4
FAHMIDA'S WORLDS

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

Gori-Khala Where is the owner of the house?

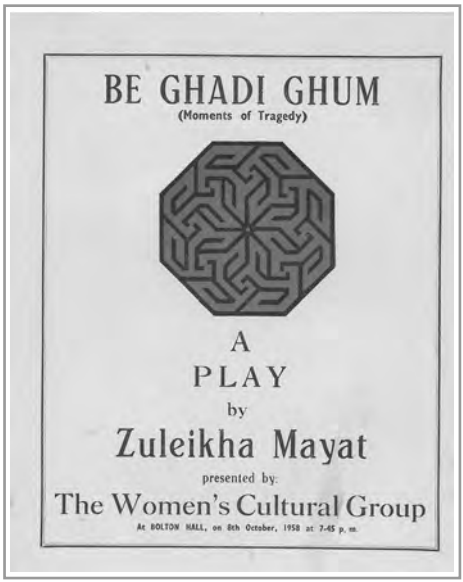
Mira Behen She has gone down to the tearoom to deliver samoosas.

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

'Mainly for women'

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Nanima's Chest

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

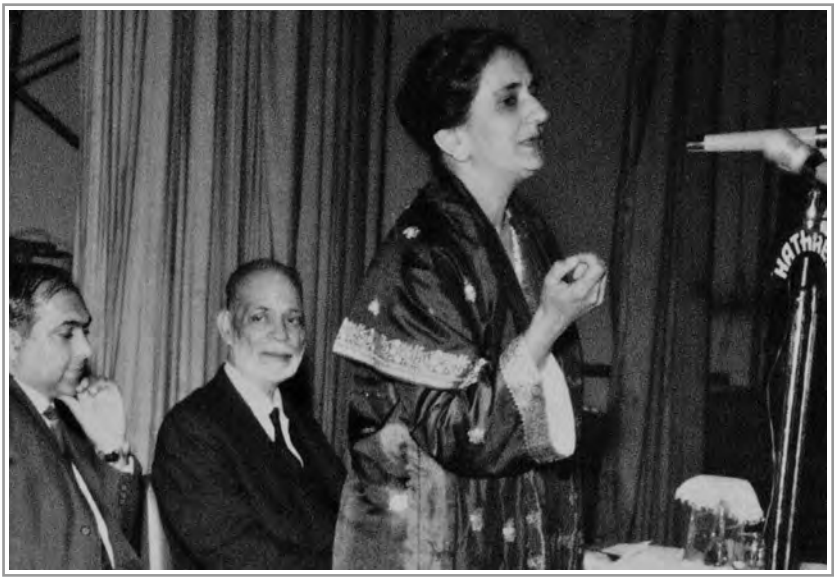
The Group derived much pride from this publication and copies were handed out to visiting guests and even sent overseas. For example, when Akber Badi spoke to the Group in September 1981, he was presented with a copy of the book. A copy was also sent to Professor TB Irving, a Canadian-born convert to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

Culture from the podium

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Musha'iras and qawwalis

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Sayedah Ansari comes

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Of mother tongues and cultural voices

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Zohra [But] our grandchildren not at all.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

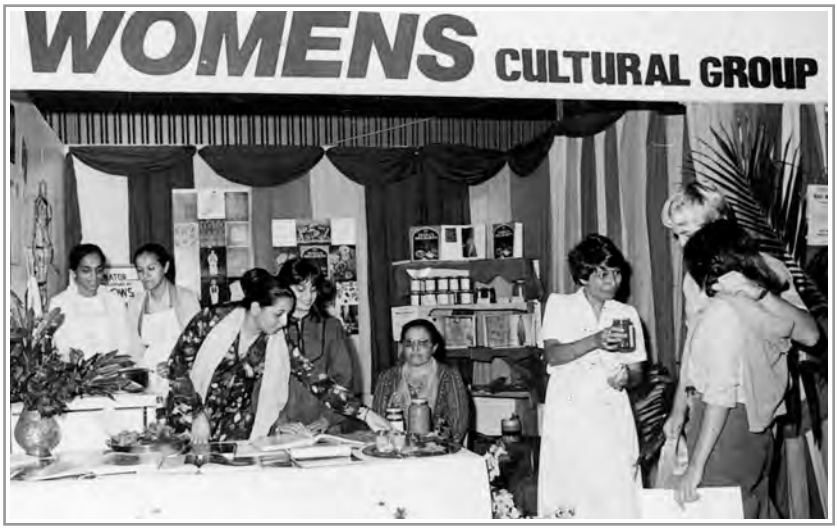
The post-apartheid period has been witness to many visible changes. There has been a marked change in gender relations, attempts to (re)confine women to domestic spheres, and the prohibition of aesthetic pleasures like music and theatre, while in many homes the nikah has been stripped of most of its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

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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