Mayat) was a pivotal figure in conscientising local woman. She believed in not 'going it alone' preferring to 'take other women with' her in the struggle against apartheid. In 1955 she was responsible for establishing a group called Women's Cultural Group, which has continued its work over almost 48 years, in service of both the immediate Indian community and the broader community of South Africans.

Mayat's activism began in earnest when she married into a Durban family. Emerging out of a culturally vibrant community in Potchefstroom where people still mixed easily across colour lines, she found herself restrained by the exclusivity of the Durban Indian community. Looking to recreate the vibrant exchanges of her home town and inspired by her husband's faith in her abilities, it seems she could have done no less than go on to become a the centre of community activism. Faced with the frustrations of life in Durban, her husband encouraged her initial participation in

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<sup>78</sup> Interview with Zuleikha Mayat June 2001

community activities. She accompanied him to Congress and religious meetings where she was often the only woman, and the men were mostly 'moulana types and the bearded types'. There, he would purposefully point out her presence to them. It took her a while to adjust to these new spaces. She admits that at times she wished she could retreat to a quiet corner, unnoticed. She says he eventually opened opportunities for her to learn and develop her interests in religion and in community activism.

Soon after an Arabic Study Circle Speech Contest, which she and Zubeida Barmania won, they decided to develop a forum where women could come together, get to know each other across the colour line and make contributions to the community. Hence the Women's Cultural Group (WCG) was born.

#### **b. Mayat's Activism<sup>79</sup>**

##### Women's Cultural Group

"It was going to be a women's association for women, there was no religion or anything but we would go into everybody's cultures and everybody's religions, (with) more emphasis on Islam because the majority involved were Muslim women ... 90% of them were."<sup>80</sup>

Devi Bhagwan, Violin Juno, Fatima Meer and Linda Cooper were amongst those at the first group meeting.<sup>81</sup>

The aim of the WCG was philanthropic:

"... to get to know the society in which we lived, to be involved in what they needed and what we could gain from them. It was always if we heard of a crisis somewhere we would rush with blankets and so on, until the other agencies grew up ... there were not all these (other) movements (then) ... all the other societies depend on public funds ... we generate our own funds, so its

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<sup>79</sup> Ibid

<sup>80</sup> Women's Cultural Group, Brochure Commemorating 35 Years of Community Service 1954-1989, Durban, Impress Publishing, 1989: 2

<sup>81</sup> Interview with Zuleikha Mayat June 2001

... really the sweat of the members that's going into the poor people. ... Most of the funds come from the book ... we have a little dinner and so on and even from that we give charity.”<sup>82</sup>

As it turned out WCG became “essentially a group of Muslim women”<sup>83</sup> which according to the 35-year Commemorative Brochure “there is no need to apologise for”<sup>84</sup>. The organisation was a response to

“a crying need for an organisation where women could meet as women. An organisation through which they could discuss and tackle the problems of family and community life, participate in cultural activities on an organised level and above all to have a forum where Indian women could meet women of other communities and get to know them better”<sup>85</sup>.

A group member, writes

“Our social reality is that our lives are circumscribed by our ideology, our religion, our ritual, our neighbourhood ...”<sup>86</sup>.

Poetry and music recitals in the vernacular were regular features of the Group’s activities. Other activities included publishing a book of prayers ‘*Qur’anic Lights*’ and a book on life in South Africa ‘*Nanima’s Chest*’; fashion shows; cooking demonstrations; dinners and lecture evenings. The most prominent feature of their work has been the publication of ‘*Indian Delights*’, a cookbook which has gained international recognition, having sold well over 400 000 copies since its first publication in 1961. Funds raised through these and other activities are used for the organisation’s projects.

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<sup>82</sup> Women’s Cultural Group: 2

<sup>83</sup> Ibid

<sup>84</sup> Ibid

<sup>85</sup> Ibid: 4

<sup>86</sup> Ibid: 2

Beginning with a focus on local women's concerns, WCG gatherings soon bore out their political relevance. WCG brought together women from all walks of life, all races, classes and interests and provided them with insight into each other's lives and a platform for solidarity. WCG hosted debates, bazaars, cultural afternoons, prominent politicians, artists, writers, professionals and foreign dignitaries and local activists.

Their projects extend from water service development; Christmas hampers; and a school for the disabled to establishing a library; flood relief; bursaries for Black students; a medical clinic and a nursery school. Using the efforts of their fundraising, the Group registered an educational trust in 1971, through which bursaries are issued to assist young women with their education.

The WCG also became a point of contact with other communities. They were consulted for media presentations,<sup>87</sup> talks and presentation on Indian art, craft and culture<sup>88</sup>.

Through their networks women integrated across racial lines, providing avenues for exchange and collective action. Their role in linking Indian and Muslim women to other women in South Africa is evident in some of their other activities. They hosted

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<sup>87</sup> In 1979 the Group "cooperated with the Independent Film Co. for a TV presentation *"They came from the East"*, the main themes being the role of Muslim mothers, mendhi application and cookery. Women's Cultural Group: 4

<sup>88</sup> In November 1964 the Group assisted in the Durban Art Gallery Oriental Exhibition, and organised an evening of Indian dance and music. In July 1967 the Group was invited to organise an afternoon of Indian art, craft and culture for the 46<sup>th</sup> Medical Congress held in Durban and later that year, in November Indira Kara and K. Coovadia gave a talk to the Sherwood Women's Institute (a white women's organisation) on Indian customs and cookery. Women's Cultural Group: 3

talks on family planning by Dr Goonam, exchanges with African women in Hammarsdale and White women in Sherwood<sup>89</sup>.

WCG did encounter occasional setbacks, particularly when they challenged traditional notions. However, they appear to have found ways and means of meeting those challenges without diverting from their aims. In 1959 the group prepared a play in which Muslim women would appear on stage before a male and female audience speaking in English. They confronted “traditional prejudices against female performers”<sup>90</sup> and were threatened with a picket against them. Preferring the success of the event over a direct confrontation with the community on whose financial and moral support they relied on, they withheld the play, produced another in the vernacular and staged it for an all-women audience. The play was a hit, big enough to demand a sequel, which received an equally positive response.

#### Other Activism

Through the WCG Mayat created links within and between communities. Other activists, such as Fatima Meer also played an important part, encouraging Zuleikha Mayat to organise gatherings and opening avenues for her to make contact with other women’s groups.

“Some of the things that they (the political organisations) had to do had to be done on a very quiet level ... And for this she (Fatima Meer) would approach me or my sister and we would involve either the WCG or the Arabic Study Circle. We would put up things with her. She organised a Black Women’s meeting at a hotel in Overport. She couldn’t have it under the aegis of any of the organisations that she was involved with. It couldn’t be shown that it was a mixed group. So the WCG just organised it for her. We served the food there that day; we cooked the food and so on and so on. You know, things like that. ... So this is where, although the women (WCG) didn’t play an active role in the participation of the meeting, one or two of us would sit and listen to the meeting ... This was the involvement of women, not as the leaders but as supporters. Women’s Cultural Group provided a ‘decoy’ - a little social gathering and so on”

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<sup>89</sup> See Appendix Two – WCG List of activities for 1954-1988, Women’s Cultural Group: 3-4

<sup>90</sup> Women’s Cultural Group: 6

When Mandela and others were on the run she and her husband provided a safe house, and transportation. The security forces knew this and her family was subject to early morning raids by the notorious 'black jacks'.

While her political potential was clearly perceived and used by Meer and Mandela, the struggle in her own community was less than easy. Acceptance did not come easily:

"Mr. AM Moolla had a fight with me the first time. There was this Sultan of Zanzibar who had come to Durban. When we heard we invited them for tea at someone's home. And we had all the members pooling together and one of those heavy tea parties. The Orient Club (a men's social club) had invited them for lunch; some one else had invited them for something else in the evening. The ship was meant to dock in the morning, but by the time they came out of there it was very late.

So Mr. Moola phoned me and said 'They will not be coming for your tea, they will be coming for our luncheon here.'

I said 'No way. If they come on time, they will be deposited here for tea.'

Mr. Moola had never heard a woman talk in that tone. He said 'Look I'm going to invite you for lunch.'

I said 'Fine, I will come for lunch and soon as that lunch is finished I will walk out with the guests.'

He said 'No; you must give them time to talk.'

I said 'No, 3 'o clock I walk out with the guests.'

When we arrived there, they (the guests) didn't arrive (until) it was late and they went straight to the Moosas. I said 'Mr. Moolla you lose out and I lose out'.

Since then Mr. Moola and I were friends. If he wanted something from women he would phone me. He would tell me that 'The administrator is coming and you must present flowers to his wife' and I would say that 'You get a little child to do that, I don't do that sort of thing.'

So always we had egos fighting with each other. Moolla had a terrific ego and so did I but we got on together. Let's put it that way."<sup>91</sup>

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<sup>91</sup> Interview with Zuleikha Mayat June 2001

Mayat recalls that even where women held economic power it was not normal for them to claim it publicly. It was common for women to become the main breadwinners in a home by selling samoosas, sweetmeats and other foods they made very well, but still not having full control of the family finances. Alternatively, they controlled the family's finances, budgeting and making crucial decisions, but this was never public knowledge. She says that the same applied in politics. Women were in politics "with their husbands, but they were never the ones that got the names".<sup>92</sup>

Apartheid meant that she could not attend her local high school. She completed her matric via correspondence, and when the opportunity to study for a degree arose later in her life, she felt it might take her away from her community activities, and so never pursued it. Nonetheless, Mayat ensured educational opportunities for young women. WCG developed a bursary fund which over the years has distributed over R2-million to Black students i.e. African, Indian and Coloured.

She regards herself as an activist who, given the situation surrounding her, could not afford to do nothing. She is motivated primarily by her faith and her understanding of Muslim women's roles in early struggles for Islam. The wives of the prophet Muhammad, Khadija and Ayesha were her two key role models.

### **c. Observations**

Mayat's experiences in the struggle against apartheid are deeply rooted in her understanding of her faith. Motivated and facilitated by it, she crossed a number of hurdles. Her social standing further facilitated her work. She had access to an exclusive community of privileged women who, without her, may otherwise have had

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<sup>92</sup> Ibid

no avenue for involvement in the struggle against apartheid. Using their resources and initiative, she opened channels for them to get to know other women in their own communities as well as women in other communities, to exchange views, to build solidarity and where possible to help financially.

Her husband's support and encouragement of her activism was certainly significant in allowing her access to venues reserved for men. Her religious and cultural affiliations were crucial elements determining her modes of activism. Her access to the worlds of the wealthy and the poor, women and men, made her an ideal networker. She used the potential inherent in that to establish the Women's Cultural Group and in so doing she "took the others with" her!

At the forefront of Muslim charitable work, the WCG was later joined by numerous other organisations doing similar sorts of work. The continued success of Mayat and the group today, bears testimony to the need she has filled in women's lives.

## **E. FATIMA MEER<sup>93</sup>**

### **a. Early Days**

Fatima Meer is an internationally known anti-apartheid activist, who gained prominence during the 70's and 80's. Born and raised in Durban she belongs to the influential Meer family. Her history of struggle is, a "most ancient history"! She began her activism at age sixteen or seventeen, in 1944-45 when she raised funds for the Bengal Relief Fund. During the Passive Resistance Campaign of 1946, she initiated the Students' Passive Resistance Council and made her first speech. It was

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<sup>93</sup> Interview with Fatima Meer 11 August 2001

in Red Square and before thousands of people. A pivotal figure in her intellectual and political awareness was her father, who at first helped her write her speeches, and later acted as a mentor. She credits her involvement in politics and her activism to her father's strong influence on her life and her family's history and record of commitment to the struggle.

#### **b. Meer's Activism**

Though she does not locate her own activism in an Islamic ideology, it is significant to note that in speaking of her father's activism she does. She also links her activism directly to his, though not in a manner that followed his ideological perspectives. In fact they had fundamental ideological differences. He:

'was a very passionate supporter of the Muslim League and Jeenah. And I was as passionate a supporter of Gandhi.'

She recalls that he was instrumental in initiating debates regarding a number of contentious issues in the Muslim community, which earned him a reputation as a learned person, as well as an outspoken critic of traditional practices.

Of her affiliation with Islam she says:

I wrote articles in school magazines and things like that, on the position of the Muslim women. I always defended the attacks that came that Islam treated women badly or women were put into purdah and all the rest of it. So I always found ... I think I took my cue from my father and I also continued to be somewhat radical in my approach, and quote and research and pointed out that is not so according to the Qur'an. ...

Meer's activism is now legendary in political circles. She became the first Indian female professor of Sociology. She was jailed for almost four months in 1976, served banning orders and led various mass actions. (Meer, 2002) In the eighties she

established the Institute for Black Research and her activism continues into the present.

She ascribes her activism to being Indian, to being from amongst the oppressed and knowing that she had to challenge the status quo.

Meer recently suffered a severe stroke, which she is fighting with vigour and in spite of which she has continued her activism.

### **c. Observations**

Meer was able to embark on her activist path safely, the way being mapped out by her father and the path secured by the family reputation. Her father assisted her in her development, with her speeches and provided her with the necessary support and inspiration to allow her to continue her work unabated and unhindered by any potential impact of a community which may otherwise have reacted severely against her unconventional behaviour.

The Meer family name, she says, also eased this path for her within the community. Preceded by other Meers, including her husband IC Meer, she did not encounter any community censure for her activism! Careful through feminist consciousness not to define Fatima Meer's opportunities and consciousness in terms of her father's activism, I find it very difficult not to. She refers to him far too frequently in her discussions of her own activism. And it is perhaps due to this, i.e. her father's strong influence, that she recalls little resistance to her activism.

She paints a picture of women's activism unhindered by conservatism or community sanction, where those with the will to assert themselves were welcomed and easily accepted. Meer's activism was supported by her family affiliations which gave her a sense of ease and confidence in terms of the relationship she enjoyed with the community she represented!

## **F. FINDINGS**

### **a. Types of Activism**

These interviews and the archival review of the previous chapter reveal a thriving activism amongst Indian Muslim women. That activism took on a host of forms. In addition to the formal political activism of making speeches, leading marches, being arrested, banned and imprisoned, other forms of activism also took place. This included writing a cookbook, establishing a school to teach secretarial, first-aid and other skills, establishing a research institute, performing plays, providing study bursaries, hosting tea parties for political discussions and providing safe-houses.

The second form of activism seldom falls into the mainstream understanding of what activism is. Hence the definition of 'activism' needs to be revisited. Suggestions for a redefinition will be addressed in the next chapter.

### **b. Social Forces**

Women in this chapter and the last took on leadership positions in political movements, initiated and developed organisations of their own, facilitating empowerment for themselves and for other women. However, women's lives were largely prescribed by social and communal norms. Perceptions of nationalism, race,

class, religion and family emerge as the dominant social forces influencing women's activism.

The national struggle against apartheid provided avenues for women to challenge the patriarchy of their smaller communities. 'Being Indian', also motivated activism.

Both Meer and Cachalia base their activism on the fact that they were Indian and therefore oppressed. Religion also played its part. Mayat's activism is motivated more strongly by her religion than her race.

Women used their family and social affiliations to facilitate their activism. Meer could rely on her father to help her develop ideological positions and Mayat's husband gave her access to 'male-only' spaces. Meer's activism benefited from her family name, as did Cachalia's.

The next chapter will discuss each of the issues – nationalism, race, class, religion and family affiliation in turn.

### **c. Strategies**

Established social norms made activism difficult. Consequently, women chose their activities strategically. The women in this study used whatever avenues were available to make valuable contributions. Particularly they manipulated traditionally prescribed roles and created their own uniquely female spaces. Thus empowered, they were able to channel their energies and resources against the State and the community. The next chapter will also assess the strategies used to facilitate activism.

## **G. CONCLUSION**

In this chapter I have presented the activism of three women as they perceive themselves. The interviews provide the lived experience behind Walker's assumptions on Indian women's activism.

Their activism was unique, indeed innovative. The use of cookbooks, secretarial schools, bursary funds and research institutes suggests that these women had access to social power and resources which they put to the benefit of the broader community.

Their efforts advocating for education for girls, freedom from purdah, equity in marriage and divorce have passed unnoticed in the histories of Indians, of Muslims and of women in South Africa. It remains for South African history to reclaim these activists.

**CHAPTER SEVEN**  
**Understanding Activism –**  
**Definitions and Strategies**

**A. INTRODUCTION**

Having presented the social discourse of the forties and fifties in Chapter 5 and the experiences of three activists in Chapter 6, the next step is to begin to understand this activism.

This requires at first a review and a broadening of the concepts 'women's movement' and 'activism'. This will be facilitated here using Molyneux's understanding of the dynamics of women's activism and the problems attendant in essentialising women's movements.

Two aspects of activism i.e. costs and impact will be used to suggest further means for assessing activism

To develop this broader view of activism, the chapter will conclude with an analysis of two activist strategies which emerged out of the literature presented in the preceding two chapters.

**B. REVIEWING 'ACTIVISM'**

A gender-based re-conceptualisation of politics requires the inclusion of “those activities women are typically involved in outside the male dominated institutional sphere” (Waylen;1996:5), failing which

“much of women’s political activity can be dismissed or marginalized as it does not fit easily into conventional categories and, as a result, the important role it plays in the political process will be ignored.” (op.cit)

The ways in which women use ‘socially prescribed roles to act politically’ (op. cit.) serves to politicise their social roles. The process begins through a politicisation of the private sphere, upon which women enter into the public sphere. Accustomed to engaging in the ‘politics of everyday life’ it is not unusual for women not to see these activities as political. (op. cit.)

To avoid the loss of valuable effort on the part of women who extended themselves beyond their traditional family and social responsibilities requires a review of what constitutes activism. This review must take into account the efforts of women who used both traditional and non-traditional roles to contribute to a broader struggle against apartheid. It must include activity that women engage in outside of the necessities of the daily running of homes or earning of a living, and which they intended to have a broader impact. This includes charitable work in the community, preparing meals and doing domestic or other work to support anti-apartheid organisations (in which they may or may not be members) as well as more formal activities, such as speech-making, writing, organisation-building and other forms of mobilisation against the repression of the apartheid state. Much of the former is not ordinarily considered activism in the generic understanding of the term.

It is true that often, women (Joseph;1997:67) experience the State only indirectly i.e. through the males who surround them. This mediated interaction potentially encourages and also maintains the severe differentiation, hence separation, of public and private spaces. However, it would not be fair to define activities which occur primarily in private spaces and which support other (mostly men's) actions and organisations, as apolitical or non-political. It is particularly unfair when these activities have the effect of facilitating and supporting other causes and struggles which are easily identified as political.

Redefining activism must create space for different forms of women's activism and expand beyond the limitations of formal and informal politics. It must recognise both the attempts to exercise as well as the actual exercise of agency in the interests of change. Women's activities which support broader social changes and which, both directly and indirectly, resulted in a challenge to inequitable power relations need to be recognised and included.

Molyneux's study of women's movements uses autonomy and interest as analytical determinates. Concluding that there is no hard and fast rule as to the link between these two aspects of activism, (Molyneux; 2001:151) she differentiates the concept of interests. "Women's interests are historically and culturally constituted ... reflecting the social placement and priorities of particular groups of women. They were politically and discursively constructed." (Molyneux; 2001:152) "Gender interests referred to those arising from the social relations and positioning of the sexes and therefore pertained , but in specific ways, to both men and women." (Molyneux; 2001:152) Gender interests can be further differentiated between practical gender

interests (based on the satisfaction of needs arising from women's placement within the sexual division of labour Molyneux; 2001:152) and strategic interests ("based on claims to transform social relations in order to enhance women's position and to secure a more lasting repositioning of women within the gender order and within society at large" Molyneux; 2001:153)

Practical gender interests motivate women in terms of immediate daily living experiences and relate more directly to the alleviation of multiple burdens. While not often viewed as political the pursuit of practical gender interests may lead to the opening of means to mobilize toward strategic gender interests. This does not necessarily imply a link between the two, as it may well be that activism on practical interests does not make impact strategic interests. However, links are possible.

Women who began the Women's Cultural group began by using acceptable forms of 'charitable work' and soon evolved into a group which supported less conventional forms of charity – i.e. education bursaries for black students, male and female.

More significant here are the links between women's interests and activism. The historically specific nature of women's interests (read from women's social /structural location) implies difference both in the focus and the form that activism takes over time. The contexts in which interests are determined effect the way agency and choice are exercised (Molyneux; 2001). The contextual nature of activism implies that what might have been activism at one point in history may not appear so at another.

Similarly, what might appear as conformity with tradition in one context, may not be so in another. This is particularly pertinent for the women in this study. While Walker

and others found them to be controlled and therefore limited by family ties and a conservative tradition, the women themselves did not hold this vision of themselves. They found themselves under severe restraint, but also found avenues and means for resisting these restraints. So that what might appear as a 'cooking class' from the outside was also a group of women sharing support, discussing the politics of the time and finding ways and means to contribute to the broader struggle against apartheid.

This selective exercise of agency reveals the strategic nature of women's activism.  
(dealt with later in this chapter.)

Other possible criteria to use in determining the activist nature of the activities under consideration here are costs and impact. The cost of activism measured in terms of personal time, effort and energies, as well as social cost or risk measured in terms of communal ties and personal reputation can be significant. This is not to imply that where the costs are fewer, that the activism is less valuable, for that will require a scale of costs measured according to particular interests. To move away from these prescriptions, a cost of activism approach must consider the particular costs to the activists, measured according to what the activist values, and with the understanding that this too is context specific.

To avoid the blanket inclusion of 'everything that women do' as activism, the impact of activism may function as a second criteria. Impact is understood in terms of the impact of activities on the surrounding social order; the manner and extent to which these activities promote change or create opportunities for change to occur. While it is important that the change be aimed at improving women's lives, by focussing on

change we avoid the tendency to prescribe a particular end goal for activism i.e. increased mobility for women, access to education. Instead it gives value to attempts to change social norms which, for instance, allows a movement in the direction of increased mobility and access to education.

With this broader definition, the efforts of the women that Cachalia and Mayat speak of, who provided the solidarity, who offered a safe house, who assisted with a decoy luncheon, or a cookbook for bursaries are not excluded from what constitutes activism. Neither will the efforts of the letter writers in *The Leader*, the women who voted and encouraged others to vote in the 'Purdah Politics' event nor the women who found their way to schools and universities against social norms, be lost.

This redefinition allows the inclusion of actions of individual women, who may be not be part of any organised women's group, as well as those women who actively support and empathise with the aims and objectives of women's groups.<sup>94</sup> This broader definition allows us to include women who do not or who cannot openly affiliate with formal groupings to be included in what is considered activism. However it is not broad enough to include anything that women may do as activism.

With this broader framework for the term activist it becomes possible to discern different forms of activism. There is the activism through formal political and other organisations which may also support women's activism and women's groups. This

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<sup>94</sup> Speaking about her early activism, and her interaction with the Islamic Movement Meer says, "I was a woman ... you know ... and those formal things, those institutionalized things, those are things that the men do. So I did my own thing ... I wrote articles in school magazines and things like that." Interview with Fatima Meer 11 August 2001

activism more often associated with strategic gender interests is commonly accepted as political activism.

Alternatively there is the activism of those who provide tacit and at times clandestine support for political activism. This community activism has a crucial role to play in political activism, by supporting and bolstering it. It often provides the logistics, infrastructure and crucial solidarity and emotional support for other forms of activism. This activism is more akin to meeting practical gender interests

Collectively these forms of activism facilitate the movement toward the achievement of both strategic and practical interests.

In situations where community organising is likely to take a less formal format, political activists may be instrumental in initiating activism and providing the ideological platform upon which women's groups may be established. However, due to constraints of time and other resources, they may not be part of the actual women's groups. Their support ranges from the moral and ideological to the use of their financial and political influence.

Meer is one such woman. Through the interviews, Meer's activism features more strongly within the anti-apartheid movement, than in the women's movement.

Cachalia and Mayat on the other hand, having established women's organisations and instrumental to their success, feature more strongly in the women's movement.

While Mayat and Meer appear to have had different rôles evident in the different types of activism they engaged in, Cachalia's activism appears similar to Meer's. Cachalia, however, also appears to have straddled both types of activism. She functioned as a woman in the broader anti-apartheid struggle as well as a woman in the women's movement.

Conversely the activism of Meer and Cachalia do not feature in terms of the Islamic movement. Mayat is unique in that respect.

Individually however, they were all activists. Using the dual criteria of costs and impact, it is apparent that their activities had significant social and personal costs, and that the impact of their activities was broadly felt. To different degrees they challenged social norms and made concerted efforts to rally people into networks that also challenged the apartheid system.

Collectively they paint a picture of Indian Muslim women involved in mainstream activism, women-centred activism and what may be referred to as Islam-centered activism, all of which was directed against apartheid.

### **C. STRATEGIES**

The various strategies employed by women to impact their surroundings, contributes to the difficulty of categorising women's activism. The strategic use of available channels to enact their agency, may allow women to bypass local prescriptions. Activists have used various strategies as a means of achieving their goals.

Organising as women may at first appear natural, until it becomes a means of circumventing the norms that resist overtly political activism. Women who formed all-women's groups as a means of struggle may have been organising along traditional lines, however the manipulation of these traditional avenues to achieve 'un-traditional' gains, is both strategic and expeditious. In effect these strategies show the tight linkages between activism for practical gender interests (which are more accessible and open) activism for strategic gender interests (which are less traditional and therefore often more difficult to attain.)

Two examples of strategic use of available avenues for activism are illustrated here.

#### **a. Subverting Traditional Roles**

The frequent reports on women's involvement in charitable work shows that this was an avenue easily accessible to women. As early as the Natal Muslim Conference in 1944<sup>95</sup> there were calls for lifting restrictions on women's mobility, to 'allow' them to explore opportunities for charitable works.

The impetus for charitable acts is couched in terms of a religious duty. The religious obligation to engage in charitable work provided women with an ideal opportunity to enter public life. Through these avenues, women were able to enter the public realm without censure and with 'legitimacy'. The variety of activities they engaged in however, shows that they did not limit their entry into the public realm to charitable works. In this respect they appear to have pushed some boundaries facilitating

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<sup>95</sup> *The Leader*: Durban, 5 August 1944:5

participation at a level and in a form which may very well not have been intended by those at the Natal Muslim Conference of 1944.

The forms of charitable activity in vogue comprised feeding and clothing the poor and the indigent. However, given the apartheid context women who entered 'charitable organisations' did more than charity work.

Cachalia's work in the Women's Progressive Union building secretarial skills, Mayat's work in the Women's Cultural group facilitating interracial meetings, hosting talks and seminars on social concerns and for cultural exchanges, Meer's direct political involvement in the NIC and the ANC went much further than the traditional notions of charitable work.

The *Indian Delights* cookbook of the Women's Cultural Group is a clear example of women using their traditional expertise and roles to facilitate the education of male and female students. Mayat talks about how raising funds for the first printing she received little encouragement from the local business community. Few thought any women would want to buy a cookbook. 'Everyone knows how to cook'<sup>96</sup>.

The funds from the sale of *Indian Delights* were used to begin a bursary fund for underprivileged women of all races. The funds still exist and continue to fund educational projects.

#### **b. Developing Exclusive Spaces**

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<sup>96</sup> Interview with Zuleikha Mayat June 2001

The Women's Progressive Union and Women's Cultural Group developed as independent groups – creating an alternative, creative space exclusively for women and which facilitated their activism through ways and means best suited to them. They challenged the racial separatism imposed by apartheid through their inter-racial activities. And, by separating out as a group of women they were able to create a space which they could control and utilize as they chose. Both groups offered exclusive spaces where women taught and learnt new skills which empowered them personally and politically.

'Exiting' from the mainstream is a useful means for creating an independent space which women can control in order to fulfil their needs. It is also not uncommon for some groups to 'exit' mainstream organisations as a means of showing disapproval. To do this a group may withdraw from the political arena to express discontent. (Fatton;1989) This offers an alternative to 'viewing women's political quietism as passivity or conservatism'. (Groot and Reid;1984 in Hassim;1991:70)

Similarly, African women also created separate, exclusively female spaces for themselves. Hassim cautions against the danger of these spaces becoming truly 'safe', in that they were completely isolated from 'feminist voices.'  
(Hassim;1991:71).

However, if we assess the feminist nature of these voices by the 'the recognition of and challenge to the subordination of women' (Hassim and Walker; 1993:531) a different picture emerges. In the level of struggle i.e. the social and personal costs that women endured in order to create these groups we may begin to discern a feminist

consciousness beneath it. Either way, whether we conclude that these groupings were not feminist, not feminist enough or as feminist as it was safe to be ... the value of this activism is not in its feminist nature, it is rather in the fact that it occurred at all.

Its value lies in that women whose traditional role was to cook and care for their homes and families chose to do more than that. Further, that in making these choices they were at times in direct conflict with the men and the social norms which otherwise determined their lives. Women opened their homes to activists on the run, they hosted political meetings under the guise of cultural gatherings, they raised funds for African children's homes, gave out money for education (at a time when women's education was still novel) and trained each other in useful skills which created access to jobs and independent incomes. These activities extended clearly beyond the traditional notion of charitable work.

#### **D. CONCLUSION**

Having established the unique forms of activism women engaged in, the first part of this chapter was to redefine activism to include the activities of 'ordinary housewives' who used their traditional roles to have an impact outside their homes.

Women negotiated their environments using various strategies to facilitate their activism. Two strategies were discussed here; the manipulation of a traditional role of charity worker to serve the interests of anti-apartheid activism and the use of 'women only' spaces. These opportunities were identified early and used successfully. As a result, some women were able to find their place in organisations. However, those who did not, were able to make their contributions using other avenues.

Having reviewed the notion of activism to include a broader scope of activity and assessed the strategic dimensions of women's activism, the next step is to come to understand the various social forces which determined women's activism. To this end the next chapter will present an analysis of which factors facilitated or enhanced activism and how these were negotiated.

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## CHAPTER EIGHT Factors Influencing Activism

### **A. INTRODUCTION**

The social forces which influenced the activities outlined in Chapters 5 and 6 were historically and culturally specific. This chapter will analyse these forces in order to note how they determined or facilitated women's activism.

### **B. FACTORS INFLUENCING ACTIVISM**

Amongst the more apparent forces effecting Indian Muslim women were the national liberation struggle and Indian identity. Both these forces were acutely determined by the dynamics of race, class and religion.

#### **a. Nationalism and the Liberation Struggle**

National struggles for liberation are communal engagements with the State. In liberation struggles women often experience the patriarchy of the struggle, which compounds the patriarchy of the State. For Muslim Women in South Africa, the patriarchy included the State and the Indian Muslim community.

In non-Western nations the interaction with the State is not an individualised one.

(Joseph;1997:67) It is communal. Ethnic, social, religious and kinship-based communities claim their loyalty and exert authority over their members.

Consequently, people experience the power and the authority of the State through

their communities. In turn, women experience the patriarchy of the State compounded by the patriarchy of their local communities. (op.cit.)

Indian Muslim women who challenged the apartheid State inevitably confronted the patriarchy of their communities. This dual confrontation appears inherent in anti-colonialist struggles. Hence the link between the rise of feminist movements and anti-colonialist struggles. (Jayawardena:1986). However, the rise of national or ethnic identities is also linked to men's increased control over women. (Yuval Davis)<sup>97</sup>.

This double-edged sword offered to women by nationalist discourse simultaneously facilitates and limits opportunities for feminist struggles against patriarchy.

(Kandiyoti;1997:10)

The emergence of national identities are often times of change, flux and dynamism. Nationalist processes may promote opportunities for new ideas, open avenues for new thinking and allow changes in traditional roles and values. However, in the midst of this flux, there is an uncertainty, which draws on women's idealised roles as bearers of culture and ethnicity, limiting their identities within historically determined mores and traditions. Religion and culture exert a coercive force over women's activities in struggles against the State. The social control exercised by the religious and cultural identity of Indian Muslim women consequently pre-determined the avenues available to them for resistance.

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<sup>97</sup> Similar debates are evident in the evolving understandings of the nation state in other areas of study. While Anderson (1991) sees nationalism as the result of the failure or weakening of systems of religious and dynastic cultures, Mazzini (1966) used religion in his conception of nation. "God ... divided humanity into distinct groups upon the face of our globe and thus planted the seeds of nations. Bad governments disfigured the design of God. But the divine design will infallibly be fulfilled ... natural divisions, the innate spontaneous tendencies of the people will replace the arbitrary divisions sanctioned by bad governments" (Mazzini; 1966:52)

Indian Muslim women lived within two systems, the formal political apartheid system and the social system of Indian Muslim culture. Dissent occurred at different levels in both systems. Women seeking to engage the State were limited to activities traditionally considered acceptable. These were mostly those that conformed to their traditional roles as mothers, wives and nurturers. Hence the Women's Cultural Group emerges from amongst middle-class housewives, whose access to funds facilitates their activism. Through the group they harness their traditional cooking skills and transform these into a cookbook project, raising funds for bursaries for children's homes, cultural exchanges theatrical performances and speech contests. They also cooked for political gatherings, and hosted tea parties as a cover for political meetings.

*Indian Delights*, was developed as a fund raising tool and used for education scholarships for young Black men and women; an excellent example of women's self-determined resistance. Mayat spoke about how while soliciting funds to publish the cookbook she was told it was ridiculous idea. 'Who would buy a book on how to cook - surely all the women know how to cook'<sup>98</sup> one detractor argued!

Similarly, other events such as the poetry and literary readings, the invited female guests and cooking gatherings were all socially acceptable activities which were used to collectively resist the restrictions imposed by apartheid.

Resistance to the activities of the Women's Cultural Group, became evident when they attempted to stage the first public theatrical performance for men and women.

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<sup>98</sup> Interview with Zuleikha Mayat June 2001

The pressure against them was significant enough to cause the group to cancel the event for fear of a public reprisals.

#### **b. Race and Being Indian**

Being Indian meant two things. In the first instance it meant being part of the oppressed. In the second, it implied preserving a cultural heritage.

##### *Indians' are South Africans and Indians are oppressed*

A number of new alliances were being forged during the forties and fifties, levels of formal organisation and community alliances were on the increase. Women also organised formally and informally, creating alliances to the extent that facilitated the 1956 Anti-Pass march to Pretoria. Mayat, Cachalia and Meer speak of their activism in terms of the fact that they were South African, that they clearly belonged to this country and could not see their situations any differently.

But identity with South Africa as a nation state may have been less obvious in the early days. The associations with and the calls to India, Britain and Pakistan to intervene in the affairs of Indians in South Africa reveal some sense of identification with those countries too. Indeed, the continued political connections that Indians maintained with India may have been what served to keep them a degree apart from local South African political life. Thus, preventing their complete identification with the struggle of the oppressed of the country until the middle or latter parts of the last century, almost 100 years after their first arrival as indentured labourers.

The ambivalence of the connection with the state is apparent in the links between the NIO<sup>99</sup> and the State. The majority appear to have been against such alliances and questioned the ethics and loyalties of those who engaged in this amicable interaction with the State.

One obvious reason for their objection would be the State's attitude to the Indian population. Having over the years tried to repatriate it, restrict it, remove it and only accepting its permanent presence almost 90 years after its arrival, the South African Indian's reluctance to invest a national identity in this land is understandable. Until it was able to do this – identification with the struggles of the majority of Black South Africans was not possible.

To develop their affiliations with other oppressed groups Indians needed to establish a South African identity. The community could only begin its identification with the liberation struggle once it located its identity in South Africa. Coming to terms with South African identity, establishing and internalising it was the first step. This occurred more markedly with the division of the subcontinent and the creation of Pakistan. When it did occur in the middle of the century, it presented a new space for solidarity and activism, where Muslim women were as much a part as any others!

Mayat, Meer and Cachalia all worked outside the traditional confines of race, in an inclusive and affirming manner. Both Cachalia and Mayat were raised in 'mixed' environments and remark on the difficulties in coming to terms with the racial

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<sup>99</sup> Natal Indian Organisation was a local grouping of business and other men who enjoyed rather positive relations with the apartheid state.

segregation that they had to adapt to in the cities of Johannesburg and Durban. Their activism is consequently also a confrontation of the imposed segregation of the State.

### Indians are Indians

Being Indian also implied a particular cultural heritage, whose defining features for women appear to have been dress and purdah. Over the years the issue of dress features regularly in the press. Both dress and purdah emerge as measures for defining the good Indian and good Muslim women!!

Feminist scholarship has shown how women often become signs and markers of cultural identity and of political goals (Moghaddem;1994:2), evident particularly 'during processes of revolution and state-building, and when power is being contested or reproduced.' (Moghaddem;1994:2) Consequently

“representations of women assume political significance, and certain images of women define and demarcate political groups, cultural projects, or ethnic communities. Women’s behaviour and appearance – and the acceptable range of their activities – come to be defined by and are frequently subject to the political or cultural objectives of political movements, states, and leaderships.” (Moghaddem; 1994:2)

In a letter to the editor entitled “What a Muslim Woman says of the Sari” a reader argues against the notion that “as our progress depends on English education so it also depends on dress”.<sup>100</sup> She contends that while Muslim women may make slight alterations to their dress, they always wear ‘dress and downy’ i.e. a dress and a scarf; implying perhaps that this is merely a variation and still not a totally Western form of dress, and may therefore still be considered Indian. Making the link between dress and education she observes:

“I find there is a tendency on the part of some women to resort to Western attire when they get educated in Western language”<sup>101</sup>.

<sup>100</sup> *The Leader*, Durban, 18 December 1943

<sup>101</sup> *Ibid*

The debate continues with a reader calling on the example of Indian women in the Indian army and their ability to do their tasks in a sari and military jacket!

Observing purdah is another marker of Indian culture. Letters to the editor come from Hindu and Muslim women and men who support and challenge it. Miss Sputnik challenges it as an Indian girl who is part of the oppressed masses, while most male readers support it as an affirmation of Indianness and Islam.<sup>102</sup>

### c. Class

The women in this study represent an elite trader class. The archives too focus mostly on such women with little information on others. Neither the archives nor the interviews presented in this study reveal much information on the activities of women outside the trader classes. These class dynamics within Indian society have shaped both the form and the nature of activism women engaged in. It has also had a significant impact on the degree and levels of activism accessible to Indian Muslim women.

The traditional class lines of the Indian community determined the nature and form of Indian politics. Early in the twentieth century there were three broad social classes within the Indian community. They were the traders, an emerging elite – whose parents had been indentured labourers and an ‘underclass’. (Swan, 1993: 182)

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<sup>102</sup> See the discussion on the ‘Purdah Politics’ of the Transvaal Indian Congress (TIC) in Chapter Five

Until then the political concerns of the Indians were determined according to the needs of the traders. Consequently, they were unable to impact on the broader political struggle, whose beneficiaries were likely to have more in common with the new elite and the underclass. With increased wealth in the emerging elite, and the growth of an aspirant working class following the opening of government and civil service positions through the teaching and other professions, the sites of struggle were changed. As this group became increasingly influential, they injected their own demands into Indian politics and consequently radicalised the struggle. In effect this emerging elite acted as a bridge between the needs of the traders and the needs of the underclass. The result was a radicalisation of Indian politics which allowed “cross-class and cross-race alliances”. (Swan,1993:182)

For women, class did not operate very differently. Meer says of Muslim women:

“They were very much guided by what the men folk were doing, and if you belonged to that merchant class, you felt that things were okay ... your businesses were going okay... you were making enough profit ... so you didn't really come out. But even they ... you see that group was lead by Moolla ... AM Moolla – within the confines of his conservatism, even Moolla was critical of the nationalist government”<sup>103</sup>

Charitable and welfare work may have acted as means through which women bridged the class barriers, however, this would also have confirmed and exacerbated the class difference amongst women. The catalogue of events hosted by the Women's Cultural Group shows a wide range of events which had the potential to both create and cross class barriers. In Meer's words:

“Well you see there is one thing you must understand ... you had the Orient Club and it was the rich Muslims, the merchant class who went there. And they were the more conservative because they had their business interests and they wanted to protect things. Now their women were more conservative. .... Now Julu Mayat married into that community. And had the choice of either going her own way or taking the women around here with her. And that was the choice she made.

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<sup>103</sup> Interview with Fatima Meer 11 August 2001

She took them with. She brought them to that awareness. She played a very important part. It did not mean that Julu was not sensitive to what was going on politically. She was very supportive of that as well. It worked like that."<sup>104</sup>

The women in this study represent mostly trading families. Consequently their activism reflects their class interests. Access to the wealth represented by the trading class both facilitated and restricted the nature of activities they engaged in. The availability of funds implied that they could engage in social activism.

However, their personal class interests also restricted their access to women of other social classes. Reaching women from other classes would have required that new links be established. It is not apparent from the interviews or from the historical review that these links were forged with any degree of effort. The regional and religious based organisational patterns indicate that if these links were established they were more likely to have been the exception than the rule.

While, the charitable activities of the WCG and others offered opportunities for some interactions between women from the different classes, the charitable form of the relationship, however, would have limited the nature and extent of this relationship. Consequently, the class differences might have severely limited the activist opportunities available to working class women.

#### **d. Religion**

Religion bears its impact in terms of its motivating and restrictive facilities. Religious authority, enacted through the application of Muslim marriage and divorce laws and

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<sup>104</sup> Ibid

purdah served to restrict activism. However, Mayat's motivation for activism shows how religious ideology also facilitated activism.

### Religious Authority

Religion certainly played a significant role in Indian politics, being subverted and manipulated to various ends. *The Leader's* reportage on the TIC Voting and Purdah<sup>105</sup> event reveals one such manipulation. Even though the political leaders on both ends claimed a purely political, activist agenda, their detractors can and did make an argument for the manner in which religious norms and women were manipulated to achieve the aims of male political leaders.

Both Mayat and Meer mention the religious authorities. The review of *Al-Hadil* gives us insight into religious authority of the time. The commentary on Muslim divorce law first lays down the situation as it ought to be, and then follows through suggesting some adjustments to make life easier for women. The tension between adhering to established norms and adapting to life in South Africa, permeates the publication.

Meer talks about how she never had any run-ins with religious authority. This was not because she was in agreement with it rather:

"No the Jamiat didn't concern itself with me. I mean they concerned themselves with issues like the moon and so on and they would go on with my father. Jamiats wouldn't take on a young girl like myself and say oh you're doing this and you're doing that. Jamiats wouldn't do something like that. I wasn't even aware of such a thing. ... I'm sure when they did their waez and things that they propounded their view of things. But they didn't attack me. They didn't say so and so said that and that is wrong and you shouldn't follow that. That never happened ... they would have their platform where they would express their conservative views. We used to have the Arabic study circle that used to have speech contests on subjects and you always got a very progressive ..."<sup>106</sup>

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<sup>105</sup> See section on Politics in Appendix One

<sup>106</sup> Interview with Fatima Meer 11 August 2001

The response of some religious authorities to the TIC voting incident showed their support for maintaining purdah and restricting women's access to formal politics. That the number of letters in support of breaking purdah outnumbers those advocating for it, shows active community opposition to these authoritative voices.

The authorities at one point issued a 'gentle' reminder to the Women's Cultural Group not to venture outside its mandate nor to be too hasty in promoting change. Fears of external influences on women's activities were voiced in *Al-Hadil Al-Ameen* as early as 1958.

'... we fervently hope they will also give their thoughts to a note of caution which we propose to voice not merely in conformity with our policy for advocating orthodox Islam, but because the pace of reform has to be slow so as to allow the overall Muslim social structure to go through the normal period of incubation and produce its own baby rather than adopt it from outside.' (Vol. 2 – No. 22 Jan 1958)

Mayat also mentions some run-ins, but appears to have negotiated these in her interest. She recalls an event where the WCG made a donation to a school, and the event was held in the balcony of the mosque building, indicating that she had access to it.

While the religious authorities seem to have had some impact on social perceptions, it seems to have been limited and contested. This may be because they were historically under the financial control of the traders responsible for bringing many of them over from India, and who controlled their funding.<sup>107</sup>

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<sup>107</sup> In January 1958 *Al Hadil Al Ameen* commends the work of two local organisations. The Arabic Study circle and the Women's Cultural Group are noted for the way in which they "have been functioning as complementary to each other". However they are both asked "to give a note of caution which we propose to voice not merely in conformity with our policy of advocating orthodox Islam, but because the pace of reform has to be slow so as to allow the overall Muslim social structure (to) go

*Mayat - A Muslim Activist*

Mayat's motivation for activism is linked directly to being Muslim. It is a widely held belief that, "Muslim women have to enter political space as Muslims" (Khan;1998:463). Apart from serving to homogenise Muslim women and their experiences, this notion ascribes little value to women's self-determination and ignores the intersecting identities with which Muslim women enter into public spaces. The experiences of Mayat, Meer and Cachalia explode that notion, affirming the need to dispel the myth of the 'Muslim woman' as a fixed and simple concept. (Tohidi;1998:278-279)

Dispelling this myth, the complex interplay of social forces that determine the lived experiences of Muslim women, becomes apparent (Tohidi;1998:278-279). Cachalia and Meer both locate their motivations for activism in their identity with the oppressed, which extends beyond Muslims, and further beyond Indians. While religion clearly formed a part of their social environment, neither claims it as the defining motivation for her activism. Neither do they express a sense of 'othering' of non-Muslims, or non-Indians.

Mayat, however, claims a Muslim identity from the outset, honing in on its liberating aspects to guide her activism. Her approach is reminiscent of the drive behind the anti-pass campaign of 1913/14. Rather than a local reverberation of the women's rights movement in the West, the anti-pass campaign was instead African women who

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through the normal period of incubation and produce its own baby rather than adopt it from outside." Al-Hadil Al-Ameen, Durban, January 1958:1

'were looking back to a cultural tradition that had allowed women a great deal more independence and authority than Western society considered either natural or respectable at the time" (Walker 1991:32 in Fouche;1994:85).

Similarly, Mayat engages in the struggle convinced that the great women of Islamic history would probably have done the same. She gains both her strength and her conviction from her belief system, and not in spite of it. When Cachalia and Meer speak too – one never feels that they were reactionaries, rebels or outcasts! Instead, they appear to be 'working with what they had' i.e. a strong legacy, both Indian and Muslim, which validated women and as well as their struggles against oppression.

The three women reveal different influences of religion in their lives, dependant on their personal experiences and priorities. Mayat speaks easily and forcefully as regards her interactions with the 'moulvis' and the religious authorities. Meer has a more ambiguous relationship with them, not clear in terms of how they could be expected to react to her activism, while for Cachalia, religion plays almost no role in her self-definition as an activist. Her religion is a personal matter, not something that features in her activism, and she is convinced that it did not feature for many other activists either.

#### **e. Family Affiliations**

Both Meer and Cachalia speak of the ease with which they are able to engage in their activism, each facilitated by their respective families, known for their political activism. As daughters of well-known activist fathers they experience little opposition to their activism. Is it possible that the response to their activism is in fact a response to their fathers – the men whom social consensus has accepted and approved.

It is possible that when women acted with the approval (tacit or otherwise) of the men in their families, they were received more positively than when they didn't. Mayat isn't challenged when she is the only woman at a meeting, which she attends with her husband. However, when she attempts to engage as an equal to host the Sultan of Zanzibar, she must struggle to be more than a 'flower carrier'. In defence she needs to stand her ground, meeting the formidable Mr Moolla on his terms before he comes to see her as an equal. In this Muslim women were not different from other Indian women. Seen as rebellious and irresponsible, as Dr Goonam is portrayed to be when she challenges the monopolies on leadership, women who claimed equality of treatment immediately placed themselves in opposition to their community.

It is not uncommon for women's demands for equal treatment to receive responses that place women in contradiction with the principles of their struggle. When women claim equality of treatment they often find themselves having to act like men in order to be considered successful. Success is not viewed in terms of their presence and their contributions, which stem from their unique gender experiences. Instead it becomes the success of male-type behaviours, only this time expressed by women.

This contradiction can happen directly or indirectly. Directly, women may find themselves required to act like men. Indirectly, they might find themselves being dealt with through the men around them, valued not for their own contributions, but because they represent other men. In both instances, who they are and what they achieve is not valued in themselves. Achievements are valued because they support,

reinforce or represent male norms and ways of being. Further their actions may be valued because these women have the sanction of significant male figures.

Women who chose to be active in the struggle, on equal terms as men, were challenging pre-determined gender roles, gendered behaviour and gendered spaces. By engaging in the sorts of activities otherwise reserved for men, they also risked removing themselves out of the realm of 'women'.

### C. CONCLUSION

Nationalism, race, class, religion and family were influential forces which women negotiated to facilitate their activism. Ethnic identity and race implied a strict adherence to traditions and resistance to the adaptations required for life in South Africa. The need to preserve an Indian culture placed added burdens on women. Limited affiliation with South Africa as a homeland also limited opportunities for political activism. Continued ties to India and the subcontinent had to be severed or reformed before Indians could begin to see themselves as part of this country and make their contributions to the broader struggle against apartheid.

However, the nationalist struggle could not be relied on to facilitate women's activism. While it opened some avenues it also prescribed forms of activism which fit the patriarchy associated with nationalism. Class identity implied that the trader class were less amenable to radical forms of resistance until they were radicalised by the needs of the emerging classes. The impact of religious authorities was felt to some extent but not as severely as it might have been. Hence religion also played a

facilitative role. Family affiliations also impacted the work of a number of activists and their supporters.

Having explained the forces shaping that activism, the remaining task is to re-locate this activism to within the struggle against apartheid.

This will be the focus of the next chapter.

University of Cape Town

## CHAPTER NINE Re-Locating Indian Muslim Women

### **A. INTRODUCTION**

Having confirmed the fact of Indian Muslim women's activism and explored the social dynamics behind this activism, the task remains to re-locate and confirm and return Indian Muslim women in the liberation struggle.

This chapter will present avenues for returning the history of Indian Muslim women to the history of the national liberation struggle. Having uncovered the history of this activism requires that future studies make efforts to locate the women of this study and to include an analysis of their experiences as aspects of both the women's movement and the Islamic movement against apartheid.

The chapter concludes with suggestions for other studies which could utilise the history uncovered here and also build on the analysis and findings of this study.

### **B. RELOCATING INDIAN MUSLIM WOMEN ...**

The previous chapters have shown in colourful relief the involvement of Indian Muslim women in the liberation struggle. Their range of activism spans the full spectrum of political and community involvement. Nonetheless, Indian Muslim women are under-researched with little reflection on the nature and forms of activism they engaged in during the apartheid years. This gap is partly due to the narrow definitions of activism as well as stereotypical notions of Indian and Muslim women.

This has led to the uncritical assumption that Indian Muslim women did not participate in the struggle against apartheid in any substantial form; that they were content reaping the benefits of apartheid; and that the effect of Indian and Muslim culture was to remove them from the struggle against apartheid.

However, this study has revealed the ways and means they found to circumvent or manipulate tradition and authority in order to assert themselves and have an impact beyond their immediate families. Indian Muslim women engaged in forms of activism which have not been entirely captured in the history of women's activism or Muslim activism. Further studies in this field will serve to recognise this activism and relocate Indian Muslim women in the struggle against apartheid.

**a. ... In the South African Women's Movement**

Organisational activism

The literature on the South African women's movement focused primarily on organisational activism and placed considerable significance on the feminist nature of women's activism. Walker observed the ways in which reliance of family networks restricted Indian women's activism. (Walker, 1991) In the chapter above however, family networks were both facilitative and restrictive. Similarly, elsewhere it may be that where women are not speaking for themselves, the view from the outside is inevitably refracted through the lens of the researcher. Where some see subjugation, a deeper look shows us resistance that challenged not only apartheid, but also the local communal patriarchy which built on the patriarchy of apartheid.

The struggle against the local patriarchy of the community required resources and energies which, had the local patriarchy not existed, women may very well have used

directly against the State. What emerges is no longer an acquiescence of Indian women to the patriarchy and cultural constraints of their communities; rather a struggle articulated at different points, with a selective use of strategies. Thus bearing out the views of Kemp and others who argue for a uniquely African feminism. This also confirms the need for future studies to pay particular attention to Indian and Muslim women's personal understandings of themselves and the social forces influencing their lives.

#### Feminist Activism

The paradigm of feminist activism suggested in the literature review is premised on confrontation against patriarchy. The activism reviewed here was not always, but occasionally confrontational. It differed in the degree and nature of confrontation. While some women challenged patriarchy by breaking purdah, others challenged it by writing a cookbook. To ascribe greater or lesser feminist consciousness to either would be unfair. This study has shown how the intention and the concomitant will to challenge gender dynamics and to exercise control over their own lives opened a variety of avenues for women. The will to improve the own lives and the lives of others lead women into activism. The impact of that activism was felt in both the material impact of their work and social change it prompted.

The women interviewed and the women who emerge out of the archival review show a keen understanding of the subordination of women and take pains to challenge it.

It remains a challenge for South African women's movement literature to capture the experiences of these women, to understand the social costs and the impact of their activism as well as the consciousness behind their activism.

**b. ... In the Islamic Movement and the Gender Jihad**

In Islamic movement literature, the focus on woman's activism within organisations has diverted attention from the experiences of other women. It has also limited 'feminist consciousness' to what that which transpires within Muslim organisations.

Jeenah's and Esack's focus on a gender 'jihad' emanating from their respective organisations gives little, if any, recognition to a prior political or feminist consciousness amongst Muslim women. Locating the impetus for a 'gender jihad' in organisations, they fail to account for women who functioned in exclusively women's organisations as well as women who functioned outside of any organisations.

The 'gender jihad' does not address the limitations of purdah, the absence of education for girls or other struggles which is what earlier and older activists fought for, to establish women's legitimacy in public life. Consequently, the 'gender jihad' is without a history or a pre-cursor. The net impact is the assumption that feminist consciousness amongst South African Muslim's arose within The Call and the MYM.

South African Islamic movement literature faces the challenge of recognising and recovering (and not re-Covering!) Muslim women in the history of the Muslim struggle against apartheid. To do so it will need to explore activism outside of male-lead Muslim organisations, reaching out to women's organisations as well as individual women.

Tayob's (2001) work on identity represents a new direction in South African Islamic movement studies and could prove valuable in understanding the dynamic interplay of the various identities that South African Indian Muslim women negotiated in their activism against apartheid.

The passing of time makes this project an urgent one. The majority of women with knowledge of the early days of Muslim women's activism are now in their sixties or older. Recovering the knowledge they hold is a matter of urgency.

### c. ... in History

Setting out on this study, my intention was to explore Muslim women's activism, or what I viewed as lack of activism in the struggle against apartheid. The course of the research has proven me wrong. I have uncovered a wealth of activism and involvement by women from all walks of life and in a myriad of forms. Much of this was uncovered from original sources. What had obscured this knowledge in the past was:

- a. the absence of woman-focused histories and biographies as well as the
- b. limited definitions of activism, which excluded women's realities.

The reclamation of history and the redefinition of activism are the two tools through which the historical fact of Indian Muslim women's activism can be confirmed, acknowledged and valued.

#### Reclaiming Activists

Indian Muslim women do feature by mention in histories of the broader women's movement. However, there have been no specific studies on women's activism in and

of itself. The historical review in Chapter Five is the beginnings of what could be a much larger project to reclaim the history of Indian Muslim women activists in South Africa. Their biographies and activism needs to be reclaimed and recorded.

### Reclaiming Activism

The limited definitions of activism in conventional readings of politics serve to exclude significant aspects of women's activism. The South African literature, particularly that on Muslims in the liberation struggle, appears to have replicated this error. A broader definition which recognizes women's realities, which challenges essential notions of activism and women's movement, which assesses the costs and impact of women's activities, would serve to give greater acknowledgement to women's everyday struggles against patriarchy.

## **B. CONCLUSION**

The combined effects of racial oppression with class and gender oppression placed the South African Indian Muslim women in a precarious position. The Women's Cultural Group is one example of the delicate balance involved in challenging that oppression, slowly but determinedly. It also reflects the need for critiques of Indian Muslim women's activism to be premised not by a wholesale discounting of the agency of Indian Muslim women, but to be nuanced by an appreciation of the constraints they faced. Their achievements, though minimal in the face of the greater liberation struggle, bear testimony to both the extent of their subjugation as well as the extent of their struggles.

Resistance occurred in many forms. This resistance must be valued not only for its impact on national politics, but for the way in which it gave form to women's agency.

That agency cannot be valued or measured by any standard other than one embedded in the culture in which it occurs. It becomes apparent then, that what may be perceived to be only a minimal contribution of the Indian Muslim women to the struggle against apartheid in South Africa, is in fact a mammoth struggle for the Indian Muslim women in her own context.

In valuing her struggle we are able to value her contributions as she makes them and not as we weigh them up against the efforts of others. In so doing we acknowledge both her contribution to the anti-apartheid struggle and her struggle within her own community; we recognise the various challenges she faced and the strength she showed in confronting them, in whatever form that confrontation took.

I began this thesis questioning the 'quietism' of Muslim women in the struggle. This study has rendered this 'quietism' a myth. Fatima Meer sums up my findings.

Questioned on how she viewed Indian Muslim women's activism (or in-activism) she commented:

"I mean political activism is always confined to a small group so why should I feel the Muslim women are not involved in a great big upsurge against apartheid. The general Indian public was not involved, why should I expect Muslim women to be. I didn't have any feelings of criticism against our Muslim women. I didn't think that they were not doing what they ought to be doing. I never had that kind of a feeling. ... they had a tremendous ability to be active. I never had any criticism against them. During 46 - even our Muslim women participated quite strongly. All my mothers, all my aunts, all of them were involved in it. I never had this feeling that Muslim women were not doing what they ought to ... I'm talking now about 1946 when we had passive resistance. Muslim women were involved in it. I can talk about 1913 - when Gandhi led his march ... here were these Muslim women involved in it. But in any struggle - it is not the generality of public that gets involved in it ... as long as you've got representation there you can see that they are doing something ... Well you see Muslim women never thought for themselves. They were very much guided by what the men folk were doing, and if you belonged to that merchant class, you felt that things were okay ... your businesses were going okay ... you were making enough profit ... so you didn't really come out."

Those that did come out, who's activism impacted the struggle against apartheid directly, and those that came out in such a way that no-one knew they were activists, but were able to have an impact nonetheless are the women this study has affirmed.

It remains for future scholarship to honour them further.

**END**

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Appendix One  
Summary of Archival Review of The Leader

The following is a list of articles relevant to women as they appeared in *The Leader*, Johannesburg

**A. Fulfilling Community Needs**

- Early in the 1940's *The Leader* carries a Women's World page, which features notices on births, deaths, holidays of teaching staff. Travel and holiday plans for community members, wedding invitations as well<sup>108</sup> as feature articles, health remedies and adverts for food, clothing or household related products.
- In November 1942 an article entitled "women's rightful place" – talks about the incidental formation of the Hindu Tamil Women's Association at a meeting called to plan a bazaar in Pietermaritzburg. The meeting appears to have given rise to spontaneous discussions on the need for a women's association.<sup>109</sup>
- December 19 1942 - The Indian Women's Club is recorded as having had a successful year reflected in their third annual meeting – their activities include visiting speakers, assistance to survivors of a sunken ship, a fundraising stall for the Indian Gifts and Comfort Fund. A perusal of the names of the elected officials does not reveal any obviously Muslim names.
- The Durban Indian Women's Hockey Association – has three clubs, run by Ms Joseph<sup>110</sup>
- In December 1943 – women of Tongaat launched the Tongaat Indian Ladies Club, and notable was the "presence for the first time of women of all sections of the Indian community" This is borne out by the list of office bearers including Muslim, Hindu and Christian names.<sup>111</sup>
- Since liquor laws had banned Indian women from entering bars, they are known to have used adjacent rooms where they were able to drink as they chose<sup>112</sup>
- On 26 February 1949 on Pg 4 an Indian girl responds to the letter of another 'Indian Girl' published in a mainstream newspaper, which alleged harassment of Indian girls by Indian boys. *The Leaders* writer contests that the other girl is

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<sup>108</sup> 28 November 1942 - The Women's World Page

<sup>109</sup> 5 December 1942

<sup>110</sup> 6 February 1943:8 "Women's Hockey"

<sup>111</sup> 11 December 1943:6 "Tongaat Women"

<sup>112</sup> 27 May 1944

making too much of the issue, must be mistaken as it could not have been Indian boys who did this and that if this had happened the girl was to be blamed as had she been decent she would not have attracted this behaviour. Ironically too a reader says that it is often “very so called low-type Indians who molest girls from their cars and shop doors and around corners” who are “the first to come to your assistance when troubled or interfered with by natives”

- An article in April 1949 features a picture of the Ladies Tug-o-War team – all clad in saris<sup>113</sup>
- 1949 – a report on the continued practice of Child Marriages and one further article states that many were unaware that this practice was continuing, blamed unscrupulous priests and encouraged Durban Indian Child Welfare to take steps to stop this.<sup>114</sup> A June report reveals 48 child marriages (10-15yrs) were recorded in the year, the youngest being of a 10 year old<sup>115</sup>
- In 1949 women’s drinking features again. Social workers complain of the increase amongst Indian women “who have taken to drink like fish would take to water”. Resulted in suggestions that Indian women be barred from alcohol since “Liquor is harmful to family life and results in the suffering of children and other evils”<sup>116</sup> – Mrs. Christopher – secretary of the Durban Indian Child Welfare Society requested the National Council for Child Welfare to “prevent Indian women from entering bars”. The resolution was rejected.<sup>117</sup>
- The Technical Students’ Union Meeting of the ML Sultan Technical College elected its officials, which included a number of females, one as honorary treasurer Mrs. SR Pather and three as committee members – Miss SI Aiden, Mrs. ST Martin, and Mrs. S Singh<sup>118</sup>
- In February 1954 the Arabic Study Circle held its first annual public speaking contest on the life of the Prophet “aimed at making the Prophet so well known that young and old may talk of him and think of him much as they do about some dear friend or some great contemporary public figure”<sup>119</sup> “An important feature of the contest was that women, mostly Muslims, attended in large numbers at both sessions” The judges included a female adjudicator from the University of Natal Speech and Drama Dept, Miss E Sneddon, a white lecturer. The article does not say whether any women entered the contest!
- That same year an article reported on what appears to have been a group led by white women and chaired by Miss Dorey – principal of the Durban Girls

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<sup>113</sup> 30 April 1949

<sup>114</sup> 2 July 1949:7

<sup>115</sup> 25 June 1949:1 “Indian Girls of Ten Marry in Durban”

<sup>116</sup> 18 June:8 “Drinking Evil Increasing among Indian Women”

<sup>117</sup> 25 June 1949:7 “Wants Liquor forbidden for Indian Women”

<sup>118</sup> 4 June 1949

<sup>119</sup> 9 Feb 54:7 “Debate on the Life of the Muhammad”

High School, the Indian Women's Literacy Group in Natal. The group appears to have had as its purpose to close the gap between illiterate mothers and their educated daughters as well as opening opportunities for more women to become literate outside of formal schooling i.e. to close the gap between educated and illiterate women. An increasing number of girls going to school have had problems in connecting with women in their families as well as marrying into families where they are the only educated women.<sup>120</sup>

- Following the 'unqualified success of the first event', the Women's Cultural Group together with Arabic Study Circle held the second annual public speaking contest for women on the life and teachings of the Prophet Muhammad. "The contest (was) organised to arouse an interest and awakening regarding the life of the prophet of Islam amongst the fair sex"<sup>121</sup>
- By 1957 the paper comments on the consequences of women having to work outside the home, as presented by the annual report of the Durban Child Welfare Association "the absence from home of mothers who are forced to take up some form of employment results in serious ill effects on the proper care and treatment of their children in their tender years."<sup>122</sup>
- Three celebrations specifically involving women make the news in November and December 1957. The first is the anticipated silver jubilee of the Pietermaritzburg Indian Women's Association begun in 1935 by Kunwarani Lady Maharaj Singh, wife of India's Agent General in South Africa. The organization had raised funds for charities, as well as for dependants of the 156 people facing allegations of treason, given bursaries and book prizes to students at the PMB Indian Girls High School, supported the National Council of African Women at their 19<sup>th</sup> conference. They are also members of the National Council of Women<sup>123</sup>
- In December "over one hundred women assembled ... to celebrate the second anniversary of the Natal South Indian Women's Association"<sup>124</sup>
- A third celebration is somewhat different. A "Muslim Women Gives a party. "Durban's Bolton Hall was the scene ... of a lavish party given by Mrs. Fatima Kajee in honour of the marriage of her son. The party was attended by distinguished guests who danced until the early hours of the morning." The accompanying picture shows Mrs. Jadwat and Dr Jadwat dancing and Mrs. Jadwat and others in sleeveless dress or sari blouses – the picture is not very clear.

#### **B. Dress Matters**

- In 1943, discussions over Indian identity enter the newspapers. A reader comments on Indian national Identity and the "duty of all Indians to preserve their national identity" irrespective of their faith. To this end he comments on

<sup>120</sup> 30 April 1954:6 "Teaching them to read"

<sup>121</sup> 18 March 1955:7 "Contest for Women"

<sup>122</sup> 6 September 1957:1 "Mother Must Work: Children Suffer"

<sup>123</sup> 22 November 1957 - Women's Association to celebrate Silver Jubilee

<sup>124</sup> 6 December:3 "Women Celebrate Anniversary"

maintaining the mother tongue as well as the sari. "It is a pity to find many Christian Indian women adopt the western mode of dress. Christianity does not call for any change in National identity. Remember there is nothing so sweet and graceful as the Indian sari." He also comments on the undesirability of mixed marriages. The editor responds – asking the reader if he would consider ensuring that he always wore his national dress i.e. dhoti, turban etc.<sup>125</sup>

- The discussion continues over the weeks. A Christian woman responds that "it is the duty of all Indians (not only the woman) to retain their national identity"
- She explains the restrictions of the sari on physical movement especially for a Physical education teacher and adds "I am proud that I am an Indian lady which neither dress nor language will change". Another reader makes the comparison between men's and women's dress asking tongue in cheek "I wonder if a pretty girl in her picturesque sari and a man with a dhoti and turban will be a match?" No doubt she has touched on the different values of each type of dress for men and women. The traditional dress for men has little social value and may even render a suitor less successful in his endeavours.<sup>126</sup>
- In an article on 'What a Muslim Woman says of the Sari' a Muslim women contests the previous readers notion that "as our progress depends on English education so it also depends on dress", contending that while Muslim women may make slight alterations to their dress, they always wear – dress and dhownee i.e. a dress and a scarf. It may be good to know how this differed from the dress of the Muslim women who arrived in the country in the 19<sup>th</sup> century as well as how it differed from Muslim women's dress in India. Making the link between dress and education levels she observes "I find there is a tendency on the part of some women to resort to Western attire when they get educated in Western language."<sup>127</sup> Another letter comments on Western dancing and alcohol as un-becoming for Hindu women who should be upholding Hindu and Indian culture. The debate continues with a reader calling on the example of Indian women in the Indian army and their ability to do their tasks in a sari and military jacket! (No doubt in all these debates 'national' is used in the sense of Indian nationality and not South African nationality. This is different from Congress politics where 'national' is assumed to refer to belonging to the South African nation!)<sup>128</sup>
- By 1949 the debate on the Sari is given a new twist. 'Sari Un-Muslim?' - The Pakistan Foreign Office is said to have issued a secret memorandum to all its embassies discouraging wives of Pakistan diplomats from wearing saris at formal functions "as the sari was a typical Hindu dress"<sup>129</sup>

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<sup>125</sup> 27 November 1943:4 "Indian National Identity"

<sup>126</sup> 11 December 1943

<sup>127</sup> 18 December 1943

<sup>128</sup> 18 December 1943

<sup>129</sup> 19 November 1949:1

### C. The Durban Riots

- *The Leader* reported that a number of women and children had been reported injured in the riots “There have been several definite cases of rape committed on Indian women, by Africans. The victims however have not reported the cases to the authorities because of the indignities they would suffer if publicity was given”. Rape victims were as young as 11.<sup>130</sup>
- Further reports on the riots explain that two women, one Muslim – Mrs. H Goolam Motala and BN Singh “made history for never before in the history of this country have Indian women witnesses appeared before a Commission appointed by the government”. Mrs. Singh spoke in Afrikaans – both gave eyewitness accounts of White assistance to the rioting groups<sup>131</sup>.

### D. On Marriage and Divorce

- In December 1943, ‘To Cut Down Marriage Costs – Memons to meet in Conference’. The Durban Memon Association met to discuss the high costs of marriages which were too lavish and expensive, and as such, “a burden to the poor man and a waste to the rich”. Other customs agreed to, have outgrown their time and usefulness, and were also considered.<sup>132</sup>
- ‘Muslims prefer easy divorce’ “The department of the Interior was of the opinion that there was no necessity for the appointment of a marriage officer for the Muslim Community” after the Muslims’ Mosque Trust of Waschbank requested the appointment of a Muslim marriage officer. “The average Mohammedan does not wish to enter into legal marriage preferring the union under his own religious custom with its facilities for easy divorce” states the Department of the Interior<sup>133</sup>.
- The next month Fatima Meer wrote an article commenting on the Muslim system of divorce commenting that the Muslim ‘divorce laws (were) based on common sense’<sup>134</sup>.
- On 22 Jan 1954 *The Leader* announced – “Muslim Women Make History” as ‘for the first time in the history of Dundee and most probably of South Africa, Muslim women discarded their purdah and attended a Muslim marriage (Nikah) ceremony of the well-known and popular Dundee family, the Hajee Jamal Khan. Normally Muslim women are precluded from attending such religious ceremonies and are segregated behind the ‘purdah’ (curtain or screen). But this was the first courageous attempt on the part of Dundee Muslims, when their men and women attended the first marriage function together openly.
- In April 1955 *The Leader* announced the marriage of the Prime Minister of Pakistan to his former social secretary. The controversial marriage “has had an echo amongst Muslims in Natal. One women comments: “Apart from presenting a very bad example to other Muslim men, polygamous marriages expose Islam to the danger of being misunderstood.” It noted, “In addition men should realise that women are no longer mere playthings. The modern

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<sup>130</sup> 19 February 1949:11 “Ferocious Attacks on Indian Women and Children”

<sup>131</sup> 26 March 1949:7 – “Indian Women’s Evidence of experiences during Durban Riots”

<sup>132</sup> 4 December 1943:5

<sup>133</sup> 28 Mar 1952:1

<sup>134</sup> 11 April 1952:p1 “The Muslim law of divorce”

woman has a will of her own and she wants to protect her interests as well as that of her children.” The writer also notes that “monogamy is, of course the rule among Muslims as among other sections though few exceptions seem to hit the headlines”<sup>135</sup>.

- As it turned out, by the next month the League for Women Rights, a Pakistani group had agreed to stop agitation against the marriage because his first wife said it was embarrassing her. They had also agreed to advocate for legal reform to allow second marriages only where the first wife was incapacitated from performing marital obligations and failed to bear children or was suffering from an incurable disease.<sup>136</sup>
- The debate on polygamy was picked up again at the end of that year in an article entitled “Polygamy and Us”<sup>137</sup>. This time however it reflects the distance between the Indian community and the economically dominant white community. It noted that employers are “under the impression that polygamy was a general practice among Indians. And astonishing, as it may seem there are a number of Europeans labouring under this misapprehension. You can’t blame them really. They get their information from the daily press ... the European newspapers have consistently created a false impression. Wild allegations about the number of wives each Indian has, that he is alien because he is polygamous, that he has large families because he has several wives and so on”.<sup>138</sup>

#### **E. Education – a measure of progress, a matter of pride!**

- In 1942 there is a report which speaks of the ability of “the Indian women, (who) if given a chance, can go forward”. Illustrating this is the success of a “married Mohammedan woman who shattered all tradition and coming out of the seclusion peculiar to the Muslim community, wrote the PSC examination and passed it”. Her name is said to be in the lists published. Reading the list of results of girls’ schools, the three obviously Muslim names on it are F Mayet, F Meer from Dartnell Crescent Indian Government School and H Soobedar from Indian Girls’ Government School in PMB<sup>139</sup>.
- The Memon Association gave out bursaries through its education programme for 465 students including “32 lawyers, 17 doctors, 5 civil engineers, 2 electrical engineers and 56 girls”<sup>140</sup>
- By March 1952, the high number of girls enrolling for high school led to a shortage of class rooms two years in succession. This was to be remedied by the Education Department the next year by building temporary structures.<sup>141</sup> A girls school reached a new high in enrolment to the point where “girls had to be turned away owing to shortage of accommodation” There were 382 students as opposed to 265 the previous year<sup>142</sup>

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<sup>135</sup> 29 April 1955 “Talk of the Bazaar”

<sup>136</sup> 20 May 1955:13 “Pakistan women to drop agitation against Ali’s marriage”

<sup>137</sup> 2 December 1955:5

<sup>138</sup> Ibid

<sup>139</sup> 19 December 1942:7 – “PSC Pass Success of Married Women”

<sup>140</sup> 4 December 1943:5

<sup>141</sup> 21 March 1952:5 “No room for girls at high school”

<sup>142</sup> 11 April:5 “Girls School Reached a new High in enrolment”

- At a conference in 1955 two social science researchers, Dr S Coopan and Mr. BA Naidoo reported their observations of the culture and change in the Indian community. They noted the number of women attending the ML Sultan Technical College, Natal University and schools under the Natal Education Department and that “the traditional attitude of opposition to education of girls after puberty is fast diminishing ... Both Muslim and Hindu girls attend”<sup>143</sup>
- And later in 1955 “of the 21 non-European students who received degrees at the University of Natal graduation ceremony ... five were Indian women” and amongst them, were three married women, causing the writer to comment “a greater number of non-European girls are now at the University than ever before, particularly in the Arts and Social Sciences”<sup>144</sup>
- In March 1957 a new girls school was opened by the Muslim Jumma Masjid trust as a means of addressing the increase in interest in Indian education. Mr. Moosa the chairman of the Trust said “that he was glad to think that the Jumma Masjid Trust was doing something to meet that need, a need to equip their daughters to take their proper place with the sons in a progressive community” Others commented on the “early struggle to establish a decent school for Indian girls”<sup>145</sup>
- In October 1957 Miss Panamuthay Muthu Krishnan of Stanger is “the first Indian women Attorney in South Africa ... she took to a legal career following a teacher’s degree and secretarial work in her brother’s legal firm.”<sup>146</sup>
- Hot on the heels of Miss Krishan was “Natal’s First Muslim Woman Doctor, Dr Fatima Mayat” She became the first Muslim woman in Natal to qualify as a Doctor. She graduated at the Wentworth Medical School. She felt “she was indebted to her parents for their encouragement in fulfilling her ambition to become a doctor. She said: “In the past Muslim women have not had the opportunity to pursue higher studies. Girls are in most cases given only standard six education and the fortunate ones are lucky enough to complete their matric. Today most Muslim parents are encouraging their daughters to take higher education. ... I only hope more of our women will be given the privilege so that the avenues of higher education will be offered to them and that they too will be able to serve the community”<sup>147</sup>

#### **F. Purdah – separates spaces create separate visions!**

- Early in 1942 a row erupts in Transvaal over an opportunistic ‘breaking of purdah’ during a tussle for leadership. This is dealt with in detail in the next chapter, while some aspects are noted here<sup>148</sup>
- Dadoo, one of the contenders, in his response commends the participation of “Muslim women, who in other circumstances, would not have been allowed to come out of purdah”<sup>149</sup>. He sees this as a victory for his grouping “and its policy of recognising the equality of women and their right to play their proper role in the struggle for the community in this country.”<sup>150</sup> He expresses

<sup>143</sup> 11 February 1955:12 and 13 “Westernising Easterners”

<sup>144</sup> 1 April 1955:3 “Women graduates”

<sup>145</sup> 15 March 1957:9 “Juma Masjid School for Girls”

<sup>146</sup> 25 October 1957

<sup>147</sup> 29 November 1957:1 Natal’s First Muslim Woman Doctor”

<sup>148</sup> 30 January 1943:5 “Women make History in the Transvaal – Nan fires the Purdah for Victory”

<sup>149</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>150</sup> *Ibid*

concern that the opposing group not “reserve their women supporters only for the purpose of voting them into office, but will allow them all opportunity to participate in the affairs of the community.

- The social commentator –The Faqir<sup>151</sup> – comments that Dadoo was the first to elicit the support of women. Nana, in his attempt to hold on to power “without much ado, ... enlisted the services of the Indian. He got 500 including purdah women – and they were instrumental in getting him into power.” Interestingly –the editorial does not comment on the event!
- In the next issue<sup>152</sup> an article notes “the participation of women in the polling in the Transvaal Indian Congress elections ... is condemned in certain Muslim circles”. In a comment to *The Leader*, Mr. AS Kajee called it a “reprehensible act” calling those responsible as having “sold his religion for office ... (having) brought women out into the open field of politics.”
- From religious quarters someone the paper calls a ‘Muslim Divine’, Moulana Mohammed Hanieff, comments that “This was the law and those who broke the purdah to bring women out to vote also broke the laws of Islam”
- The debate continues into the next issue<sup>153</sup>. SM Nana responds to AS Kajee's criticism on the involvement of women in politics, he questions Kajee's opinions on the participation of women in India and Pakistan.
- AS Kajee responds to Nana<sup>154</sup> and recalls the example of Fatima, Daughter of the Prophet as the “best example of womanhood”.
- IA Bhabha (in Transvaal) supports AS Kajee's assertion that breaking purdah was a ‘reprehensible act’ but says there was good reason for it!<sup>155</sup>
- The debate continues with a challenge to the ‘Muslim Divine’. A letter from AIS (in Ladysmith) contests that the Moulana Hanieff's views are “hard to swallow” While the reader confirms that “man is the protector of woman, because, because he is endowed with greater physical strength and toils and earns a living for the woman and himself quoting the Qur'an (surah 4:verse34). He asserts: there is no difference between man and woman materially, spiritually and morally” Another letter from CMP asks Nana to “quote a verse from the Koran where it says that our women folk can participate in meetings”.
- IC Meer comments on the impact of the Transvaal elections for women by noting “position of the Indian women in the fabric of the South African Indian life”, he says that “there is no reason why women should not play a greater part in the affairs of the Indian community”. “Unfortunately” he notes “the Nana group although it had 500 women voters, had not given any woman a position on its list of officers. He also corrected the figures for the numbers of women who voted – 500 for Nana and 250 for Dadoo.
- The social commentator adds a revealing a new angle to the debate. The mention of Kajee without the initials had been mistaken to mean AI Kajee – of the SAIC who had been questioned on his apparent views. The mistake was corrected in the newspaper. The Faqir writes, “If you must know Gentle

<sup>151</sup> 30 January 1943:p7 “The talk of the Bazaar”

<sup>152</sup> 6 February 1943:5 “Breaking Down of Purdah – a “Reprehensible Act””

<sup>153</sup> 13 February 1943:5 “Begum Shah Nawaz Breaks Purdah”

<sup>154</sup> 20 February 1943:4

<sup>155</sup> *Ibid*

reader, AI does not believe in the purdah or Pakistan. He is all for breaking purdah with one mighty sweep of social revolution”

Clearly the political manoeuvre has made little difference to women’s lives. The Purdah remains a problem and manifests itself in other areas too.

- Only a few months later, commenting on the small numbers of Indian women responding to the Nursing profession, Dr Goonam notes, “ the purdah system contributed no less to the ills of the Indian community. The Indian woman, who was confined within the purdah suffered both mentally and physically” The purdah also prevented the economically well-off Indian woman who was in a position to do so, to come forward and take part in social welfare work. Social welfare workers could not very well be drawn from the working class. The speaker blamed men for the maintenance of the purdah. “the educated group of Indian men, who should be the first, is still wanting in this respect”<sup>156</sup>
- In 1949, a letter from Anti-Purdah asks why “can’t the women folk of South Africa shed the purdah and have a free life and frequent places like the theatre, circus etc. We must realise that the time for them to be kept as jailbirds is over. “ As argument she strikes the Indian comparator “ Today our Motherland has got her independence, so why not let the ladies enjoy a free and contented life. Today there are many Muslim ladies who are anxious to visit places of amusement but are stopped because the parents ignore the march of civilization and enforce the laws of the purdah. Today the ladies of Pakistan and India have shed the purdah. Why not follow suit here?”<sup>157</sup>

In 1957 the issue re-surfaces. A reader writes:

- “Modernism is sweeping the world but our girls are still living behind the veil of purdah – or in the feudal age. They re not given the chance to advance in the social sphere of life or to adapt themselves to their present environment. Girls today should experience a new freedom in living: new ways of dressing, new customs in love and marriage, freedom to go to cinemas, to play games, to go to Sunday services and parties, to say to their parents “I won’t marry the person you have chosen for me. The custom of keeping boys and girls apart and of women living in seclusion should be abolished. Co education should be enforced, to create a healthy mode f living for both sexes. Women’s activities should not be confined to housework and bringing up children. They should fight for their freedom: today they are held in slavery to their households and to their men folk. Japanese women won their freedom in 1945. We South African Indians ask the government for the franchise; why not give our girls freedom? Parents should treat their sons and daughters on a footing of perfect equality”<sup>158</sup>.
- Support is forthcoming from other readers. A letter from BS Sharmakumarie also of Wasbank, Natal supports Ramathaur – a “young bachelor saying, “I agree with his fine opinion. Our freedom will prove the salvation of our country” “His letter created a letter amongst old-style parents in Northern Natal.” “ ... he would decree out emancipation from the dreaded purdah

<sup>156</sup> 9 October 1943:1 “Men blamed for the “Purdah””

<sup>157</sup> 15 October 1949:4

<sup>158</sup> 6 December 1957:9 “Indian Women are Held in Slavery and Letter to the editor – “Give freedom to our Indian girls. Bissesar Ramauthar, Wasbank Natal

system and release us from the bondage of tradition and taboos that restrict us to the household.<sup>159</sup>

- Another letter from Miss Sputnik records: "being an Indian girl, I know what it is to be kept behind the purdah. While out Coloured and African sisters are leading a carefree life we are tied to our mother's apron strings. If ever we do step out to some social functions our mothers or some older people must accompany us. ... Even in dressing an Indian girl must have the approval of her mother, whereas coloured and African girls go in Jeans, swimsuits and shorts. We are not allowed to mix with the opposite sex so ... parties, dancing and drives are unthinkable. No wonder girls of other races look upon us with pity. The worst comes when an Indian girl is of marrying age. The parents look for a boy of her and there and then she is drawn into a loveless marriage ... she cannot voice her opinions .... She enters into a strange home with a strange husband. Strange faces surround her and the poor girl scared out of her wits. Where is the girl's happiness? At her parents home she is under her mothers thumb and now she is under her husband's and mother in laws thumbs. Just as non-Europeans cry 'down with the Colour bar' we Indian girls cry 'down with the purdah'"<sup>160</sup>

#### G. Politics - of Women!

- The Natal Indian Congress elections of 1949 elected officials included one woman – Miss Padayachee, who would not have been Muslim.<sup>161</sup> Later that year Dr Goonam a female doctor, also active in politics holds up national SAIC Elections by asking the popular Dr Naicker, in the interests of allowing others to access leadership, to stand down for nomination, as she had done. She is recorded as being "adopting a taciturn and reserved attitude, ... asking a delegate to speak louder and calling for adjournment". IC Meer apposed her. Later she was reported as having been "autocratic". She no doubt troubled the group with her call to consideration and to ensure that that the ranks for leadership were not monopolised.<sup>162</sup>
- At a 1952 rally in culmination of a day of protest against 'unjust laws' one female speaker participated. "After a long time, a woman speaker appeared as the Square. She was Miss Nana Sita from the Transvaal. Her comment on the limited response to a collection box is noted as well as her comments on the loss of freedom "In every oppressed country, the people are moving nearer and nearer towards freedom. Here in South Africa, freedom is going back"<sup>163</sup>
- In September of 1952 *The Leader* reporting on the resistance campaign noted, "21 resisters followed by 4000 marchers marched through the streets of Durban. The resisters were arrested and amongst them were four women – two African and two Indian women – Miss Nomntu Myikiza, Miss Teresa Mofokeng, Mrs. Fatima Seedat, and Mrs. Janapathy Singh. The march include "four well-dressed European girls"<sup>164</sup>

<sup>159</sup> 20 December:11 "Woman Hails Bachelor Champ"

<sup>160</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>161</sup> 28 May 1949

<sup>162</sup> 2 July 1949:5 "Dr Goonam holds up Congress Elections"

<sup>163</sup> 11 April 1952:3 "Hint at Resistance" "Commentary on the All Union Observance"

<sup>164</sup> 5 September 1952 "Thousands in Solemn March along main Streets"

- Reporting on the Women's Anti-Pass March in 1956 *The Leader* seems to have felt it most appropriate to fall back onto known concepts i.e. No Fury Like a Woman Scorned was the title for the article.<sup>165</sup> The headline on this edition talks about the 'manhandling' of Indian women by Indian businessmen in their stores, and calls for an end to it. March article makes the comparison with the SAIO!
- Again the next month it reported 'Women March in Protest: Don't take or homes' when "Indian Women rallied in their thousands in defence of their homes last week in a protest through Johannesburg to the All-In group Ares Conference" in an act "reminiscent of the Passive Resistance days when many women demonstrated against the Pegging Act"<sup>166</sup> The accompanying picture (attached here as annex -#) shows a column of women holding banners and placards. Though no numbers are given in the article, there are about 100 women in the picture wearing sari's, dresses with pants, some with scarves on their shoulders. The conference rejected the application of the GAA in Johannesburg and that Indians move to the private township of Lenasia.<sup>167</sup>
- In 1957 "Dr Zainab Asvat, Mrs. Amina Cachalia and Miss Hajira Saloojee, well known Transvaal women leaders: were summoned to appear in court in regard to charges that arose "out of the procession which was organised on the evening of June 26 to demonstrate the solidarity of the Indian people on the second anniversary of the adoption of the Freedom Charter "alleged that those summonsed were the organisers of the torchlight procession"<sup>168</sup>
- In 1958 Reporting on treason trialist, D A Seedat, *The Leader* mentions that he is "the only accused among the 91 having the charge of high treason whose wife Fatima Seedat appears in schedule B of the indictment as a co conspirator, although she is not one of the accused. The Seedats have taken an active part in politics for many years"<sup>169</sup>

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<sup>165</sup> 24 August 1956:6

<sup>166</sup> 7 September 1956:1

<sup>167</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>168</sup> 30 August 1957:3 "Women to appear in Court"

<sup>169</sup> 5 September 1958 "Treason Trial Profile No 6"

*Appendix Two*  
*Women's Cultural Group – List of Events 1954-1989*

**EXTRACTS OF ACTIVITIES OVER THE YEARS**

- |            |  |             |  |
|------------|--|-------------|--|
| 1954 May   | Play reading.  | 1966 Nov.   | Play reading by Alan Paton and Devi Bughwaan.  |
| 1954 Nov.  | Speech Contest (Public).   | 1967 April  | Symposium on World Religions   |
| 1954 Dec.  | Talk on Rabindranath Tagore by Z. Seedat.  | 1967 June   | Middle East University Experience.   |
| 1955 April | Lecture on Islam by Y. Perdu.  |             | Lecture by Z. Barmania.  |
| 1955 July  | Bring and Buy Sale. Proceeds to Clairwood Girls School for three bursaries.  | 1967 July   | Group organises afternoon of Indian Art, craft and Culture for Medical Congress held in Durban.  |
| 1956 June  | Eisteddfod on Islamic arts and culture.  | 1967 Oct.   | Evening of devotional songs.   |
| 1957 Feb.  | Poetry Recital.  | 1967 Nov.   | Indira Kara and K. Coovadia talk to Sherwood Women's Institute on Indian customs and cookery.  |
| 1958 March | Play in Gujerati written and presented by Group.   | 1967 Nov.   | Lecture by Sir Zafrulla Khan.  |
| 1958 June  | Grand Bazaar. Money to various Welfare Organisations.  | 1968 Feb.   | Talk by Ayesha Paruk on current fashion.   |
| 1958 May   | Constitution approved.   | 1968 March  | Slides by Dr. Hansa on Mecca and Medina.   |
| 1958 Sept. | Reception for Sultana of Zanzibar.   | 1968 March  | Talk and slides by Mrs. Joan Templar on Art.   |
| 1958 Nov.  | Talk on Family Planning by Dr. K. Goonam.  | 1968 March  | Film Show on Egyptian Excavations.   |
| 1959 Aug.  | Bring and Buy Sale. Proceeds for set of Encyclopaedias for Orient High School Library.                                       | 1968 April  | Tour of Packco Factory and Inanda Baby creche.   |
| 1959 Oct.  | Guest speaker Fatima Meer.   | 1968 June   | Talk to Scottsburgh Institute by Z. Mayat.   |
| 1960 Feb.  | Oriental Dinner plus variety show.   | 1968 Aug.   | Talk and slides by Mr. Cassim Lakhi on Indus Valley Excavations.   |
| 1961 Jan.  | Indian Delights First Edition published.   | 1968 Nov.   | Donation to Katulani Nursery School for building.  |
| 1961 Jan.  | Demonstrations in Indian Cookery at Greenacres.  | 1968 Nov.   | Talk on Indian Music by Mr. Moola.   |
| 1961 March | Order for another 2,000 copies of Indian Delights given. Donations to Bantu Child Welfare and others.                        | 1968 Oct.   | Reception for Mrs. Mascati. Town Councillor of Surat   |
| 1961 Aug.  | Stall at Hobbies Fair to demonstrate cookery and sell books.   | 1969 Feb.   | A. Bobat talks on "Investment in Growth Funds".  |
| 1961 Aug.  | Talk to Black Sash by Z. Mayat on Religion.  | 1969 May    | Get together at Kwa Mashu as guests of Zamokuhle Society.  |
| 1961 Sept. | Film and talk on Cerebral Palsy.   | 1970 Dec.   | Drive for Pakistan Flood relief.   |
| 1961 Nov.  | Talk by F. Osman to Women's Institute.   | 1970 May    | 10,000 copies of Enlarged edition Indian Delights.   |
| 1962 May   | Talk by Devi Bughwaan on Speech and Drama.   | 1971 Sept.  | Registration of Women's Cultural Group Educational Trust.  |
| 1963 July  | Group organises scheme of cooking for other peoples parties and thus supplementing income of housewives.                     | 1971 Nov.   | Asim Randeree Mushara Orient Hall.   |
| 1963 Aug.  | Visit to Durban Art Gallery organised by Sylvia Kaplan.  | 1971 Dec.   | Public lecture and dinner in honour of Professor AlFaruqi.   |
| 1963 Aug.  | Monthly Soup Kitchen in Merebank.  | 1971 Dec.   | Second impression of enlarged edition of 15,000 copies of Indian Delights.   |
| 1963 Sept. | Talk by Mr. Somers on Batik.   | 1972 Feb.   | 13 bursaries allocated to University students.   |
| 1964 Aug.  | Zainub Reddy's lecture on "Development of Indian Crafts".  | 1972 April  | 18th Anniversary of Woman Cultural Group. Indian craft & African bead work demonstrations. Fashion display, etc.; Opening graced by Chief Gatsha Buthelezi & Princess Irene  |
| 1964 Sept. | Visit to Rajab Home for viewing art collection and to hear Mr. Rajab speak thereon.  | 1972 May    | Slide Talk by Dr. & Mrs. M.G.H. Mayat-Trip to Indonesian Islands   |
| 1964 Nov.  | Group assists at Durban Art Gallery during fortnight of Oriental Exhibition and organises evening of Indian Dance and music. | 1972 June   | Cookery Demonstration - Ann Wise of Sunday Times.  |
| 1965 March | Talk by Dr. Tirapurisundari on Indian Dancing.   |             | 1972 Impression Revised edition of Indian Delights 25,000 copies.  |
| 1965 March | Allocation of bursaries to University students.  | 1973 April  | Memorandum & petition with 11896 signatures presented to the mayor asking that the fire-ravaged Indian Market in Victoria Street be re-built on grounds that historically it is associated with the Indian Community and as a tourist attraction it had no parallel in Durban. |
| 1965 May   | Evening of Chamber Music by Maartens Group at home of Doris Wallace.   | 1973 April  | Quawwali by Chote Saleh Adam & Salma Begum-Westville Centre.   |
| 1965 July  | Mushara (Recital of Urdu Poetry).  | 1973 July   | Ghazal evening by Maya Devi & party.   |
| 1965 July  | Talk and slides on Pakistan by Z. Mayat.   | 1973 August | 24000 Eid Cards printed for re-sale. Selection by M. Motala.   |
| 1965 Nov.  | Social Anthropology and Survey. Talk by Yasmin Dinath.   | 1973 August | 2 evenings of talk on Indian & Islamic Crafts and traditions. Illustrated by clothes, music and objects, at Durban Girls College, Musgrave Road.   |
| 1965 July  | Help to Inanda Nursery School building fund.   | 1973 Nov.   | Slides & Talk by Dr. & Mrs. Mayat on Russia at Orient Hall.  |
| 1966 Oct.  | Ghandhian Philosophy. Talk by Fatima Meer.   |             |  |

1974 April	Letter to editor, condenser protesting against mention in an article referring to Malays; "These were Malay slaves, criminals in their own country who were sent from Balavia by the Council of Seventeen at Van Riebeeck's request.	1980 Aug.	Show arranged at Mercury auditorium displaying Heirlooms of India & Pakistan. Decision taken by group to publish Nanima's Chest.
1974	Group members tour of van Loon Buddhist collection; Grey Street Mosque; S.A.B.C. etc.	1980 Sept.	Cookery demonstrations at Salisbury Island Naval Base & Rooi Rose Magazines.
1974	August Fete at Orient Hall. Sibusiwe Child Welfare & Nicca R1000 each.	1980 Nov.	Jumble Sale at Juma Musjid. Moneys for charity and also for Afghanistan Fund.
1974	3rd; Impression of Enlarged Indian Delights 25000 copies.	1981 April	Group participated in INDICOM TRADE FAIR Moneys for charities.
1974, Dec.	Slides & talks by Dr. & Mrs. Mayat on Senegal & The Ivory Coast.	1982 Aug.	Group participated in Daily News Food Fair.
1975 July	Talk on the United States by Z. Seedat when she, Pamela Sharrat and Mrs. Nyembezi toured there as guests of the States Government	1982 Feb.	Group presented NICCA with cheque of R20,000 to purchase Hendry Road Land for an assessment centre.
1975	Lecture by Dr. Kalim Siddiqui at Orient Hall.	1983 July	Grand Fete at Orient School opened by the Mayor Councilor Sybil Hotz. R26,332 was raised but that year Group gave out R37,235 to various charitable organisations. See list on page 10.
1976 Sept.	Petition by Group to Westville Council to remove Apartheid signs from Post Office was successful.	1983 Nov.	Lecture arranged for Dr. Hamidullah of Paris at Westville Hall.
1976 Sept.	Eid hampers sent to political detainees and needy families.	1983 Oct.	Samoosa demonstration at Daily News Kitchen by members.
1976 Oct.	Cookery demonstration - Windermere Centre.	1984 Aug.	Show by Nina & Rajendra Mehta.
1977 April	Group's sponsorship of Dr. Yakub Zaki to give lectures on Islamic Architecture.	1985 Feb.	Group participation at Indian Day at Flea Market. R4,000 donated to various societies.
1977 April	Group with other societies arrange Premier of "World Of Islam Films".	1985 April	Members visit at As Salaam Institute.
1977 April	Lecture arranged for Fatima Heeran (German convert) at Orient Hall.	1985 Sept.	Members help at Greenbury Hall in Phoenix to aid flood victims. Clothing and 20 two plate stoves donated.
1977 August	Group involved in running multi-racial sandwich bar in St. Andrews Street.	1985 Oct.	R1,000 donation to Imbaliyezwe L.P. School Inchanga.
1977 Sept.	Eid Milan for Group members & husbands at Golden Peacock.	1985	Mushaera for Mujeeb Ansari & local shaers.
1977	Lecture by Ustad Muhammed Asad at home of Z. Mayat.	1985 Oct.	Mushaera for visiting shaer Peerzada. Opening speech by Khorshed Nadvi.
1977 Dec.	Group undertook to assist in training of nursery school teachers for Hammersdale	1986 March	Members went to bid farewell to Maulana Ansari and asked him to present donation of R5,000-00 to Golden Gateway.
1978	Members visit to Spes Nova School where they presented cheque of R1000-00 to Golden Gateway on our behalf.	1986 May	SATV - We prepared special Ramadaan menu but quality of programme most disappointing.
1978	Bumper Fete at Orient School. Raised R7000-00 for charities.	1986 Nov.	Two Jumble sales held. Total realised R1,800 of this R1,000 was donated towards construction of Mosque in Kwa Mashu.
1978 Sept.	Members were invited by Hammersdale African Women's Society where we demonstrated Indian dishes and they demonstrated African dishes.	1987 Jan.	Members visit the Valley Trust Complex.
1978	Arranged function commemorating death of Mahirul Qaderi. Member Sayeda Ansari	1987 Feb.	Quawwali at Orient Hall by visiting Naizi Bros.
1978 Dec.	Guest star - Mohammed Rafi with great dignity officiated dinner at Maharani. R650 raised for charity. Kuhla Khale nursery.	1987 March	Members visit the Kwa Mashu Mosque to which building project Group donated R1,000.
1978	Group participation in week of Arts & Crafts at home of Mrs. Brian Lee 'Trevean'.	1987 April	Public lecture arranged for Maulana Taqi Uthmani at Truro Hall.
1979	Group members cooperated with independent Film Co. for a TV. presentation "They Came From The East" Role of Muslim mothers. Mendhi application and Cookery main themes.	1987 June	Eid Milan for members and families at the Taj Mahal Restaurant.
1979 June	Group undertook a stall at Zamani Women's Fete in Durban North.	1987 Sept.	Public lecture at Orient Dining Hall by Justice Tanzir-ul Rahman.
1979 Dec.	Group arranged a picnic for members families at Tinley Manor	1987 Sept.	Public Mushaera by visiting shaers Himayat Ali & Raghbir Muradabad.i
1980 Feb.	Group opened 'Tiflaneh' School for children with Downe Syndrome who could not be accomodated at other institutions. Ran this for a full year and children were then transferred to other Institutions.	1987 Oct.	W.C. Group officially open Sanzaf kitchen at Dar As Salaam in Queen Street and ran it for a year, giving lessons to public and teaching housewives who need to supplement their incomes.
1980 March	Jumble Sale at Juma Musjid-Raised R700 for charities.	1987 Oct.	Group held cookery demonstration at Durban Workshop.
1980 May	Arranged Mushaera for local shaers. Great success.	1988 June	Public lecture for visiting Pakistani lecturer Dr. Saziya Chisti.
1980	Arranged dinner at Whispers where fashions were exhibited. Raised R750 for our Tiflaneh school venture.	1988 Sept.	Group arranged dinner function at Orient Club where they addressed Community leaders and heads of other organisations and informed them of our plans to develop Hendry Road as a Community Centre with multi-dimensional activities. A model and plans of the project were displayed.
1980 July	Two days of cookery demonstrations at Natal Mercury Kitchen.	1987	Members attend function at V.N. Niak School for deaf which is an Institution that we have helped right from its days when it operated as the Arthur Blaxal School.
1980 July	Showed "Islamic Festival Films at Gitanjali. Moneys raised for Tiflaneh.	1989	Members visit S. Dass School for hand-capped persons. Another institute that we have helped all along. Last major donation of R20,000 for building project. Thereafter a donation for a fridge and clothing.
1980 Dec.	Tiflaneh closed down. Moneys remaining for this project donated to Golden Gateway School on understanding that name Tiflaneh feature on whichever classroom		