INDIAN WOMEN IN POLITICS FROM 1946 TO 1963:

A Focus on the Transvaal

Presented by

CHAMPA GOOLAB

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DEDICATION

I dedicate this research to my Mother and Aunt, who, during the period I have studied, were battling to help their families survive and thus could not participate in political activity.

PEOPLE WITHOUT A HISTORY

We women
wandering exiles
in a man's world,
illiterate,
strangers to the archives -
we have no history.

We cannot tell our daughters:
"Your ancestors were wise in judgement,
generous, and strong in battle."
We can only say:
"This one died in childbirth,
that one outlived her usefulness
as sweetheart, wife, and mother."
We can only say:
"Your great-grandmother
is lost to us already,
my own mother can no longer remember
her own mother's girlhood name
or any detail of her life."

To our daughters we can only say:
"She was a wise one, strong
with the knowledge of birth
and dying, breathed truth. There
is this relation: she is part of you.
She sleeps in your dreams.
She lives in your veins."

WAKE UP PEOPLE

Wake up people and see what is happening to us.
Important decisions about our lives and future are being made.
The cowards and sellouts want to become our leaders
The people who have caused our ships to sink, now want to become captains.
Listen to people who have chosen the path of justice and accept them as your leaders.

Why are we allowing the oppressors to have their way with us?
If you fail to chose the path of truth and justice you will pay a bitter price
For when the day of reckoning comes,
Then do not blame the all mighty for the seeds you have sown.

Why are you so afraid to stand for what is right?
Why is truth and justice being side stepped?
With our revolutionary spirit and freedom songs
Other nations are responding to our call
The pillars of apartheid are being shaken
Because the international community is now on our side.

Rookaiya Saloojee, "Shama"

Featured in the Lenasia Women's Congress Editorial: August 1989

Interview with Rookaiya Saloojee

INTRODUCTION

This study addresses the involvement of some Indian women in political events in the Transvaal during the period 1946 to 1963. This research attempts to highlight the contributions of Indian women to national politics and to reflect their active role in various aspects of organised politics. It explores the impact of apartheid legislation on Indian women and their communities and the consequent political events that projected some of them into the public political domain. A brief theoretical discussion looks at the importance of developing approaches to the writing of history in order to acknowledge the enormous contributions made by these women, and in this case those made by Indian women. The notion of Indian women's `passivity' is critically explored and challenged within the study and examined through the voices of the women who were interviewed.

My informants are a select group, but representative of the different class and religious groups within the South African Indian community. They came from either middle-class or working-class families and evidence suggests that to some extent that their political motivations were influenced by their class origins. Their religious affiliation was either Hinduism or Islam, but it was not a crucial factor in determining their participation in politics. Nevertheless, it is noteworthy, as it marks the close co-operation between the two groups in pursuing their common goal, that of resisting the segregation and apartheid laws. The women ranged in age from fifty-three to eighty-three years. The level of education that they respectively attained also appears to have been a determining factor in the nature of their involvement.

In my study, I aim to explore and highlight the motivations of these Indian women who were politically motivated, and who became involved in organised political activity during the almost two decades covered in this thesis. The oral histories of the Indian women whom I interviewed are testimony to the significant role that some Indian

women played in political struggles in the given period. Through their testimonies, they become active subjects within the historical framework.

The methods of research include the use of primary and secondary sources. Personal interviews and selective archival material are utilised to develop an understanding of the nature of the participation of these women in the political arena and to highlight their personal and collective evolution in this regard. While the interviews are a valuable reflection of the involvement of Indian women in the political struggles, account must be taken of the fact that memory and recollections are not as accurate as historians would like them to be in terms of dates and figures. Nevertheless they are a great treasure of experiences.

The Indian population of South Africa presently constitutes 3% of the total population. Consequently the Indian involvement in the National Liberation struggle is often subsumed in the larger struggle. The particular role played by Indian women is also subsumed within the national liberation struggle of Indians and other groups against apartheid. It is therefore understandable that not only was little attention given to the specific role played by Indian women, although Indian women themselves often did not realise the vital contribution they were making to the struggle for a democratic South Africa.

Little has been written about the participation of Indians in the last fifty years and even less about the role of Indian women, therefore most of my dissertation had to rely on interviews. Consequently, given the paucity of information, the dissertation provides an introductory study of the role of Indian women in the struggle for the period 1946 to 1963.

My research draws on the works of Maureen Swan, a pioneer in writings on Indians in South Africa, as she offers insights into historical development of political thinking and the structure of the Indian community in South Africa. Her book entitled *Gandhi:*

The South African Experience (1985),[1] explores Gandhi's life in South Africa and his influence on the political movements in the Indian community. She emphasizes his role in the development of the Satyagraha philosophy, which led to the strategy of Passive Resistance. Her discussion centres on the class composition of the South African Indian community, and the respective political responses to segregation legislation. Swan's book is important for my study as it highlights the shift from conservative to radical leadership within the South African Indian Congress in the 1940's. Yet, this is simultaneously a limitation, as her study ends in the 1940's and mine begins therein. Furthermore, as outlined above her study does not look at Indian women's participation in politics.

There is a large corpus of secondary literature on the 1946-1963 period. However, I argue that the role of Indian women in the political struggles in this period has not received due recognition.[2] For example, Davenport's *South Africa: A Modern History (1987)*[3] does not even mention women's political participation in the resistance campaign, but rather subsumes this in a general discussion of the lead up to the Defiance Campaign:

> Mass protest meetings were held in many parts of South Africa on that day, and the ANC and the SAIC capitalised on the enthusiasm aroused by them to set up the Joint Planning Council to organise a more ambitious demonstration on the 26 June ... [4]

Tom Lodge provides a comprehensive picture and analysis of South African resistance politics in his book *Black Politics in South Africa since 1945 (1990).*[5] But his review of women's participation during the 1950's is limited to discussions on Federation of South African Women (FSAW) and how, as a women's organisation, it contributed to the broader aims of the national liberation struggle. He does not specifically introduce the role of Indian women in either FSAW or the campaigns of the era, but centres his discussions around mainstream organisational politics. He alludes to the successful joint actions between the South African Indian Congresses (SAIC) and the African

National Congress (ANC) during the Decade of Defiance. Lodge elucidates the relationship between FSAW and the Congress Alliance:

> During the first months of the Federation's existence, the energies of its office-holders were channelled into Congress campaigns, which - especially in the case of the Bantu Education boycott - drew upon the resources of the Women's League and the Congress of Democrats.[6]

Dilshad Cachalia's examination of the Radicalisation of the Transvaal Indian Congress (TIC) and the moves to Joint Action, 1946-1952 (1981)[7] is valuable for its critical analysis of the forces that facilitated the rise of radical leadership within the TIC. Her focus on the emergence of radical leadership and how it impacted on the direction and nature of resistance struggles offers insights into how the passive resistance campaign evolved into a tool for a mass resistance. This evolution resulted in women being drawn into the campaign. Consequently in discussing the passive resistance campaign Dilshad Cachalia notes that:

> However the discussion makes few references to the role of Indian women in the passive resistance and Defiance Campaign and is thus limited in its scope.

In the past few decades there has been an explosion of documented women's history and in South Africa a similar growth in literature on women's history is evident. Cherryl Walker's *Women and Resistance in South Africa (1982)*,[8] is a pathbreaker in this field in uncovering of the history of women's participation in resistance struggles in South Africa, and is a work that begins to address the gap in women's history evident in general texts cited above.

It provides an excellent overview of the nature of women's involvement in politics and contains valuable sources and original interview material. Her theoretical analysis of the nature of Indian women's position within the community and how that impacted on

their participation in the political arena offered a framework within which to locate this and similar discussions contained in my dissertation:

> Culturally, Indian women could be regarded as the most subjected group of women in South Africa. Both the Hindu and Moslem religions sanctioned an extreme form of submission and passivity among women. Prejudice from within the Indian community against women's participation in any form of activity outside the home was deeply rooted.[9]

Furthermore, her review of the role of the South African Indian Congresses and more specifically, the emergence of Indian women from isolation into organised political activity, raises questions about assumptions regarding the motivations for women's participation in political activity. These questions are crucial to my analysis of the impetus for Indian women's participation in political activities in the 1950's and 1960's.

Another important contribution towards making Indian women visible in history is Chetty's paper titled **"Sammy" and "Mary" go to gaol: Indian women and South African politics in the 1940's** (1991).[10] Chetty focuses on the 1946 passive resistance and explores the motivations for Indian women's participation through the eyes of three leading women. He attempts to give an overview, rather than a detailed study, of Indian women's role in political actions during this period. Furthermore, he explores 'popular images' of Indian women as reflected in mainstream media, and how these have consequently influenced perceptions of their social and political character both globally and within the community. Chetty's discussion on the stereotypical images of Indian women as passive and docile members of the community raises questions for my own exploration of the notion of 'passivity' of Indian women.

While it is true that one cannot use the term 'Indian women' in a monolithic sense, given class, ethnic and religious divisions, nevertheless, within the dissertation I do make some generalizations. In discussing the notion of Indian women's passivity, for

example, I argue that regardless of their class, religious affiliation or ethnic origin, Indian women were perceived as docile and subservient. In this regard I argue that there are two important notions which inform the way Indian women were regarded in their community and indeed their own perceptions of their roles. The first notion of the passivity of Indian women is that they belonged in the home. The second is that within the home Indian women were docile and subservient.

These notions cannot however be looked at in isolation. I argue that they are linked to two important factors: the gender identity of Indian women and the socio-economic position and structure of the joint Indian family. The ability of the Indian woman to be politically active outside the home was often determined by the above factors and not by an inherent passivity or lack of interest. As I will show, some women left the security of their homes to protest against repressive legislation that the state introduced and implemented, sometimes alongside their men and sometimes with other women. Nevertheless, while their participation in political protests was a necessary condition for the success of such action, this does not mean that in the process these Indian women transformed their gendered identity within the family. As Chetty, for example points out:

> Indian women's gender identity was constructed around the image of 'mother' as the self-sacrificing pillar of the family, gentle nurturer and upholder of the Indian culture. The Indian women was seen as the subordinate and domesticated counterpart to her husband.[11]

Moreover, the structure of the Indian family - its composition and economic position - in many ways determined the extent to which the Indian woman could be active outside the home.

Freund strongly argues that:

> Women, particularly given the extensive nature of domestic work in a large family and the lack of remunerative options, were most effectively put to work within the family accumulation engine ... The economic strategy of keeping women at home had a distinct rationale. It was not the result of a tradition of demure seclusion or an other-worldly demand on the part of religion.[12]

Taking the above factors into account, an important aim of this research is to recover the voices of some ordinary Indian women who through their political participation made valuable contributions to the transition in South Africa. A number of these women are very old and, since embarking on this research, two of them, Ama Naidoo and Villanagee Pillay have died. To lose their voices altogether would leave a gap in our understanding of their political participation and how their activities inspired the next generation of Indian women to enter the political arena in the 1980's.[13] Furthermore, in the current process of rewriting the history of South Africa from a gendered perspective, this research may hopefully make a contribution.

I also argue that women's political struggles cannot only be understood within the political and historical framework of 'organised' movements as these tend to circumscribe the scope nature or depth of women's experiences, resulting in traditional depictions of women's participation. By nature, 'organised' movements are not gender-neutral. These movements tend to coalesce around issues that are prominent in the public sphere as the decision-makers are men. Analysis of 'organised' political history is consequently inadequate because it does not capture other forms of political activity or protest. Due to the lack of scholarly focus on the tasks that women perform in their daily lives, their position in the family and community at large and how these affect their ability to participate in political activities is not tackled. The devaluation of women's actions and experience in mainstream historical writing has resulted in many women 'disappearing namelessly from history'.

Here I strongly support Farnham's proposal of a method for rewriting women's history which works toward integrating women as a category into present historical frameworks:

> The aim of this approach is to give value to an experience that has been ignored and thus devalued and to insist on female agency in the 'making of history'. Investigations that seek to uncover women's participation in major political history by attempting to fit a new subject - women - into received historical categories, interpreting their actions in terms recognizable to political and social histories.[14]

My study attempts to highlight the nature of Indian women's political activism with a view of providing some contextual information about the political and social forces that influenced them at the time. Since the majority of my informants emphasized the role played by their families in their political activities, the connections between family and politics is considered throughout the dissertation. The extensive networks that were established via familial links played an instrumental role in facilitating or inhibiting Indian women's participation in politics. It is important to note that the basic pattern of the family and motherhood inherent in Indian community life remained unchanged and domestic power relations were not seriously challenged during the period under consideration. The dissertation explores how political participation developed the confidence and organisational skills of many Indian women and catapulted some of them into leadership positions.

Chapter One provides a brief overview of the formation of the Indian community and the historical campaigns in which Indian women participated prior to 1946. The rise of radical leadership within the South African Indian Congresses and the dramatic events surrounding the independence of India that influenced the participation of Indian women in public political activity during the period under review is dealt with. The overview of those periods is important to our understanding of the progressive development of the political consciousness of some Indian women. Chapter Two

covers some important political events of the 1950's including the Defiance Campaign and the Freedom Charter. I focus on the significance of this period as it related to the further development of Indian women's political consciousness. Chapter Three explores the 1956 Women's March to the Union Buildings and the smaller, but significant, protests engaged in by Indian women in the early 1960's, culminating in the march against the Group Areas Act in 1963.

Most of the Indian women whom I interviewed continued to be politically active long after the period that my study covers and were a source of inspiration to their children. The achievements of these women did not go unnoticed by their children. The daughters of both Amina Cachalia and Ama Naidoo, for example, went on to become very active in the political campaigns of the 1970's and 1980's.

The dissertation has a strong personal significance as it emerged from exploring the lives of my mother, Jamu Goolab, and my aunt, Sharda Goolab, in an attempt to understand why they were unable to participate in the political activities that are discussed in this research. Their memories and perceptions of events and conditions in Johannesburg during the 1940's and 1950's offer glimpses of the political, cultural and social milieu within the Indian community. The unfolding of their lives became the vehicle for tracing my own political roots.

END NOTES

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CHAPTER ONE

THE GHETTO ACT AND THE PASSIVE RESISTANCE OF 1946

I promised the leaders that I won't go to prison for one time, but several times![1]

This chapter will explore events precipitating the passive resistance campaign in 1946. It will provide an overview of the political scenery of South Africa from the early 1940's and a brief history of the role of women in passive resistance prior to 1946. I will also discuss the Ghetto Act and its repercussions for the Indian community. Specific attention will be given to the impact of the Act on Indian women and the incentive it provided for a minority of them to become actively involved in political protest. The following factors will provide a framework within which the nature of their participation will be analyzed:

i) the widespread restrictive laws passed by the United Party Government.

ii) the rise of radical leadership within the Transvaal Indian Congress.

iii) the influence of the independence struggle in India and the Satyagraha campaigns prior to 1946.

iv) the development of a political consciousness amongst a cross-section of Indian women as a result of their participation in political activity.

A brief discussion on the origins and composition of the Indian community in South Africa is important to contextualize the events which are covered in this and later chapters. Between 1860 and 1911 more than 150 000 Indians arrived in South Africa. They were composed of two groups, the indentured labourers and the passenger Indians. The former group came predominantly from the southern states in India and did not pay for their passage as they were brought as contractual workers. The majority of them settled in Natal as they worked on the coastal sugar plantations.[2] The indentured Indians were promised free citizenship on the expiry of their contracts. Most accepted this arrangement but "due to their economic success, became the victims of racial prejudice."[3]

During the same period and subsequently a lesser number of passenger Indians, most of whom came from agricultural communities and of both Hindu and Muslim origin, arrived from Gujerat in India.[4] The passenger Indians paid for their passage. Many of the passenger Indians who arrived in South Africa in later years were to settle in the Transvaal and thus the geographical division of the working-class and merchant-class Indian population became apparent.

The passenger Indians were not bound by contracts and soon they were hawking goods and developing trade networks. Their apparent success in this lead to increasing restrictions on residence, trade and movement between the provinces. This action tended to exacerbate the tensions between the authorities and the Indian people as Meer points out:

> the first laws whittling down the right of Indians to move, trade and reside where they pleased were passed at the end of the last century in Natal, Transvaal and the Orange Free State.[5]

The composition of the Indian community is of note, as there was a large disparity in the number of males and females arriving in Natal between 1860 and 1911, "about 61% were men, 25% were women and 14% children."[6] Passenger Indians rarely brought their wives with them due to their uncertain future. The indentured labourers did not always have the option to bring their wives, as the women were chosen for their ability to work and bear children. Consequently family life as it is generally understood did not exist. However, attempts were made to recreate a sense of family and community. These working class Indian women of childbearing age were in demand and most of them were engaged in producing and rearing children in addition to working to produce cash crops.[7] On the other hand wives of merchants sometimes engaged in more commercial activity as Freund notes:

> In a laundry owner's family, the wife effectively ran the business on behalf of the political-activist husband. The daughters-in-law sold cooked food to the workforce ...[8]

Until 1936 a greater number of males than females moved into the Transvaal and the Cape, due to the opportunities to make a living by trading. In 1911 there were 2 000 women as opposed to 9 000 men living in the Transvaal. By 1936 these figures had increased to 10 000 and 15 000 respectively.[9] In 1946, Indian women living in the Transvaal numbered 17 000 and males 21 000.[10] Between 1910 and 1946 the Indian population in the Transvaal "almost doubled from 7 % to 13 % of the total Indian population. By 1946 there were 17 000 females and 21 000 males living in the Transvaal."[11]

By the early 20th century immigration from India had all but ceased and special permits were required for Indians to move between provinces. Meer states that:

> their residence and trade in the Transvaal and Natal was restricted and controlled by special voting rights in the central legislature ... so that both by tradition and law their social and economic opportunities were curbed.[12]

In summary, Indians did not passively accept the discriminatory laws and practices to which they were subjected, but embarked on organised resistance such as, the 1913 passive resistance campaign. As early as this Indian women had started to participate in the campaigns initiated by the Indian people.[13] This campaign together with the subsequent political action taken by the Indian people against the segregation laws are discussed in greater detail in the course in this chapter. At this stage, however my concern is, to pick up on that history of resistance from 1946.

THE GHETTO ACT OF 1946

Indian politics during the 1940's and 1950's focused on the issue of gaining citizenship and protesting against laws aimed at curbing the trading activities of the Indian merchants. The introduction of legislation that advocated the separation of groups on the basis of race gave impetus to the 1946 passive resistance campaign. Such legislation appeared in the form of the 'Pegging Act' of 1943 and the Ghetto Act of 1946.

At this point, an overview of the immediate political climate prior to 1946 is useful in order to contextualize the introduction of the Ghetto Act and the passive resistance campaign that was organized to protest this measure. As early as 1943, the United Party Government under General Smuts extended the controversial 'Trading and Occupation of Land Restriction Bill' to include Natal, based on the findings of the Broome Commission. This Commission was first appointed in 1940, by the United Party Government to investigate the extent of Indian penetration into white trading areas. The second report of this Commission, published in 1943, indicated a 'significant Indian takeover of a small section of Durban Berea'.[14] The government thus decided to introduce legislation in this regard. The Act became known as the 'Pegging Act' and it restricted Indians from occupying land 'unless such property was already occupied by Indians prior to 1943'.[15] It also stipulated that 'no Asiatic could purchase

property from a European and vice versa, except under permit from the Minister of Interior'.[16] There was strong reaction to the measures from the Indian community 'but with a moderate Transvaal Indian Congress (TIC) leadership in hand, nothing concrete was achieved'.[17] The Indian Government added its protest - to no avail - and consequently mooted the introduction of economic sanctions against South Africa.

The Smuts Government tried to divert attention from the protests by appointing yet another Broome Commission in early 1944 to consider the 'uplift provisions of the Cape Town Agreement'.[18] The Natal Indian Congress (NIC) leadership finally agreed to the appointment of a board "consisting of two whites, two Indians and a lawyer as chairman to control inter-racial property transactions."[19] This compromising gesture from the NIC leadership led to the suspension of the Pegging Act in terms of the Pretoria Agreement of 18 April 1944.

However the agreement was short-lived. A breakdown was sparked by the Natal Provincial Council's determination to legislate measures which would restrict the land purchasing rights of Indians as opposed to occupational rights as set out in the Pretoria Agreement. This was met with strong objections from all sides and led to the collapse of the Pretoria Agreement. The Indian Government retaliated by imposing travel restrictions on white South Africans.

The United Party Government passed further legislation in March 1946 in the form of the Asiatic Land Tenure and Indian Representation Act, otherwise known as the Ghetto Act. This Act:

> restricted the acquisition and occupation of land by Asiatics throughout the Union and granted them communal franchise. The Act demarcated predominantly Indian Areas.[20]

The Ghetto Act and the Pegging Act legally entrenched economic and social privilege for white people by forcing Indian traders into locations soon to be demarcated as 'Indian' areas. The authoritarian manner in which the United Party Government imposed these measures, despite the protestations of the Indian Government and the South African Indian community, was in contradiction to the dialogue maintained between the above-mentioned parties up to this time. As Meer points out:

> Though the position of Indians deteriorated and their citizenship rights in the country dwindled, up to the coming of the Nationalist Party in 1948 there was sustained contact between Indian leaders and the government.[21]

The membership of Indian resistance organizations including the TIC and the NIC had, up to that time, been dominated by the merchant class. Swan argues:

> their major political organizations were founded to protect the vested commercial interests and were controlled by the wealthiest merchants.[22]

Pahad similarly argues that:

> Given their [passenger and indentured Indians] political and ideological positions, the merchant class leaders were not interested in the problems faced by the Indian working class and land workers. Since the latter's problems were very different from those of the shopkeepers so that meaningful unity could never take place.[23]

Thus the strategies used by Indian resistance organizations to protest discriminatory legislation were reactionary and accommodational, characterized by petitions and deputations. In Swan's view, 'these forms of protest were generally extra-parliamentary since South African Indians were not enfranchised'.[24] The apparent divisions between the working and trading class mentioned above led to a split in the

NIC. The radical group was headed by Dr. G.M. Naicker and the moderate group under A.I. Kajee and P.R. Pather. The radical group advocated universal franchise, whereas the moderate group were particularly concerned about the franchise for Indians.

THE PASSING OF THE 1946 GHETTO ACT AND THE CAMPAIGN FOR PASSIVE RESISTANCE

The Ghetto Act was passed amid tremendous debate among the Indian political groups, the Government of India and the United Party Government. The Indian Government protested strongly against the measures and called for a Round Table Conference on the issue. Unlike the accommodating response of the conservative TIC to the Pegging Act, the Ghetto Act precipitated a sustained campaign of passive resistance from politically active members of the Indian community and, in particular, from the radical groups. The mid-1940's had seen a shift in South African Indian politics from the politics of negotiation and consultation to more provocative and confrontational strategies. This shift was initiated by the radical leadership of Drs Dadoo and Naicker who were elected to the TIC and NIC respectively in 1945.

Dadoo had been a prominent member of the Non-European United Front from its formation in 1939. This organisation had tried to promote the strategy of a united front to oppose the government and, during the 1939 passive resistance campaign, Dadoo tried to introduce the idea of a 'cross- racial alliance' to his audiences. However, "the idea of a united front was a totally novel one in Indian politics and found no support amongst the more conservative elements within the TIC and NIC."[25] Pahad also argues in the same vein that:

> the existence of these two very distinct groups within the Indian population and the lack of unity between them, also meant that for a considerable time Indian

> political movements in South Africa tended to operate in isolation from those of the African people and the organizations of what are called in South Africa, the Coloured people.[26]

By 1945 the new leadership under Dadoo and Naicker was critical of, and frustrated by, the failure of former means of resistance, and the Indian resistance organizations realised that they had more in common with the African National Congress (ANC) than the Non-European Unity Movement which was dominated by Coloured intellectuals who preferred to engage in protests within the law. As Davenport notes, 'it was primarily in their preparedness to defy the law that the Indian congresses and the ANC found that they could make common cause'.[27]

The new leadership took the resolution to embark upon the passive resistance campaign, drawing on the historically successful strategies used by Gandhi and the people of India to challenge and defy British colonial rule. Passive resistance was a strategy based on Satyagraha ('soul force'), a philosophy of resistance refined by Gandhi. It was employed by Indian people in South Africa as early as 1906 as a form of protest against the excessive poll taxes, passes for Indians and the refusal of the government to recognize traditional Indian marriage rites.[28] Satyagraha was based on the principles of truth and non-violence. The individual Indian activist in South Africa was responsible for making a commitment to the Indian struggle at hand. Satyagraha was passive to the extent that resisters would not engage in violence under any circumstances to support their cause. However, by voluntarily breaking the law and courting arrest, the resisters were engaging in provocative and confrontational activity.

Hence, the strategy of passive resistance was in effect confrontational, because it brought the issues of the South African Indians into the public eye and the government into direct conflict with the resisters. Dilshad Cachalia cites a joint statement issued by the NIC and TIC that encapsulates the philosophy of Passive Resistance:

> Passive resistance is the only weapon that is in our hands ... it is a weapon that has been handed to us with sacred trust ... Passive resistance has never failed where the leaders are imbued with faith and service.[29]

In addition, it was a strategy that did not automatically exclude women on the basis of class or level of education. Over several decades the Satyagraha campaigns saw women actively engaging in public marches and civil disobedience actions, including defiance of restrictive legislation and voluntary imprisonment. An important organisation responsible for mobilising women as Satyagrahis was the Transvaal Women's Association. The Association had been formed during the passive resistance struggles of 1906-1913 when women played a formative role in demonstrations against the poll taxes, the registration of Asiatics in the Transvaal, discriminatory laws relating to traditional Indian marriages and admission of wives and children of Indians domiciled in South Africa. A group of Transvaal Tamil women including Ama Naidoo's mother-in-law were amongst those who helped to mobilize workers during the 1913 passive resistance efforts in Natal. They crossed over the border to attend a meeting in Newcastle with popular Indian leader Thambi Naidoo to urge Indian miners at the Farleigh Coal mine to strike over the imposition of the R6 residential tax on Indians. The strike action spread to other coal mines in northern Natal where:

> a band of 2 037 men, 127 women and 57 children led by Gandhi marched for four days beginning November 6, 1913 and crossed the Natal-Transvaal border. They were arrested ... railed back to Natal where they were imprisoned and given hard labour on the mines.[30]

Indian women supported the strike action, not only in an auxiliary manner, but as co-marchers with their husbands even though it was an arduous journey.[31] Gandhi noted the contribution of women in this action, particularly that of sixteen year old Vallimma Munuswami, a Satyagrahi who developed a fever in jail and died within a few days of her release. When Gandhi asked her if she regretted having gone to jail, she responded, "I do not mind it. Who would not love to die for one's Motherland?" The

1913 strike forced the government to finally retract the R6 tax on Indians, thus highlighting the importance of a mass base for passive resistance to succeed.

Again in 1932, Indian women were visible in resistance actions aimed at legislation introduced in 1930, and an amendment to that legislation in 1932, that imposed restrictions on ownership of proclaimed land and outlawed Asians using white nominees to acquire property or businesses. Although these Acts were particularly harsh on the merchant Indian class, small traders and hawkers were also affected because they relied on credit extended by merchants.

The Transvaal Indian Women's Association which had strong links with the TIC and SAIC, came out in support of a resolution "moved by Thambi Naidoo's daughter, [now Mrs. Villanagee Pillay], to resist the amended legislation of 1932, enrol volunteers for passive resistance and to establish a committee of five to liaise with the men"[32] The chairwoman of the IDA at the time, Ms Singaram Pandithar, declared that "Indian honour and Indian self-respect were at stake."[33] Due to poor organisation and a lack of serious commitment to resistance on the part of a wavering leadership, the campaign was unsuccessful. But some Indian women had certainly been active and vocal in their support for the idea of resistance.

This was again evident in 1939 when the government passed the Asiatic (Transvaal Land and Trading) Act which, in brief, restricted Asian trading to Asian bazaars and locations. Simultaneously it denied new trading licences and permission to hire or occupy new premises. Between May and July 1939 several meetings were held which many Indian women attended and speeches against that Act were delivered by Sushila Gandhi, Ms G Christopher and songs were sung by Thambi Naidoo's grand-daughter. The speeches and songs aroused the anger of the audience and had the effect that:

> Women readily donated their jewellery at the meetings and... it was estimated that (early on in the campaign)

> two hundred volunteers had pledged themselves for resistance.[34]

Thus it is clear that, unusual though it was for Indian politics, women were a visible minority in Satyagraha and passive resistance campaigns that spanned nearly four decades prior to 1946. The leadership of the campaign against the Ghetto Act could thus clearly draw on the fact that Indian women had been active in earlier passive resistance efforts in order to mobilize women's support for the 1946 campaign. Moreover the TIC successfully exploited Indian patriotism and community's strong loyalty to the independence struggle as a way of mobilizing women to participate. Pearson notes that in the Indian independence struggle:

> womanhood seemed to transcend caste or class and helped the Congress leaders to present the movement as one which was representative of all social groups.[35]

The TIC and NIC established the Joint Passive Resistance Council to mobilize Indian people around the Ghetto Act. By addressing issues such as, the Ghetto Act which had severe consequences for both the merchant and working class, their aim of broadening the base of political activity and ensuring the participation of both the working class and women was achieved.[36]

The Joint Passive Resistance Council envisaged the passive resistance campaign occurring in two phases. In the first phase a small group of ten to fifteen resisters with a leader would voluntarily occupy the camp-site at the corner of Gale and Umbilo Roads in Durban. The site was located in an area that contravened the Ghetto Act, as it was not on land that Indians were permitted to occupy. The group would remain on the site until they were arrested. In the second phase, a small group of resisters, again with a leader, would cross the provincial border between Transvaal and Natal and would court arrest. The reason for having small groups was that once one group was arrested, another would take its place, thereby ensuring continuity. The groups would be coordinated by the Joint Passive Resistance Council.

Passive resistance gained widespread support from Indian people and, in contrast to the protests of the early 1940's, the campaign saw many Indian women visibly participating. Since many South African Indian women were not literate, the strategies employed in the early 1940's, which included formal petitions and deputations to government officials, had not been able to utilize women in that form of protest. Passive resistance was a public activity which did not necessarily require a high degree of education from its participants and therefore as a strategy of protest was more accessible to Indian women. The passive resistance campaign spanned two years and of the approximately thousand people who resisted, some three hundred were women.

Class and religious barriers were transcended in the passive resistance campaign because these women were becoming more aware of the common experience of racism that they experienced. They worked in close cooperation with each other to challenge the racist government. A description of Ama Naidoo's entry into politics supports my contention that class distinctions were transcended:

> Ama Naidoo was born in the city and lived the sheltered life of an Indian woman. The private world of the home was as demanding as any work place, but her marriage to a working-class political activist began to open up for her a growing awareness of the struggles against oppression and exploitation in the wider South African society.[37]

The lack of tensions between religious and ethnic groups is highlighted by Miriam Saloojee's comments on the campaign:

> I personally never encountered problems. There was always a very positive response. Amongst us were the Gujerati speaking, the Tamil speaking, the Muslim ladies and all of us got along very well and there was no racial, ethnic or religious conflicts ever crossed our paths, very, very seldom.[38]

I suggest that a growing political consciousness, together with an apprehension of the racist legislation passed against Indians, led to the active participation of Indian women in resistance politics. Indian women were inspired by the events preceding the independence victory in India and the contribution of women to that struggle. These events were widely covered in Indian newspapers, such as the Passive Resister and the Indian Opinion, instrumental in keeping South African Indians updated on the events in India, with the latter publishing in Gujerati and English. Indian women also received information via letters from relatives in India and through women's cultural groups. These women had begun to see themselves as active subjects rather than as supplicants as was evident in the passive resistance campaign launched on 13 June 1946 when:

> Transvaal women were the first to cross the border into Natal and occupy the Resister's plot at the corner of Umbilo Road and Gale Street.[39]

This was a clear demonstration of these women's determination to participate in the resistance and to risk breaking the laws of the State as:

> Indians were not free to move to the other provinces to study, seek employment or even make social visits without a permit or pass issued at a fee and valid for six weeks at a time.[40]

Furthermore, these actions were in clear contrast to Indian family norms. Indian women were perceived as first and foremost mothers and housewives, who did demanding and strenuous domestic chores. However as Pahad points out, 'In the most dramatic personal action in their lives, they left their homes and defied the laws imposed on Indians.'[41]

The ability of those women to participate in such action was likely due to three factors. Firstly, the protest actions were not dissimilar to those undertaken by women in the Satyagraha campaigns of previous decades. The public role of women in those

campaigns was largely accepted by the Indian community. Secondly, the participation of many Indian women in the passive resistance campaign did not dramatically alter the domestic power relations within the average Indian family. The majority of Indian women were not participants and thus their roles as wives and mothers were not affected. Those who did participate relied on the support of other female family members to tend to domestic responsibilities in their absence.

Finally, the nature of the threat to the rights of Indian people was such that many Indian women were determined to visibly demonstrate their protest. The very fabric of family and community life, including the ability to financially maintain the family, were being progressively threatened and eroded by racist legislation. Many women who participated in the passive resistance of 1946 had already been exposed to political discussions around these issues in their homes. They had begun to grapple with the concepts of segregation and exploitation at a young age. Amina Cachalia recalls that; 'My father was an associate of Mahatma Gandhi. I heard about justice and injustice before I could talk'.[42]

The composition of the Indian family facilitated the women's participation in political activities. The joint family system existent in many Indian households meant that there were always other women around to care for children and tend to domestic and other duties. Ama Naidoo, for example, was able to participate actively in the campaign against the Ghetto Act because her mother offered to take care of her six young children:

> My youngest was 18 months when I went to prison, as a result of the Ghetto Act and I left the children with my mother.[43]

The role that some of the older women played in caring for grandchildren, while their own children were imprisoned, is important to note. Although they were unable to

publicly demonstrate due to age or domestic responsibilities, they supported their daughter's participation by ensuring that the family life was kept intact.

Four of the women I interviewed had fathers whose involvement in politics was a catalyst for their own participation. They are Mrs Villanagee Pillay, Amina Cachalia, Zainub Asvat and Miriam Saloojee. The following extracts from those interviews illustrate the above remarks.

Mrs Villanagee Pillay was a Hindu and came from a working- class family. She started her political activities at the age of seventeen. Villanagee had direct links with Gandhian politics and the tradition of passive resistance. Her family had a special relationship with Gandhi and they had lived with him at Tolstoy Farm. As a young child, Villanagee was Gandhi's pet. Her father was a highly committed activist and this in itself was a motivational factor for her participation in politics. As she comments:

> My father, Thambi Naidoo was always going to jail, in and out. In 1939 they gathered the people and they took 11 women to jail. They were arrested, even then my mother was pregnant but he (Villanagee's father - Thambi Naidoo) did not mind, even if she had to die in jail, he took her down to the jail. And my granny went with her and her sister-in-law and her daughter-in-law with a three month old baby at the time.[44]

Childhood on Tolstoy farm, her parents' political participation and a racial incident from her childhood were still vividly imprinted on her mind. The incident occurred in the days when the trams were still operating and were for whites only. Villanagee and her father had boarded the tram and the driver made rude comments about Indian people. Her father challenged the driver regarding his attitude towards Indians. The dignity with which her father handled the situation had a marked effect on the young Villanagee. It was a catalyst for her future participation in political activities and an example for her own conduct.

The same pattern is evident in the case of Amina Cachalia and her sister Zainub, whose father was a close associate of Gandhi and the first president of the TIC. He was particularly active in the passive resistance campaigns of 1913/14 and went to jail fourteen times. Justice and equality were the basis of his opposition to the racist laws of the United Party Government. Therefore, from a young age, the daughters in this middle-class, Islamic family were made aware via the influence of their father and other activists of the inequalities imposed by the government in power. The Asvat family had long been associated with the TIC and Amina's sister Zainub set the precedent for the children in the family to be politically active.

As a young child Amina lived in Newclare, which was a well- known racially mixed area. They moved from Vereeniging where her father owned a large general dealer's business. She clearly recollects her childhood:

> I remember coming to live in Newclare when I was 8 years old. People of Chinese, Indian, Coloured and White origin lived together. The children in this area associated freely, played games and were just children. This experience has remained with me to date.[45]

Amina Cachalia was obviously motivated to be politically active from a young age. The influence of her father, his contact with Gandhi, her sister's activism and life in Newclare were all forces that shaped her thinking and ultimately her activism.

Miriam Saloojee came from a middle-class Islamic family and shocked even Yusuf Dadoo with her political activity at age nine. Miriam's father was also an activist from Gandhi's era. His political beliefs made an impact on her:

> My father was the first man to defy [the government] in the passive resistance (1941). He had been a participant in a lot of activities, mainly the TIC. He had campaigned throughout South Africa. In 1964, he was arrested again for a period of four months, when the

> emergency was declared. He qualified his political participation by drawing on religious teachings. He made his children aware of the religious and social injustices that emanated from the policies of racial segregation.[46]

It was as a result of her father opposing the government in the passive resistance campaign and being jailed that Miriam's political awareness was inspired:

> I felt something was wrong because my father had been taken to jail because he was fighting for a Black person. So I, at the age of nine, took out a little placard and wrote down ... and I collected a whole lot of children and they were my connections - a number of Indians, Coloureds and Blacks. We marched with this placard up and down the police station screaming and shouting 'Down with the Ghetto Act'. My uncle, who lived across from the street from the police, witnessed the incident' was quite surprised and approached me and said 'What are you doing?' I'm fighting for the rights of the people' and he was quite amazed and that was how I got involved in politics.[47]

For two of my informants, their husbands played the role of conscientising them into political involvement. They are Ama Naidoo and Mrs Thandary. Ama Naidoo came from a working- class Hindu family and began participating in political activities at the age of nineteen, when she married Naransamy Naidoo, one of four sons of Thambi and Mrs Naidoo. Here she recounts her initial experiences in political activity:

> Well I got married and he was he was a full-time activist [with the TIC] and whatever meeting he goes to, I can be very, busy I had to go with him. And my children, I must dress my children and go for the meeting.[48]

Although it was Ama Naidoo's husband who provided the initial impetus for her and their children's participation, she carried forth this tradition after his death. There were regular meetings, and guests at lunch and supper times where the issues for discussion

were often political. This climate enabled Ama Naidoo to develop her political consciousness.

As with Ama Naidoo, Mrs Thandary's political awareness was crystallized after her marriage. She came from a devout Hindu working-class family which had battled to cope with the pressures of farm living. At the age of 17 Mrs Thandary married but could not cross the border into the Transvaal to join her husband. She recalls, 'I had to bring a pass and come to Johannesburg'.[49] [The Immigration Act of 1914 restricted the free movement of Indians between the provinces. The law stipulated that Indians required a special permit in order to move from one province to another.]

The need to obtain a permit for travel raised questions for Mrs Thandary about the treatment of people of different race groups. She was initially dependent on her husband for information about and insight into political issues. His proficiency in English made political discourse more accessible to her.

The above testimonies highlight the vital role that the family played in politicising Indian women. It was the political activities of the fathers, husbands and other women that in many cases inspired the participation of their daughters, wives, sisters and friends in politics. The pivotal position that the family occupied within the Indian community, coupled with the role it played in motivating Indian women to participate in organized political activities, facilitated the process of recruiting volunteers for passive resistance campaign.

Babliben Ranchod's experience is an anomaly to those illustrated above as her entry into politics was self-motivated. She came from a Hindu, petty-bourgeois family, and she joined the passive resisters at the tender age of fifteen. Babliben's interest, and subsequent participation, in politics stemmed from her keeping abreast of the political development in India and South Africa:

> They [her family] were not political, but I had some political thinking going around at school. I read a lot about India and I was a believer in Mahatma Gandhi's passive resistance. I used to follow everything that happened in India at the time.[50]

Chetty also addresses the importance of a connection to India: 'local newspapers devoted much attention to the Indian cause and sense of belonging to the motherland was heightened as the nationalist movement grew in stature'.[51]

Babliben's determination to be active is further illustrated below:

> So that time when I was schooling, then the passive resistance started, the Ghetto Act started, so I felt that I should join and I was very determined. I had a friend, I told her, 'It's school holidays and let's join'. They first refused us because we were under age. We were fifteen. They said, 'No you can't, only when you're older'. 'If you don't take us in now, we'll keep on coming'. So Dr Dadoo said, 'Let her sign' and my brother had to sign for me.[52]

As Babliben's statement illustrates, the youth were encouraged to become aware and active within the sphere of resistance politics at the time. A number of the women I interviewed, including Babliben and Miriam Saloojee, were in their early years of political involvement active members of the Indian Youth Congress. Others like Amina Cachalia went on to serve on the executive committee of the TIC.

Various strategies were used in recruiting women to participate in the passive resistance campaign. As Zainub Asvat points out:

> The main concern politically was what action the women should take. We didn't form a women's group of the Congress, we just had a group of women. I used to just delegate people to go collecting funds. So the women were very active. By then I was on the

> executive of the TIC. I was one of the vice-chairs so I could report back to them what was happening.[53]

According to Pahad, Indian women were volunteering to be resisters when the campaign was only in its planning stages. Pahad recounts:

> How the first volunteers were found is an interesting anecdote. It just so happens that my parent's flat in Johannesburg was used for most of the meetings. So here the leaders were on one occasion having this long meeting and my mother, as usual was feeding them, when Dr. Dadoo happened to leave the meeting. My mother said to him 'Mota, why are you sitting in that room having all these long discussions, what is happening?' He replied, 'But you see we are having a problem.' 'What is your problem?' my mother asked. Now my mother was a very typical Indian woman in the sense that she had never worked outside the house and neither had she gone to school, but she was very politically conscious. 'The problem', said Dadoo, 'is that we want to have passive resistance, but we need volunteers. Volunteers, otherwise you cannot have passive resistance. We need volunteers to go to prison.' And my mother said 'That is not a problem. I will be your first volunteer!' Dadoo responded, 'And what about Goolam?' [Mr. Pahad] And my mother said, 'That is his problem. But I will be your first volunteer.' So Dadoo said, 'Oh, very good.' Thus the first batch of passive resisters was formed by Indian women because the wives, sisters and nieces, daughters and grandmothers were also recruited.[54]

The family network was obviously an important channel for recruiting volunteers and for those Indian women who were exposed to political discussions in their homes or whose family members had some history of activism, the motivation to join the resistance was undoubtedly increased.

Zainub Asvat humorously recalls that they even used unusual occasions for recruiting:

> Yes, for instance, we even organized at funerals and weddings. We'd say we are having a meeting at such and such a time, we want you to come. We used to go around and talk and it was easy because it was such a big group of people.[55]

Different chords were touched on to mobilize Indian women into the struggle and ensure that issues relevant to each class were focused upon. A common desire to fight for the future of their children drew women from working and middle classes together. Women from working-class backgrounds tended to be more concerned about the material well-being of their families, while those from the middle-class backgrounds tended to resort to abstract notions of peace and justice as reasons for their involvement. For working-class women, it was the first time that they were able to voice their grievances and views on the segregation policies. They could join the struggle as 'equals' and fight against a common enemy.

Indian women were also drawn into fund-raising activities. Dr Goonam notes that 'fund-raising was crucial to maintain the family of passive resisters while they were imprisoned, for staff, printing and travelling costs. Fund-raising was as crucial as volunteers.'[56] The structure of the joint Indian family and the close-knit nature of Indian communities was such that women had access to many people over a wide-spread area of the Transvaal. Kuper's comment on the characteristic features of the joint family supports the argument that the Indian family structure provided extended systems of support for women and served as a crucial network for recruiting and fund-raising:

> The Indian family type is distinct from that of other racial groups in South Africa, even when the groups live under similar economic conditions in the same urban environment. The most conspicuous differences between the South African Indian, urban family is the greater strength among the Indians of joint family ties, the emphasis on arranged marriages and the higher

> proportion of Indian households occupied by more than the related family.[57]

This network of contacts facilitated fund-raising drives. Babliben Ranchod talks about where fund-raising was done:

> We used to go to quite a lot of places, for weeks and weeks and mostly it used to be women and we used to go from shop to shop and talk about what we were collecting for and they [the people] were marvellous. Yes, as far as places like this side of Schweizer-Reneke, Ermelo side, Nelspruit, everywhere where anyone had connections [relatives or friends], like where there were a lot of Indian people. We used to go there and collect quite a lump sum.[58]

The TIC effectively used singing as a strategy for recruiting people and in ensuring larger donations on fund-raising drives:

> When we used to go collecting money, whoever wrote this added a few lines that I had to sing in the end. And believe it or not, they used to respond a lot.[59]

An analysis of the treatment of women in prison is instructive as it illustrates their determination to participate in political activities, even though the prison conditions were particularly harsh. Some of my respondents spoke about their personal experiences of prison, their initial perceptions and their personal or collective responses to the conditions they encountered.

Although Zainub Asvat and Amina Cachalia's parents were concerned, they encouraged their children to continue their participation in political activities:

> My parents were worried too about my sister having gone to prison, but she was a university student and she decided she was going to do it in any event, and my

> mother was worried about her safety more than anything else.[60]

Babliben Ranchod enthusiastically recalls that:

> Well, we were picked up, put into the van, and we were all singing freedom songs and, like, we were all so happy about the whole thing.[61]

Rank and file members (female and male) were sentenced to a month in prison, while the leadership served a 3-month sentence. Age was not a mitigating factor with regard to the length for sentence, as a sixty eight year old woman served the same sentence as her younger fellow resisters.

Women prisoners were forced to endure the humiliation of prison procedure and the racist attitudes of the prison authorities. Zainub Asvat vividly recalls:

> But the matron there [Maritzburg] was English and she was a bit more educated than the one in Durban. The Durban one was really obnoxious, you know, and she was so illiterate too. Just because I told her, 'that's not the way to examine for VD,' she smacked me! So I said, 'You can hit me; but I'm telling you this is not the way to treat a lady like Mrs Naidoo, she is old enough to be your mother.'[62]

Mrs Thandary recalls the prison dress vividly. She explained that the clothes were very uncomfortable and took some getting used to:

> Then they give one skirt, one blouse and one slip and cami, then they throw one blanket. And shoes, one will be 10, one will be 8, such an odd pair, men's shoes, not women's shoes.[63]

The food was unpalatable. Mrs Thandary said that prisoners only ate the bread, but even this was only made available at tea-time. Mielie pap and beans were served daily for lunch. Furthermore, communal showering, overseen by a matron, was also an embarrassing experience for many of these women. Mrs Thandary again recalls, 'We had to shower, a cold bath right, all the women were naked, you know. There was nothing to cover yourself.'[64]

The women were required to perform a variety of tasks while serving their sentences. These included sewing, scrubbing, weaving and knitting:

> Weave mats. They would soak the straw in water. There was this long table with nails here and there (she indicates along the four sides of the table). You weave up and down, up and down, till you come to that end, right. Then you push with the scissors. Now I didn't do much of that. I used to do the knitting. They ask to sew the hospital clothes, you know, the hand stitching. Or some people used to put on buttons.[65]

Zainub Asvat describes what long hours of scrubbing did to the women:

> Then again we have to do it and then our knees started bleeding because we weren't used to sitting on hard surfaces like that and scrubbing and you know, you've got to press on your knees all the time so we were bleeding. They tried to break our morale by making it very tough. It was hard labour we were sentenced to.[66]

Mrs Thandary adds:

> Oh, you can't finish fast. We should do the floors. We got 30 rooms, 15 on this side, and 15 on the other. We'll go over and scrub, hmmm ... and polish till a lot of shine comes, right.[67]

The size of cells varied from prison to prison, but the most common number was six in a cell. The conditions in the cells were offensive and it took real courage to complete the sentence when the women were well aware that they could pay a fine and be released. Zainub Asvat speaks of her experience:

> They put us in this little cell, seven of us, and we had to put sort of 'coir' mats on the floor and they gave us filthy dirty blankets and the lice; when we were sleeping at night I saw the bugs and cockroaches coming towards us.[68]

The cells were infested with cockroaches, which seriously frightened many women and they gave each other moral support to cope with these conditions. The stale smell of urine pervaded the cells and this further tested the women's commitment to the struggle.

The sacrifices made by the Indian women who served jail sentences during the campaign were acknowledged, along with those of others who had been detained. Dr Dadoo, on being released from prison, issued this statement:

> The discomforts of jail matters little before the knowledge that the response of the Indian people to the call of passive resistance against the Ghetto Act and for the elementary rights of citizenship has been total and united.[69]

Zainub Asvat reaffirms the resisters' position on the prison experience:

> I think, if anything, it strengthened our belief in the struggle, that we should fight for freedom. It was really educational and then I could think back and feel - my God'- what my father and them went through. Then India at the same time was struggling there for independence and what people there were going through.[70]

CONCLUSION

Although the organized resistance was not successful in forcing the authorities to repeal discriminatory legislation, it became the watershed of Indian women's participation in politics. The Pegging Act and the Ghetto Act set into motion one of the powerful mechanisms of the apartheid system: the legislated racial segregation of residential, educational and health facilities.

Despite the fact that Indian women traditionally had limited interaction with the outside world and that language barriers were often daunting, they responded to the TIC call to protest in 1946. As Babliben concurs:

> Well to tell you the truth, from the TIC my experience was that we all had to get together with women and go for the cause and alert other women about the whole thing.[71]

The political climate in the 1940's made space for numerous Indian women to participate outside the home. Their political involvement was influenced and facilitated by family members and the structure of the Indian family. The history of Indian women's activism in the Satyagraha campaigns of 1906 - 1913 and in later decades paved the way for the mobilisation and participation of women during the campaign of 1946.

By the end of the passive resistance campaign many Indian women had developed an interest in and understanding of the core political issues that were under debate at the time. The often unconventional stances taken by these women were further testimony to their commitment and activism.

Pahad's narrative stands as an example of the value and validity of oral history. There is no record or reference to the discussion between his mother and Dr Dadoo in

biographical writings[72] on the period, so Pahad's account of this event is a refreshing addition. Furthermore, Mrs Pahad's decision to volunteer is an example of the 'hidden from history' incidents that are not reflected in mainstream historical or political literature but are crucial for unveiling the events of that period. I argue that the active participation of Indian women during this period developed a new personal and political consciousness that challenged the stereotype of the housebound Indian women. Walker's analysis supports my view:

> The fact that these women did participate, and so prominently too, had repercussions throughout the Indian community. The popular image of women as passive, docile creatures was undoubtedly dented.[73]

The illustrations of activism by Indian women throughout this chapter reveal that despite the notion of Indian women being housebound and committed only to their domestic responsibilities, some did in fact participate in political activities which sent them into the public domain. Their commitment to voluntary incarceration took them away from their families and domestic responsibilities for periods of time and was seen by these women as a necessary sacrifice for the struggle. The actions of Indian women in the passive resistance campaign were pre-cursors to their future participation in campaigns around national liberation and enabled some of them to acquire organisational skills that would earn them leadership positions in later years.

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In a later passage, Davenport describes the Cape Town Agreement as follows:

> The Cape Town Agreement was the product of an exceptionally harmonious encounter. It contained provisions for the assisted immigration of South African Indians, for the entry into South Africa of the wives and minor children of Indians with domiciliary rights, and included an undertaking by the South African government to withdraw the Areas Reservation Bill.
>
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41. Pahad, E., 1988. p. 90.

42. Interview with Amina Cachalia.

43. Interview with Ama Naidoo.

44. Interview with Villanagee Pillay.

45. Interview with Amina Cachalia.

46. Interview with Miriam Saloojee.

47. Interview with Miriam Saloojee.

48. Interview with Ama Naidoo.

49. Interview with Mrs. Thandary.

50. Interview with Babliben Ranchod.

51. Chetty, D., 1991. p. 5.

52. Interview with Babliben Ranchod.

53. Interview with Zainub Asvat.

54. Pahad, E., 1988. p. 90.

55. Interview with Zainub Asvat.

56. Goonam, K., 1991. p. 106.

57. Kuper, H., 1960. *Indian People in Natal*. p. 96.

58. Interview with Babliben Ranchod.

59. Interview with Babliben Ranchod.

60. Interview with Zainub Asvat.

61. Interview with Babliben Ranchod.

62. Interview with Zainub Asvat.

63. Interview with Mrs Thandary.

64. Interview with Mrs Thandary.

65. Interview with Mrs Thandary.

66. Interview with Zainub Asvat.

67. Interview with Mrs Thandary.

68. Interview with Zainub Asvat.

69. Spark Newsletter, 1946. Johannesburg TIC, p. 1.

70. Interview with Zainub Asvat.

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72. For example, Joseph, H., 1986. *Side by Side*.

73. Walker, C., 1982. *Women and Resistance in South Africa*. p. 110.

CHAPTER TWO

THE APARTHEID ERA BEGINS: 1948 to 1954

We must not think we are housewives. We have to fight for freedom for our children, that is how we used to talk![1]

This chapter will focus on the introduction of legislated apartheid after the victory of the National Party in 1948, and its consequent impact on the lives of South African Indians. More specifically, it will address the decade of defiance and the resultant political activity in which numerous Indian women participated. Within this framework I will examine the Defiance Campaign and the Freedom Charter as these were resistance campaigns in which Transvaal Indian women participated most prominently.

I compare the activism of these women in the years of the Defiance Campaign with that of the passive resistance campaign in the mid - 1940's. The links between the two campaigns, the levels and style of Indian women's participation will be explored in the following contexts:

i) Organisations: The cooperation between the South African Indian Congresses (SAIC), the African National Congress (ANC) and the Communist Party of South Africa (CPSA).

ii) Strategies: The shift from racially and culturally-based political protest to more pro-active, mass-based action.

iii) Coordination: The birth of organisations such as the Progressive Women's Union (PWU), the Federation of South African Women (FSAW) and other

cultural bodies that brought a cross-section of women together to coordinate action against apartheid legislation.

iv) Prison Experiences: A comparison of Indian women's prison experiences during the passive resistance campaign and the Decade of Defiance, as well as the relationships that developed between these women through their experiences of incarceration.

The entry of the National Party into government in 1948 led to the systematic implementation of the apartheid policy. All areas of life, from the cradle to the grave was affected. Earlier segregation legislation was strengthened. Political activity was increasingly restricted with such measures as the banning of the Communist Party, bannings and banishments of activists. Furthermore, severe restrictions were placed on African people, such as, on the jobs they could do as well as the places they could live in. (some of these laws are cited in the pages that follow). Ismail Vadi also argues that the apartheid policy began a:

> process of massive social restructuring ... which affected all sections [African, Coloured and Indian] and all classes [working class, peasantry and petty-bourgeoisie] within the Black communities. It was this that provided a context for the mounting tide of popular democratic resistance to the Apartheid state in the 1950's.[2]

DECADE OF DEFIANCE

The all-encompassing nature of these measures, and the fact that they were implemented harshly and without any consultation with the people affected, made the response to them more vigorous. That response heralded the decade of defiance characterized by a series of actions including the Defiance Campaign, the drawing up

of the Freedom Charter and the Women's march on the Union Buildings. These events saw active cooperation between Indian, 'Coloured' and African peoples for the first time. Although the declarations of the Three Doctors Pact of 1947 had urged 'practical cooperation between the national organizations of non-European peoples',[3] it was not until 1952, after the passing of the Group Areas Act (1950), and the Bantu Authorities Act (1951) that such cooperation materialized.

Amina Cachalia refers to the Three Doctors Pact and the wider significance of unified action leading to the Defiance Campaign:

> Ja, the Dadoo, Xuma, Naicker pact was very important. The passive resistance struggle of 1946 was an eye-opener, I think to the ANC as well, that we could non-violently protest and gain something from that protest. And the fact that the pact was signed by Dadoo, Xuma and Naicker was very important for Indo-African relations because it consolidated our unity and the struggle, because it was after that the ANC and the South African Indian Congresses decided to go ahead with the Defiance Campaign.[4]

However, the basis for cooperation between the ANC and the SAIC was most likely consolidated by the May Day stay-away initiatives, organised in protest against the passing of the Unlawful Organisations Bill in 1950. This Bill forced the dissolution of, most significantly, the Communist Party South Africa (CPSA) in June of that same year. Prior to the CPSA's dissolution, a banning order against Dr Dadoo of the TIC was issued by the Government. In response to these events an emergency meeting of various national political organisations was held in April 1950. The delegates from the SAIC, the ANC, the CPSA and trade union organisations resolved to:

> take steps to mobilise all sections of the South Africa people to offer concrete mass opposition to this vicious bill with the aim of defeating it.[5]

Subsequently the National Executive Committee of the ANC mooted a national stay-at-home on 1 May 1950. A coordinating committee was formed with Yusuf Cachalia of the TIC as one of the secretaries. On this day of protest, eighteen African people were killed by the police.[6] The response to the call for the mass action was not uniform nationally. The reaction in the Witwatersrand was:

> below expectations and disappointing, as there was a low percentage stay-away. It appears that the ANC in the region had underestimated the negative impact that state violence and employer victimisation had on the working class.[7]

Similarly, the call was not heeded uniformly amongst the Transvaal Indians. This was probably due to the fact that there were fewer Indian people living in the Transvaal. However, the reaction of large sectors of the Indian community, particularly the working class in the Durban region, was unprecedented and it:

> indicated that the NIC had assumed a mass character [and further] demonstrated the possibilities of launching joint campaigns and forging, in practical terms ... non-racial unity.[8]

Although the stay-away highlighted the potential for unity in action by the various national political organisations, it must be noted that the Africanist element within the ANC continued to have reservations relating to 'ideology and the role of Indians and Communists in the national struggle'.[9]

Furthermore, the animosity between Indians and Africans at grassroots level, precipitated by the 1949 inter-communal riots in Cato Manor,[10] did little to help the leadership resolve the problem of drawing together the various groups within the ANC and TIC. This may go some way in explaining why each of the Congresses continued to mobilize around those issues that were relevant to their constituencies. According to Bhana and Pachai:

> The focus of the Indian Congress in the Defiance Campaign was the Group Areas Act which adversely affected the rights of Indians to trade in certain areas, as well as their rights of residence.[11]

This in itself is not surprising since the SAIC had been actively opposing any restrictions on Indian trading and residential rights since the imposition of the Pegging Act in 1943.

For the purposes of this thesis, what was of particular importance was the strategy to engage Indian women once again in the canvassing of support for the campaign. The TIC in particular engaged women to do extensive canvassing in a cross-section of communities prior to the launch of the Defiance Campaign. Amina Cachalia recalls that:

> Women used to go out to various areas in Johannesburg; African townships, Indian areas, to house meetings, larger meetings, to talk in garages, wherever we could gather women and men. We talked to them about the Defiance Campaign and what it would mean as far as the struggle was concerned and we had tremendous interest.[12]

THE DEFIANCE CAMPAIGN

With the launching of the Defiance Campaign in 1952, a decisive stance was taken by the SAIC and the ANC leadership to unite and forcefully register their protest against the legislation that aimed to restrict or remove altogether the basic human rights of Black people. The ANC and the TIC jointly selected the following six laws as the focus of their protest: the Pass Laws (1942), regulations relating to Stock Limitation, the Group Areas Act (1950), the Separate Representation of the Voters Act (1951), the Suppression of Communism Act (1950) and the Bantu Authorities Act 13 (1953).[13] Davenport comments that the programme of defiance:

> demanded 'freedom from White domination' and the right of Africans to self-determination; it urged the use of boycotts, strikes, civil disobedience and non-cooperation as the weapons of the future.[14]

The increasingly provocative style of protest adopted by the resistance organisations indicated the degree of confidence that developed from the unified stance taken by the two organisations.

In the urban areas, the acts of defiance themselves were aimed specifically at the laws restricting movement and freedom of association. As Lodge points out:

> the regulations disobeyed were very minor ones: use of white facilities at post offices, railway stations and on trains, breaching curfew regulations and pass laws and entering African locations without a permit.[15]

It was envisaged by the organisers that the campaign would develop a 'mass character' over a period of time to include not only urban centres, but far-flung rural settlements all over the country.[16]

Dilshad Cachalia's examination of the organisational dynamic of the Defiance Campaign highlights the crucial role that the TIC played in organising the volunteers and co-ordinating the different stages of the campaign:

> Although Indian participation in the Defiance Campaign was limited, primarily because of the smallness of the population, the TIC leadership nevertheless played a crucial role throughout, in the organisation and conducting of the campaign. Together with the ANC, they took on the vital task of organising and enroling volunteer corps. This was done on the following lines: firstly, a leader had to be in charge of each volunteer corp and had to lead the corps into action. Secondly, the corps always had to consist of both the sexes and members of their respective organisations.[17]

Women were seen as important components of that mass character. Within the TIC, at least, women had been active in leadership positions from as early 1946. The TIC had elected three women, Zainub Asvat, Suriakala Patel and Mrs Naidoo to its executive at that time and they continued to be active throughout the years of the Defiance Campaign. Zainub Asvat's sister, Amina Cachalia, was also involved in the TIC and was instrumental in launching community-based initiatives that inspired other women to become politically active. One such initiative, namely the Progressive Women's Union, will be discussed later in the chapter.

The organising of Indian women to defy the government in this particular Defiance Campaign was not as clear-cut as in the passive resistance campaign of 1946. This was perhaps due to the broader nature of the campaign which encompassed a greater variety of groups and organisations. In addition, most of the laws that the Defiance Campaign addressed did not specifically affect the Indian community and thus volunteers could not be recruited on the 'patriotism' ticket as was the case in the passive resistance campaign of 1946. Amina Cachalia comments on the methods used to enlist Indian women as volunteers:

> We had to go to their homes. We went with members of the TIC and we had to speak to the mothers, husbands, fathers of the women. And sometimes there was resistance, more out of fear than anything else because they didn't know what would happen to their wives or their daughters if they did go to jail. But apart from this they wanted to partake in the struggle.[18]

In addition to the door-to-door campaigning that took place, the most common way in which Indian women were recruited was through cultural organisations operating in their communities. One such organisation, the Progressive Women's Union (PWU), was founded by Amina Cachalia and eight others in 1952 in an attempt to draw Indian women out of their homes to learn a marketable skill. Cachalia elaborates on the inception of the PWU:

> I, together with a few other women decided in late 1952 that we should start a women's organisation, an Indian women's organisation primarily. We did not want to just limit it to Indian women but, our idea was to bring out the Indian women, especially. We explained to them [Indian women] that if we can get women to do shorthand, typing and dressmaking classes or if they can learn to read and write and become secretaries later on, they could go out to work or work from their homes. By earning their own living and becoming economically independent, you're not dependent on your husband or father for the income.[19]

Amina Cachalia saw the PWU as a route to women's economic independence. Through the PWU an Indian woman could learn a valuable skill which she could market from home while allowing some mobility and increasing the opportunity for interaction with a variety of people. But the founder members of the PWU were not only interested in promoting the economic independence of Indian women. Rather they were eager for their membership to foster an interest in the effects of the apartheid policies on the Indian women and to participate in action that challenged the racial laws. There was an underlying political motive for the existence of the organisation. Miriam Saloojee describes the PWU as an organisation with a political agenda:

> women gathered and discussed about the situation in the country. They talked about the unjust conditions. Women met under social conditions but they discussed the political situation of the country.[20]

The PWU proved to be an important initiative because for the first time Indian women from different classes, ethnic groups and religions were drawn together outside of their homes. Women from other cultural organisations within the Indian community were also drawn into the activities of the PWU. One such organisation was the Mahila mandal, a Gujerati-based women's group concerned with issues of female solidarity, education and welfare.[21]

One of the main branches of the Mahila mandal in Johannesburg was the Bhagini Samaj, which was founded by Leela Desai. The Samaj provided a forum for Indian women to learn a range of traditional crafts. Leela Desai made contact with the PWU, and the women from the Samaj enrolled for typing, shorthand and dressmaking skills. The PWU was able to expand its forum to include women from the Mahila mandals, thereby gaining access to an organised group of women who could be politicized and recruited to the TIC. The relationship proved to be mutually beneficial. The members of the Bhagini Samaj gained access to a wider range of resources and skills and remained abreast of the political developments. Leela Desai, and other members of the Bhagini Samaj, went on to participate in the Defiance Campaign and the Indian women's march to the Union Buildings.

The PWU was a pioneering organisation in the Indian community for it encouraged Indian women to become politically aware and active. Prior to the PWU's inception, that kind of encouragement and influence usually came from within the family and often from male members. Now there was an organisation in which women were the active agents in the development of their own political consciousness and that of other women.

Once enlisted as volunteers, the women could actively participate in efforts to engage women from other locations in issues of common interest. Indian women found themselves interacting with other women they may never have come into contact with if they had not joined the PWU. The future of the children and the youth was discussed openly amongst women and acted as a powerful motivation for them to participate in political action. Ama Naidoo, for example, saw herself as an active agent in defining the future of her children and she encouraged other women to challenge their traditional roles in the family and to participate actively in the struggle:

> We must not think we are housewives. We have to fight for freedom, for our children - that is how we used to talk. We are now here, but our children will never have

> anything, they are going to sweep the streets, so that's why we must fight for our future. I felt that we must fight for our freedom, to lead our children's way. We want our children to be free; we were slaves; I don't want our grandchildren to be slaves. So they must also live where they like, they must also have an education and live like a person.[22]

The responsibility of mothers to ensure a better future for their children was perceived to be synonymous with the survival of the community. Political activity that stressed this notion appealed to the Indian women. Ama Naidoo's rationale indicates a shift in political consciousness from issues that were of importance to the Indian community specifically to those being addressed by resistance organisations of the day. Freedom from enslavement, freedom of association and freedom of movement were important tenets of the liberation struggle at the time. Linking these issues to the future of the children caught the attention of many women who otherwise may not have had access to current political ideas.

The Defiance Campaign marked the beginning of a new era of political activity as it forged ties between Indian and African resistance movements and generated wide public attention. The mass-based character of the campaign envisaged by the organisers was becoming more a reality with people of all colours and backgrounds joining together in protest. Amina Cachalia distinctly recalls the day the Defiance Campaign was launched:

> It was late afternoon on 26th June 1952, when the first group of volunteers were going to defy in Germiston location and there was a tremendous crowd and everybody was very highly strung, because it was the first time that so many thousands of people had got together here, that we were going to send people into jail and it was a greater thing than the 1946 campaign because of the numbers and because of the fact that Blacks together with Indians, Coloureds, were going to defy together.[23]

The first batch of women who went to prison included eleven Indian women, twenty eight Black women and one 'Coloured' woman.[24] These women had defied the permit regulations by entering the Boksburg location without the proper documentation. They were promptly arrested by the police and, on refusing the option of a fine, were imprisoned on the charge of demonstration without a permit. Amina Cachalia comments on the mood that prevailed amongst the women themselves:

> Oh, we were so absolutely thrilled at the idea of being arrested because we were part of the situation. So it was a lovely feeling that for the first time Black and Indian women were going to jail together. You know that we've never done that before, Indian women went to jail during passive resistance, but never with other groups. It was there that we realised that it's so easy to live together, that women are just women, wherever you are - Black or Indian or Coloured. We ate, slept, sang together, and rubbed each other's backs and arms and necks. I must have been 22 years old, one of the youngest. It was August and still very cold, so the older women would say, 'Don't sleep on the floor, come and sleep on our backs.' So they would sleep together, I would sleep on their backs to shelter me from the cold.[25]

An examination of experiences of imprisonment is important here, particularly in the context of the 1950's. In contrast to the passive resistance campaigns of the 1940's, Indian women were imprisoned alongside other Black women and this, in itself, was extraordinary, considering the community divisions that existed outside the prison walls. The apparent ease with which the women interacted is captured here by Amina Cachalia:

> We talked about our children, our sisters, our families and we learned about each other on a completely equal basis. It had never happened before because at the time the Indians and Blacks used to come together only as master and servant or at various functions where they could be together.[26]

The attitude of the wardens towards the defiers were different from those experienced during the passive resistance campaign. There may have been attempts by the prison authorities to break the morale of the defiers in the hopes of deterring them from further action. Babliben Ranchod's account of her prison experience testifies to the change in attitude of the warden's under the Nationalist government:

> It wasn't like Maritzburg this time, it was like the Afrikaners and they were giving us a bit of a hard time. Bringing the washing from the mornings, scrubbing and you know we were called by our names and we were hoping you know, when will we get done with three weeks. And we didn't have a nice time like we had in Maritzburg. They treated us very well there and here we had quite rough treatment. I think they were trying to scare us, you know so that we'll never do it again.[27]

This tactic was not particularly successful as women continued to participate in demonstrations and other acts of defiance throughout the 1950's. The morale and political consciousness of these women was, in many cases, enhanced by their involvement over a period of time. Mrs Thandary was a veteran of several marches when she was imprisoned once again:

> Ooh! the last time was in Vereeniging. There I was there, Mrs Pahad, Amina Cachalia was there, we were the old prisoners, right. It was the third time. Ooh! they wouldn't even let us have lunch too. They come, bang the door and come open. Take our fingerprints. Then we used to worry, wonder why? When we came out, I asked my husband, you know. He said, you people went 3 times to jail, that is why they are worried about you three.[28]

The sharing of life experiences, the opportunity to reflect on the political developments and to strategize future action, proved to be a new and enlightening experience as it challenged the women's stereotypical notions of each other and forged inter-racial harmony:

> We got to know each other so well, told our life stories. We were just big happy family. But the defiance campaign was a real must and it was a very good impact on the Indians, Coloured and Black people in South Africa because it brought them together, it united them to face a common enemy.[29]

The public acts of defiance, the experiences of incarceration and police harassment, far from deterring the activist women, inspired many others from all walks of life to participate in further campaigns against the apartheid system. This, in itself, was a shift from the passive resistance actions of the 1940's, and for the Indian women who participated in the Defiance Campaign, it must have been another milestone in their political development. Indeed, the co-secretaries of the SAIC at the time, Ms. Mistry and Ms. Cachalia, noted that:

> The Defiance Campaign had succeeded in arousing the political consciousness of the non-white people as never before ... and had revolutionised the outlook of non-white people on a mass scale and instilled a spirit of defiance in them.[30]

The Defiance Campaign saw Indian women participating in greater numbers in political action. Organisations such as the PWU were instrumental in drawing women out of domestic environments and into new, more public arenas. The acquisition of skills that could lead to greater self-sufficiency was also a notable motive behind the activities of the PWU. As late as the 1940's, according to Freund, the Indian community looked down upon women working outside the home.[31]

However, the political climate during the 1950's was increasingly hostile. Successive racist legislation (in the form of the Ghetto and Group Areas Acts) placed severe restrictions on Indian mobility and trading rights. As a result their economic position deteriorated and with the increased pressure to survive, the Indian men welcomed the opportunities for their wives, daughters, to gain skills that could prove to be income-generating.

THE FREEDOM CHARTER

The end of the Defiance Campaign was by no means the end of coordinated acts of protest. Amina Cachalia recalls that:

> After the Defiance Campaign everyone started getting busy with the Congress of the People and the Freedom Charter. Again we went back to the people to tell them to get ready; we're going to have a massive meeting at the Red Square, to start off the Congress of People.[32]

The previous two years had been relatively free of Congress campaigns due to the passing in early 1953 of the Criminal Law Amendment Act which legislated severe penalties for any form of public demonstration against the repressive laws and 'made any repetition of the Defiance Campaign impractical'.[33]

However, with the increasingly rigid enforcement of these laws by the state, along with the banning of many leading SAIC and ANC figures,[34] some form of public response was necessary.

The decision by the Congress Alliance to launch the Congress of the People (COP) and the Freedom Charter was a direct response to the above events. It had the broader aim of empowering 'ordinary people to speak for themselves and to state what changes are to be made in the way of life, if they are to enjoy freedom'.[35] Furthermore, the Congress Alliance was under pressure to sustain the momentum gained during the Defiance Campaign and also saw the need for a campaign 'that would have an overall politicizing effect on the masses and generate new and wider layers of active participants in the Congresses'.[36] The Freedom Charter was compiled from the demands submitted by workers, women, people from the rural areas, professionals and members of political organisations. It set out the changes that people wanted in their daily lives and in the socio-political dynamics of the country.

Initiating the campaign and canvassing communities across the country was an intensive process and one that extended over a long period of time. A strong degree of commitment from activists was necessary, not only to keep up the momentum, but also to reach the enormous numbers of people whose demands would be essential to the compilation of the Charter. Women were drawn into the campaign to canvass and collect the demands of the people. Amina Cachalia speaks of the way in which people were trained to canvass:

> On 6 April there was a massive meeting at the Red Square with Blacks, Coloureds, Whites. After the meeting the interested people were asked to remain behind and taught how to consult the people and formulate their demands.[37]

Babliben Ranchod explains that the women's groups alerted their members across the country. Groups as diverse as the PWU, the Mahila mandals, and the ANC Women's League worked together to gather demands. These demands reflected how the people felt about the present system and what they would like changed. Miriam Saloojee recalls substantial campaigning by women prior to the meeting to compile the Freedom Charter:

> I remember that we had to campaign for a number of weeks before the Charter was drawn up. We had to canvass door-to-door, appeal to the people to come to this large rally, and they can take an active part in the drawing up of the Freedom Charter, listen to the speakers, agree or disagree when the Charter is adopted.[38]

Campaigning in the PWV (Pretoria, Witwatersrand, Vereeniging area) was widespread and, even though the individual Congresses campaigned in their own sectors and amongst their own people, there were instances where joint campaigning took place. The TIC did extensive campaigning in Alexandra Township, Benoni, Denver, Doornfontein, Fordsburg, Jeppe, Kliptown, Malay Camp, Newclare, Newlands, Nigel,

Ophirton, Asiatic Bazaar/Pretoria, Sophiatown, Springs, Turfontein, and Vrededorp.[39] Reggie Vandeyar, a key TIC activist at the time, explains:

> When we went to African areas this was important. A fair amount of work was done with African comrades. When we went to Alexandra and Kliptown for instance, Indian and African comrades went together.[40]

I argue that the process of collecting the demands for the Freedom Charter facilitated the politicization of Indian women. It engaged them not only in campaigning but gave them an insight into the lives of other South Africans. It also made them reflect carefully upon their own lives in order to determine their respective contributions to the list of demands.

Campaigning also involved planning and coordination of transport, accommodation and food for over 3 000 delegates that were expected to converge on Kliptown. Miriam Saloojee comments:

> We had to gather people, collect them from points, make transport available to them so that they could get to the rally.[41]

Indian women were directly involved in providing accommodation and food for the delegates. According to Amina Cachalia, women in the Transvaal 'found accommodation for the people who were coming from all over the country, and also provided the food for them. Delegates were coming and Indian women assisted in that way'.[42]

I have thus far noted how several women's organisations established networks through which women could be recruited to canvas, organize, provide auxiliary services and list their own demands. Another key women's organisation that was active in the COP campaign was the Federation of South African Women (FSAW). In dealing with FSAW, it is not my intention to embark upon a detailed analysis of the organisation,

but rather to explore the extent to which FSAW facilitated the joint action of women from all races. The main FSAW affiliates were the various trade unions and the ANC Women's League, as well as the Congress of Democrats, the Indian Congresses, and the South African Coloured Peoples Organisation (SACPO).

The inaugural conference of the FSAW in 1954, saw male members of the TIC, providing food and waiter services. Helen Joseph described the tone of the conference as follows:

> ... this was a gathering of women ... all rightful achievers. What we did that was unique was that Hilda [Bernstein] decided that this time, the women would not arrange their own meals or their own teas. We got use of the TIC men and they had to do it. They prepared all the food, they made all the tea. The women sat right through the conference the whole day, and didn't lift a finger.[43]

An important initiative around the time of the launch of FSAW was the compiling of the Women's Charter for the Congress of the People. Lodge notes that on:

> the 17 April 1954, 150 delegates from different parts met in Johannesburg to adopt a 'Women's Charter' and launch the Federation of South African Women.[44]

But, 'as things turned out national liberation was to take priority over specifically feminist demands';[45] although issues pertinent to women were not to be completely sidelined. The main emphasis within the Women's Charter was on the responsibility of mothers (rather than women, specifically) to be involved in the political process and to see themselves as integral to the successful liberation of the oppressed in South Africa.

Within FSAW motherhood was stressed as a common experience of women from across spectrums of race and class. The threat that apartheid laws posed to black

women's ability to fulfil their roles as mothers and securers of the family was considered a grave one and women were mobilised to defend their rights as mothers. A FSAW member recalls:

> We organised as mothers in the 1950's ... women's attitude was of women as mothers and we [protested] as mothers, not as women.[46]

Wells points out that the document submitted to the Congress of the Mothers by FSAW was 'headed by demands for mother, children, then all people in that order. Special rights for women, unrelated to motherhood, appear last.'[47]

Ama Naidoo's statement at the beginning of this chapter embodies the spirit in which political activity was undertaken by some Indian women and is worth repeating here:

> We must not think we are housewives. We have to fight for freedom for our children, that is how we used to talk![48]

By June of 1955, the Freedom Charter campaign had reached fever pitch. On 25-26 of that month delegates from all over the country gathered at Kliptown outside Johannesburg to publicly adopt the Charter:

> There were delegates from the Natal Indian Congress, and it included women. Dr Dadoo's mother, who was very old at that stage, had come with a group of women from Krugersdorp where she lived.[49]

A vibrant atmosphere was apparent to the Indian women present at Kliptown that day. Miriam Saloojee recalls that:

> Lots and lots of Indian women arrived at the rally and mixed and mingled, enjoyed and listened to the speakers and they were very optimistic about the

> Freedom Charter. They felt that the Freedom Charter was a very important document, it was a document that had the welfare of all the communities of South Africa and that it was very just document.[50]

The presence of the police in large numbers did little to deter the spirit and determination of the thousands of delegates. According to Amina Cachalia, 'police were non-existent as far as we were concerned. We just carried on our business'.[51] As the meeting progressed, however, the police presence became more intimidating and 'towards the end of the second day's proceedings, they confiscated all the documents that they could grasp and recorded the names and addresses of all the delegates'.[52] Both Babliben Ranchod and Mrs Thandary recall the presence of the police and how they advanced on horseback as the Charter was read out to the people:

> They surrounded the whole area. The people, you know, got so scared they started running. As we were going out, they were searching us ... And then they want to take our films, and destroy the speeches, but they had to take it from the people. Then Babla Saloojee gave me some film to hide away. I brought it out.[53]

The determination and conviction with which these women engaged in the COP and their apparent resolve to defy the law and ignore the often aggressive actions of the police is a testament to their level of consciousness and commitment to the struggles at hand. The basic organisational skills that Indian women developed through participating in the Freedom Charter campaign were invaluable and would enhance their contributions to future campaigns.

It must be stressed that only a minority of Indian women participated in the campaign. Amina Cachalia, and other women activists of her generation, were not representative of the majority of women in the Indian community in the Transvaal. However, the years of political experience that these few women had gained and their commitment and diligent efforts to draw other Indian women into the broader arena of struggle

must be acknowledged. I argue that the organisations founded by Cachalia and others, such as the PWU, the Mahila mandals and FSAW, influenced the nature of Indian women's political activity. Without the support of these organisations which often reflected and affirmed the aspirations and traditions of Indian women, far fewer of them would have been politically active.

The drawing up of the Freedom Charter at the Congress of the People in Kliptown in June 1955 was an historic event. It marked a new chapter in the decade of defiance and helped to consolidate further the alliances amongst the different political organisations.

The Freedom Charter itself was a vital document as it was inclusive in character and reflected the concerns of a wide spectrum of groups and individuals. The Charter campaign saw for the first time the needs and aspirations of the majority of South Africans being verbalized and recorded. Miriam Saloojee expresses the importance of the Freedom Charter:

> Many of the aspirations came from the ordinary and the common people. So that was a very important element. People who were housewives, domestic workers, all had a say in the drawing up of the Freedom Charter.[54]

Political gains on a larger scale may not have been made during the 1950's but women generally became far more visible and vocal in the public arena. The significance of Indian women's participation in the Freedom Charter campaign cannot be underestimated. The Freedom Charter has survived to the present day as a testament to the will of the South African people. Its content and the rich history behind its adoption has influenced generations of Indian women subsequently.

CONCLUSION

With the increasing involvement of its leadership in the national political arena the PWU dissolved in early 1953.[55] Most of its executive membership, most notably Amina Cachalia, went on to become executive members of the TIC and FSAW. Though the primary goal of the PWU was to impart skills to Indian women and bring members from cross-sections of the community together, I argue that its secondary agenda was to recruit potential activists from the ranks of its membership. Moreover, by drawing women out of their homes to gain marketable skills, the PWU 'did challenge the assumption that women's place was only in the home'.[56] This represented an important conceptual shift for those Indian women who did join the PWU. Amina Cachalia sums up:

> Many women became members of this organisation because it was something that I think they yearned for. I think they felt that the time had come to express themselves and also emerge in their own rights as individuals without having to always bow out to their menfolk in the homes, either the husband, the father or the brother.[57]

Although a minority of Indian women took part in the Decade of Defiance, it must be said that their actions and commitment were unprecedented and indicated a new consciousness and understanding of the prevailing conditions in the country. Whereas the passive resistance campaign was a response that was confined to Indian people, the Defiance Campaign and the Freedom Charter generated a mass response to all the restrictive laws of the apartheid system. Indian women engaged in defying not only these laws, but also the unwritten laws of the community which required them to confine their activity to the home. Politically conscious Indian women consistently emerged from the private sphere to engage in protest action and within this context, the uniform images of the passive, homebound and docile Indian women were also challenged.

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CHAPTER THREE

THE LATE 1950's AND EARLY 1960'S
AN 'ASSAULT ON OUR DIGNITY AND SELF-RESPECT'[1]

I have thus far shown that throughout the period under review, Indian women were involved in defiant action. From the early days of the passive resistance, to the Defiance Campaign, to the submission of demands for the Freedom Charter, Indian women participated actively and in different capacities. The latter part of the 1950's saw concerted and organised protest by women, particularly in the Transvaal. This chapter will focus on three major marches that were organised in protest against the Group Areas Act and Pass Laws passed in 1950 and 1952 respectively: the March by 20 000 women to the Union Buildings in 1956, the Torch Procession by the Transvaal Indian Youth League through the streets of Fordsburg in 1960, and finally the Indian women's March against the Group Areas Act in 1963. It also briefly comments on the Treason Trial and the effect it had on the Transvaal Indian Congress. The discussion will take place within the following framework:

i) Women take the Lead: Drawing together the three women's marches to the Union Buildings, I will examine the motivations, the nature and outcome of these marches.

ii) The Laws: The impact of the Pass Laws and the Group Areas Act on women specifically and the protest actions which were initiated by this legislation. A brief discussion of the laws that restricted political activities and banned individuals will follow.

iii) Treatment of Marchers: Police responses to the demonstrations by women and a brief exploration of the media coverage of the Indian women's March.

The chapter concludes with a discussion on how the political actions undertaken served to empower the Indian women who participated in them.

THE 20 000 WOMEN'S MARCH TO THE UNION BUILDINGS - 1956

The first women's march to the Union Buildings was organised by the Transvaal branch of FSAW and took place on 27 October, 1955. The march was organised in response to unjust laws in general, but more specifically to the increasing pass raids being carried out by the police against African people. African women were particularly militant in their resistance to the introduction of passes, and through FSAW, were able to mobilize thousands of women from a cross-section of South African society to join in protest against this legislation. Some Indian women were amongst those whose political understanding was extended through exposure to the lives and struggles of African women. The organisers of the march were inspired to demonstrate in this manner by the recent actions of the Black Sash, a group of white, liberal, English-speaking women who had protested at the Union Buildings. Walker notes that:

> Shortly before, the Black Sash had organised an all-night vigil by members outside the Union Buildings in Pretoria, the executive seat of government. This had been to protest against the Separate Representation of Voters Bill and related issues.[2]

The FSAW leadership had to improvise its strategy to circumvent the government's aim to stop the march. The marchers were advised to go as individuals rather than as FSAW women, because FSAW as an organisation was not granted permission to march. If they had, it would have constituted a contravention of the law against public gatherings and would have resulted in arrests.

The march on 27 October attracted 2 000 women, the majority of whom were members of FSAW and the ANC Women's League. Indian women participated in this march and continued to support the many anti-pass demonstrations that took place across the country over the following year. With this ongoing militant resistance of women to the introduction of the passes, FSAW realised that the moment had arrived for co-ordinated action of all the supporting women's groups. The Transvaal branch of FSAW chose to replicate the march of the year before, but this time campaigning took place throughout the country.

The 1956 march to the Union Buildings was the culmination of years of women's political protests against the pass laws and decisive action against the various apartheid laws. Amina Cachalia notes that 'by the time of the march, the Indian women were very much aware of what it was all about, because they had already been very much politicised and they came in.'[13]

For the second march, women were mobilised through the already existing ANC branches. The women's wings of these branches provided the infrastructure for accessing women in the small towns. It is interesting to note how men were mobilised in this situation. Male comrades were organised to provide transport for the marchers.

Although the march was organised under the auspices of FSAW, and was aimed at issues pertinent to African women (hence the protest against the Pass Laws), Indian women were involved in much of the logistical planning and organisation prior to the march itself. Amina Cachalia and Rahima Moosa were two prominent Indian women in FSAW during the late 1950's. Amina Cachalia comments at length about campaigning for the march:

> We had organised them, we had gone out telling them about it. We had spoken at house meetings, at factories where Indian women worked. We canvassed Pretoria for the people to go straight to the Union Buildings and we went to the East Rand, we went to Sophiatown, we want to Newclare, we went to everywhere Indians lived because it was our task within the federation that the Indian women started to organise the Indian women.[4]

Miriam Saloojee was one of the women recruited by Cachalia to assist with the campaigning. She relates how she was drawn into the campaign early on:

> So she [Amina Cachalia] approached me and said that we needed a number of Indian women to be active in the movement and this was one of the ways that we could help the Black women, show our solidarity with the Black women. And we actively campaigned. We went from door to door asking women to join us in the march. It was a very long process, although we started weeks ahead, prepared months in advance, for the particular march.[5]

It is clear that a number of Indian women, particularly the young activists like Cachalia and Saloojee, had developed a political consciousness that went beyond the boundaries of their own struggles. They joined with women of all races in solidarity and committed themselves to active participation in the campaign.

Miriam Saloojee comments on the occasions when young women defied their parents and other elders in the family to take part in political events:

> We had women that came from the ordinary walks of life as well. Black women were oppressed to such a degree that they should do something about it. I know a number of ladies that went with us did so without the approval of certain family members. I know of a young girl in particular, whose parents totally disapproved but she disobeyed them, she defied them and said that 'I thought it was the right thing to do.'[6]

The sense of responsibility and commitment is evident here. Some Indian women went to great lengths to join in the campaign. Again, the success that Indian women activists had in mobilizing other women in their communities is apparent. The usual channels of recruitment, through male family members, seemed to be falling away.

A tremendous amount of preparation went into arranging transport and accommodation for the thousands of women who descended on the Transvaal from all over the country. Miriam Saloojee enthusiastically recalls her duty of arranging transport:

> We had to collect the ladies, we had to see that transport was made available and we had asked the ladies to meet at certain points. So, it was my duty, Mrs Cachalia, Mrs Pahad's duty to gather all the women at a particular point and from there the transport was organised whereby they could present themselves in Pretoria.[7]

The tasks delegated to Saloojee and others were important to the success of the march. For weeks before the day, the Indian youth in the area had been mobilised to provide transport of whatever kind, 'be it a lorry or a kombie, a car or a donkey ... to get the women to Pretoria.'[8] Women from all over the country were determined to reach the

Union Buildings to register their protest against the passes for African women. The infrastructure needed to ensure that women arrived timeously and safely was complicated and in some cases sabotaged. Many taxi drivers and bus drivers raised the fares without prior notice and in several instances the women were subjected to police harassment as they attempted to board buses and trains:

> Before the march took place, they [police] stopped the buses from going, which were to take the women from the locations and the trains. They had stopped women from boarding the trains and so the women went on foot for half the way. They went as far as some places like Benoni and Springs to take the trains to Pretoria.[9]

On 9 August 1956, 20 000 women of all races and from all four provinces descended on Pretoria and marched to the Union Buildings, each armed with a petition to deliver to the Prime Minister's office. The women made their way to the forecourt in their thousands. Amina Cachalia recalls the procession of women making their way up the hill:

> The women were all waiting to walk up and it was a wonderful sight - standing up on the top seeing all these women, Black women chanting and the Indian women in their saris marching up.[10]

The spirit and determination with which the women demonstrated their protest made for the powerful and symbolic atmosphere that prevailed throughout the day. Helen Joseph recalls vividly the sight of thousands of women and their babies congregated in the forecourt:

> There was a tremendous sound of singing and the babies were off their backs and they were feeding their babies and having their padkos and it was stunning, really a stunning sight.[11]

The fact that many women gathered in protest with their children in tow, points to the nature of women's lives in which there is no separation of domestic responsibilities from commitments which take them beyond the boundaries of the home. Significantly, when men are involved in similar actions, the added responsibility of child care does not fall on them.

Once the women had congregated, speeches were delivered and then four representatives of FSAW, including Rahima Moosa, delivered the 20 000 petitions to the Prime Minister's office. Helen Joseph recalls:

> The four of us, Rahima, Lilian, Sophie, and myself were chosen to go hand over the petitions. Rahima Moosa was highly pregnant at the time, but could not be deterred from taking part in the march. She insisted. But we wouldn't let her walk up all the way, we sent her by car. The baby was born a week later.[12]

The petitions were deposited with a clerk of the Prime Minister's office as Strydom himself was away. The women then gathered in the forecourt of the Union Buildings:

> stood in silence and then we burst into song afterwards - Nkosi Sikelele and suddenly there was another song, it seemed like it had come about instantaneously and it said: 'Strydom, you have tampered with the women, you have struck a rock ...'[13]

Although only a small number of Indian women participated in this march, many who did were actively engaged in the organizational aspects of the campaign months prior to the day. Mobilization, planning and infrastructure were all skills that these women developed by being involved.

Some of the Indian women who were prominent in the campaign, like Amina Cachalia and Rahima Moosa were also leaders within the TIC. Their political thinking was influenced not only by their active participation in political activities but to some extent by exposure to women from the CPSA, such as Ray Alexander, Ruth First and Hilda Watts-Bernstein, offered support, together with a different approach to conceptualising the oppression of Black people and strategies for dealing with the apartheid regime. Cachalia and Moosa, amongst others, developed close links with some of these women and enabled other Indian women to be introduced to the ideas of the party. Amina Cachalia explains that:

> It was individual links, more or less, because people like myself befriended people, women of the Communist party and found that they were so polished in their political understanding. I found I could learn a great deal from them. They were of tremendous help to us who wanted that particular assistance and understanding of events and how to get strategies to work out certain issues.[14]

Rahima Moosa was a Communist Party member when the party dissolved in 1950 and she remained a listed person until 1990, when the CPSA was unbanned. Her political thinking was clearly more advanced than many other women of her generation and community, as evidenced by the following statement she made at a women's meeting:

> For all women [there must be] ... the right to vote, full opportunity in all spheres of work, equal pay for equal work [and] equal right for the guardianship of our children.[15]

It was Rahima Moosa who was instrumental in bringing together women of the CPSA and Indian women from the various cultural and women's groups:

> We used to get Communist Party women and take our young girls along, we had sing-songs, and public speaking

> classes, and they taught them a little bit of Marxism. There, in fact, they discussed books and reported on their reading. You know, sort of elementary stuff, but really interesting to them because the girls were elementary at that stage in the political field and these people already were polished.[16]

For most Indian women, engaging in public speaking classes and reading groups was unheard of and represented a shift in social and cultural norms. Within the average Indian home, women were certainly not encouraged to debate political issues openly and for many, reading material was inaccessible due to language barriers and illiteracy. Most of the Indian women who attended these classes had little or no education:

> Certainly, none of our women at that stage had a high school education or even a university education. Some of them didn't even go to primary school.[17]

Considering the low level of education that most of these women had attained and the fact that political involvement was not commonly encouraged within their communities, their active participation certainly challenges the prevailing image of Indian women as docile and passive. The exposure to women from the CPSA developed the political thinking and the confidence of several of the Indian women to the extent that they became Regular speakers at rallies and meetings:

> Yes, those who wanted to speak, used to speak. They were allowed to address the meetings, they were called to sit on the platforms. Mrs Suriakala Patel, Zainub Asvat, Mrs Bhayat used to speak at the meetings.[18]

The 1956 march on the Union Buildings was a powerful demonstration of the capacity of women to strategize, organize and impact on the political landscape. Although it did not force the repeal of any of the offensive laws, it set a precedent for further political protest and made clear to the government, and to the predominantly male leadership of the

political organisations, that women were a force to be reckoned with. It also represented a turning point in the political development of many of the women who participated. Though a minority of Indian women were involved, their participation was significant. It signalled that there were Indian women who would act in defiance of not only the laws of the country, but of the strict norms of obedience that Indian women were expected to conform to within their own homes. Walker argues that:

> Culturally, Indian women could be regarded as the most subjected group of women in South Africa. Both the Hindu and Moslem religions sanctioned submission and passivity among women. Prejudice from within the Indian community against women participating in ... activity outside the home was deeply rooted.[19]

Indian women's participation in political protest reflected political maturity and the development of personal confidence and awareness. Moreover, the essence of Indian women's political activities had shifted from the patriotic and 'Indian-centred' demonstrations of the passive resistance campaign of the 1940's to a clearer identification with the issues apparent in South African society as a whole.

Helen Joseph's reflections on FSAW provide an insight into the role of the organisation in drawing women of all races into concerted political protest during the 1950's. She notes that FSAW was 'a child of its time and responded to the political and social pressures of the period. It could never have stood in isolation from the political movement of which it was an integral part'.[20] This was certainly an important factor in the success that FSAW had in attracting women from diverse communities and backgrounds into its fold. Most members and leaders came from communities where notions of family and mothering were very strong. As Vadi notes:

> A leading FSAW activist argues that the women's organisation of the time 'did not organise around women's issues, but rather to participate fully in the struggle for the national liberation. Feminist issues were consciously avoided as it would have proven to be distracting and destructive'.[21]

Thus, FSAW did not challenge the oppression of women per se, but rather provided a vehicle for the mobilisation of women around issues and activities related to national liberation.

The march by women to the Union Buildings was in itself an historic gesture. In 1914, Afrikaner women had marched on the Union Buildings to protest against their men going to fight in World War I.[22] In 1955, (as noted earlier) the Black Sash held an all-night vigil there. In 1955 and 1956 FSAW organised successive marches to the Union Buildings. In 1963 the Indian women marched in protest of the implementation of the Group Areas Act. Miriam Saloojee's memories of the 1956 march capture the inspiring atmosphere that prevailed on that day:

> People of all colours were present and it was a beautiful occasion, because it was just women, Black, Indian and White women. It was a very moving, inspiring experience for me, at a young age, to witness a march of 20 000 people.[23]

The spirit of those thousands of women served to unite them in the largest gathering to date; it is commemorated annually on the same date in August as National Women's Day.

TREASON TRIAL - 1956 to 1960

Apart from taking part in exclusively women's protests, women, including Indian women, continued to challenge the laws and actions of the Apartheid state. By the end of 1956, many of the top leaders of FSAW and other members of the Congress Alliance had been arrested and charged with high treason. The Treason Trial, spanning four years, placed tremendous political and financial pressure on the Congresses. Consequently, the organisations had to engage in low-profile activity. Volunteers were organised by members of the Defence and Aid Fund to cook food for the trialists to eat during breaks in the proceedings. Ama Naidoo was one such volunteer and she remembers preparing meals:

> I used to collect donations of food, some from Defence and Aid and some from the people from the community. They gave me rice, they gave me meat, oil, masala, salt and I was to cook in my backyard. I made a fire and cooked in my big pots. The people on trial preferred the Indian food and every meal I gave them fruit and sometimes when it was cold I would organise coffee for them.[24]

The Indian community and, significantly, Indian women were particularly active at this time, even though many of the leadership of the SAIC had been banned or otherwise restricted. The spirit of the people could not be extinguished altogether and small political protests continued around the country.

TORCH PROCESSION - 1960

The Torch Procession was one such small, but significant, protest initiated by the Indian Youth Congress. The young people had decided on a march through the streets of

Vrededorp and Fordsburg in protest against the state of emergency that had been declared by the National Party government and the arrests of a number of community leaders. According to Miriam Saloojee, 'the protest had been in solidarity with the events that had taken place'.[25] The march would start in the early evening and the participants would light torches and walk down to Red Square, in Fordsburg.

Indian women were present at this march, not only as participants but as co-leaders, together with the prominent male leadership of the time. Amina Cachalia, together with Hajeera Saloojee, helped to lead the march:

> Everybody gathered in 11th street near my home. There were crowds of young and older people and so many women had turned up. All lit torches and started walking peacefully in the procession right down 11th street and into Railway Street. Yes, I was at the head of the procession with my sister, and Miriam Saloojee's sister was there and many other women. Ahmed Kathrada, Barney Desai, Mosy Moola and the youngsters like Babla Saloojee were all at the head of the procession.[26]

Amina Cachalia distinctly recalls how marchers were harassed by police and the violence that erupted between marchers and authorities that evening:

> As we got to the subway there, the police came and stopped us. We were not asked to disperse. The front liners were just bundled into the police vans. The others were asked to disperse, but they carried on in two's and three's and small groups walking down to the Red Square where they gathered eventually. When they got to Red Square skirmishes broke out, there were fights between police and the young Indian men and a fellow called Pepsi had knocked out one policeman, but so badly that the policeman was lying in the street.[27]

The police attempted to disrupt and diffuse the procession by detaining some of the leadership and holding participants overnight in police cells:

> All I remember was being driven around all over the place for hours it seemed like. Then we were taken to the Fordsburg police station and by then word was already sent to our parents and other members of the Indian community, that so and so has been arrested. Late at night we were released and the next morning we had to appear in court, charged with illegal procession. We pleaded not guilty and were charged. But we didn't pay a fine or anything, I think we were discharged.[28]

The manner in which the police dealt with the leaders of the march indicates a definite shift from the days of passive resistance, when resisters were subjected to 'hard labour' in prisons. In contrast, during the Torch Procession the marchers were attacked by the police with batons. Even women marchers were beaten, illustrating how vicious the regime had become. Amina Cachalia distinctly recalls that:

> There was a baton charge. A couple of people were arrested immediately, one of them was Dr Zainub Asvat, my sister Hajeera Saloojee, and a number of other ladies were arrested, taken into a police van and I would say they were badly treated. But the march continued, although it was disrupted because people were waiting at Red Square. There was a lot of harassment, a number of baton charges took place and many ugly incidents. I vividly remember the march as I was one of the victims of the baton charges; quite a number of people had to be treated in hospitals, by doctors. The police ran amok.[29]

This dynamic era came to an abrupt halt with the banning, detention, and listing of the TIC, ANC, PAC, leadership and organisations. The enforcement of severely repressive laws created the climate for organisations to go underground, forced hundreds into exile,

discouraged and even obstructed political resistance. The consequent 'lull' in organised resistance was effectively capitalised on by the state to begin the systematic implementation of important apartheid laws.

IMPLEMENTATION OF THE GROUP AREAS ACT

One such law was the Group Areas Act which, although promulgated as early as 1950, had not been strictly enforced. Lodge states that:

> The Group Areas Act extended residential and occupational segregation and threatened in particular those who owned property or operated business in 'white' areas.[30]

While the Ghetto Act had specific implications for the Indian traders, the Group Areas Act had dire consequences for middle- and working-class Indians. Both groups were forced to relocate to areas designated for Indians, and thus were faced with major changes and considerations, for example, the cost of relocating, the type of housing available, transport, limited access to education facilities and being situated far from the central business district where many Indian people had built up small trading shops. Furthermore, people who had lived in areas like Sophiatown, where Indian, Coloured and African people lived next to each other, were forcibly removed by the government. Residential apartheid was thus formally instituted resulting once again in the disintegration of families, neighbourhoods and the community as a whole. Indian women were particularly concerned and, through the Indian Women's Association, sent the following letter of protest to Prime Minister H.F. Verwoerd in Pretoria:

> Under the Group Areas Act our people are being deprived of their homes, means of livelihood and property. Hundreds

> of families in Johannesburg, Pretoria and other parts of the Province are living under the notice and the force of law is being applied to drive us into isolated ghettoes.[31]

Adaptation to the new areas, pressures to make ends meet, and the harsh repression of all political activity, combined to create a climate that made it arduous to organise and mobilize the Indian community as in the past. Moreover, the community networks in many instances had fallen away and this made political activity difficult to initiate. Freund notes that:

> the Indian 'community' in reality consisted of networks of community linked together through dense human contacts that reflected family relationships and a myriad of economic connections.[32]

The Group Areas Act effectively destroyed many of these communities and the political networks that had been built up over decades. Furthermore, the Treason Trial, which lasted from 1956 to 1960, drained the financial and political resources of the TIC, NIC, PAC and ANC. The banning of the ANC and PAC following the Sharpeville massacre in 1960, as well as the banning of many individual leaders of the TIC and NIC under the Suppression of Communism Act (1950), created a tense and repressive climate in which political organisation and activity was difficult and dangerous.

I argue that the Group Areas Act had severe implications for many Indian women, particularly those of the trading class. The act not only compelled them to leave the work-place but also their homes. The common pattern of residence for members of this group was to have their homes adjoining their shops. This arrangement facilitated easy access to both the domains, thus enabling the women to combine their domestic and shop tasks. The most serious consequence of the act for these Indian women was that they lost, or at best had limited access to, the trading world. Since Indian women were not mobile and

public transport in the newly-formed Indian areas was very poor, they were confined to their homes.[33]

Other far-reaching effects were that Indian women no longer had contact with customers from different communities, or daily interaction with other small business people. This was accentuated by the fact that the opportunity to learn English, Sotho, or Zulu and exchange news about daily events became more limited due to the segregation of communities. Again, these concerns were formally presented to the government by the Indian Women's Association:

> The progressive implementation of the policy of apartheid in relation to the Indian people is causing grave concern and agitation to our community. As mothers and women we face the stark reality of a bleak future.[34]

THE INDIAN WOMEN'S MARCH TO THE UNION BUILDINGS - 1963

Since many of the key organisers in the TIC leadership had been banned or listed by this time, it was up to the rank and file membership to organise campaigns within the Indian communities against the Group Areas Act. The Indian women within the TIC were particularly active in this respect and as Amina Cachalia recalls:

> It was the women who decided that they were going to march to Pretoria to present to the Prime Minister the fact that Indians disapproved of the Group Areas Act and they had the right to protest. It was specifically the Indian women's march that was decided upon, because of the Act and, because of the terrible effect it had on the Indian people and on the older Indian people. They were being uprooted left, right and centre. Their businesses were going

> to be taken away and they had to start all over again in strange places.[35]

The women received strong support from the TIC as an organisation. This is significant because within the Indian community as a whole, there was still a great deal of reservation about women being politically active. Miriam Saloojee explains the TIC's response to the march:

> Oh, the TIC was tremendous, you know, gave tremendous support to the women in all aspects, not only political but social, economic, any matter that needed attention, the TIC always responded very justly and strongly in favour of it.[36]

Campaigning for the march took place within the greater Johannesburg area and due to the banning or listing of key leaders, it was up to the rank and file members to mobilise Indian women to participate. However, there were instances in which even those women who had been banned went out into the community to encourage other women to join the march. Amina Cachalia was one leader who did just that. She recalls:

> But I had to organise, I went individually to homes, I didn't dare go with anybody else because I didn't want to contravene my banning order.[37]

On 10 December 1963, the women gathered at the Red Square in Fordsburg where buses had arrived to take them to Pretoria. They were dressed in white saris as a symbol of mourning and their outrage at the systematic enforcement of the Group Areas Act. Amina Cachalia again recalls:

> I was banned at that stage; I couldn't go to the Union Buildings. I had been banned in November that year and the march had been set for the 10th December 1963, on Human Rights Day. I stood in somebody's doorway just

> watching the women coming in their white saris and climbing into the buses and singing and waving goodbye to me and they went off to Pretoria.[38]

The significance of the white sari is worth noting here. Traditionally the white sari is worn as a symbol of mourning and the colour white signifies the simplicity of the widow. I argue that the wearing of white saris by Indian women on the day of the march was a communal act of mourning in the service of public protest. Indian women were mourning the erosion of family and community life as a result of the implementation Group Areas Act. Although this symbolism was more than likely lost on the government officials, Indian women effectively combined a traditional symbol of mourning with a more contemporary form of resistance.

On arrival at the Union Buildings, about 400 women[39]. the women proceeded toward the offices of the Prime Minister to deliver a memorandum which read:

> The ruthless application of the policy of apartheid is causing grave concern to our people. Its implementation in the form of Group Areas, job reservation and other measures involve loss of homes, impoverishment and assault on our dignity and self-respect.[40]

Dr Zainub Asvat and several other women led the march and as the procession reached the terraced gardens, they were met by police and dogs. The dogs were let loose and they attacked and injured several of the marchers. The women scattered, some fell and got hurt, and the procession did not reach the top of the hill.[41] There was also verbal intimidation and harassment of the women by the police. Mrs Villanagee Pillay distinctly remembers that during the march a policeman tried to intimidate a young lady:

> There was a Hindu girl - the police wanted to grab her. She said 'Don't touch me', and she smacked him and his hat fell

> off. Of course what right does he have to touch her? You see ... they won't allow another man to touch a white girl, they are brutal.[42]

Mrs Pillay's recollection of the incident is authenticated by its coverage in two different newspapers. The Star, dated 15 December 1963, reported the event thus:

> One young Indian girl squared up to a young policeman after she had knocked his hat off. But the policeman tactfully declined the spur and walked away shaking his head.[43]

Another newspaper, the Sunday Express, on December 15, 1963, titled its article, 'Punch Up? not with ladies, Thank You!' together with photographs of the incident and the march. Both these articles focus on the incident and reflect the young girl's response negatively, arguing that aggressiveness from 'ladies' was unbecoming and inappropriate behaviour. Yet from the Indian women's position the action was clearly a reflection of their confidence and the fact that they were no longer going to be reserved in their responses.

Furthermore, the media portrayed contradictory images of the Indian women who participated in the march. The Star Johannesburg dated December 10, 1963 titled its article covering the events of the march 'Pilgrims in White' and referred several times to the march as a 'pilgrimage'. The Rand Daily Mail, on the other hand, ran its article with the headline 'Dogs grab saris at protest' and noted that 'there were several brisk altercations between the leaders of the women and the police officers.'[44]

I argue that the different interpretations of the march are clear even from the headlines, and in certain cases highlight how western concepts of women's public behaviour are unthinkingly applied in the mainstream press. In both the Sunday Express and The Star, attention was focused respectively on an isolated incident of confrontation and the notion

of a 'pilgrimage' and both reports failed to appreciate the significance of the white saris and more importantly the political rationale behind the march. Indeed, calling the march a 'pilgrimage' served to depoliticize the event entirely and detracted from the seriousness of the protest. The Rand Daily Mail's coverage, in contrast, highlighted the political agenda of the protesters and the aggressive response of the police and members of the Security Branch.[45]

On the day after the march Dr. Zainub Asvat was issued with a banning order under the Suppression of Communism Act for 'allegedly promoting the objects of Communism'.[46] There was strong protest against this banning by the Indian Women's Association in the form of letters to ministers of government and leaders of the opposition in parliament. In a letter to P.W. Botha, then Minister of Community Development, dated 10 February 1964, the Indian Women's Association reacted to the banning of Dr. Asvat:

> These actions are indefensible. No civilised Government can be expected to behave in this manner and any comment on our part is superfluous.[47]

A letter, dated 2 March 1964, to Sir De Villiers Graaff, then leader of the opposition in parliament, voices the anger and shock that Indian women felt about the government's reaction to the march:

> It is this context that we as women, so concerned about the future of our children, tried to place the grievances of the community before the Prime Minister in person. This was done with the view of demonstrating our union's opposition to apartheid and Group Areas so that the plight of our people could be brought to the glare of general public opinion. It is regretted that we were prevented from presenting dignified and lawful protests at the Union Buildings on the 10th December 1963.[48]

The Indian women's march was the final women's march to the Union Buildings in the period under study. The Black Sash's all-night vigil gave impetus to the march of 2 000 women, followed by the march of 20 000 Women, all of which had evoked different reactions from the National Party government. At the first gathering, no police were present. At the second march, police were present but did not take any action against the protesters. Yet, by the 1960's, when the Indian women's march took place, repressive machinery was in position and the police with their dogs were out in force:

> Police reinforcements and more dogs were brought as the women attempted to enter the Government offices to put their case before the Prime Minister, Dr. Verwoerd, himself.[49]

The effects of the Group Areas Act were far reaching. The forced removals of entire families and communities served to break down traditional ways of life and disrupted not only the lives of adults, but also of their children. Indian women in Johannesburg, for example, responded quite vociferously to the removal of their children from schools in town to schools in Lenasia and Benoni. Amina Cachalia recounts the actions taken by women in her community in 1965 against this policy:

> The time when Lenasia was proclaimed and schools were threatened here and the women had small children and they had to send them to Lenasia - it was a thing that affected them - the Indian women came into small groups and wondered what should they do about this? How could they stop Lenasia becoming Lenasia and the schools being closed here in Fordsburg and opened there so that we were forced to send our children there. These women picketed the buses that the government had introduced to cart our children free of charge to Lenasia to go to schools there. So in issues like that the women continuously mobilised and eventually they affiliated to the TIC.[50]

The determined efforts of these women to protest the legislated changes unfortunately did nothing to alter the position of the government on segregated education. The Group Areas Act was by now firmly entrenched and authorities were putting enormous pressure on people to move to the racially demarcated residential locations.

CONCLUSION

I argue that Indian women's involvement in the political activities in the 1950's constituted a path of empowerment. They challenged the unwritten laws of the Indian community by once again leaving their homes to engage in public political protest and they challenged the laws of the state by demonstrating their anger and indignation at the repressive legislation that threatened their livelihood and the lives of their families.

Within the Indian community, and particularly within the joint family, motherhood was a common and collective experience amongst women. I argue that in the case of many Indian women being a mother was one of several factors that gave rise to political expression. Political issues surrounding the implementation of the Group Areas Act for example, were explained and expressed in terms of motherhood and the sanctity of the family and children. Miriam Saloojee stated emphatically that one of the reasons these Indian women engaged in political activity was because:

> They felt that they had to do something, they had to play an important role in changing the society and because being mothers, they felt that they have a right towards their children and towards bringing up their children in an atmosphere and climate of justice and fairness.[51]

Throughout the Decade of Defiance and into the early 1960's, many Indian women were actively engaged in political activity. As illustrated in this chapter, the main motivation for their actions centred around the repressive Group Areas Act that threatened the livelihood and ultimately, the survival of the joint family. On a broader level their participation was linked to the struggle for national liberation; the struggle of all black people in the country against the destructive laws of the apartheid system. The participation of Indian women in the broader arena was fostered through such organisations as the FSAW and the SAIC.

Although their actions brought no immediate political gains, I have argued that the political consciousness of Indian women evolved to the extent that their activities were influenced by issues that were central to the South African political environment rather than the issues related to Indian independence as was the case during the 1940's. The 1950's ushered in an era where Indian women interacted and closely cooperated with other South African women in their common struggle against the apartheid system. Their political participation enabled them to become confident and develop organisational skills outside their domestic environments. These experiences empowered them personally and politically so that by the early 1960's Indian women were initiating marches and protest actions of their own. The legacy of the 1946 - 1963 protests continued into the 1970s and 1980s when the children of many activists, joined the struggle for democracy.

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3. Interview with Amina Cachalia.

4. Interview with Amina Cachalia.

5. Interview with Miriam Saloojee.

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7. Interview with Miriam Saloojee.

8. Interview with Amina Cachalia.

9. Interview with Amina Cachalia.

10. Interview with Amina Cachalia.

11. Interview with Helen Joseph.

12. Interview with Helen Joseph.

13. Interview with Amina Cachalia.

14. Interview with Amina Cachalia.

15. Moosa, R., Report on Women's Meeting Held at Trades Hall, quoted in Vadi, I., 1989. The Campaign for the Congress of the People and the Freedom Charter, unpublished M.A. thesis. p. 249.

16. Interview with Rahima Moosa.

17. Interview with Amina Cachalia.

18. Interview with Amina Cachalia.

19. Walker, C., 1990. *Women and Gender in South Africa to 1945*. p. 106.

20. Interview with Helen Joseph.

21. Remarks made by anonymous persons quoted in Vadi, I., 1989. p. 247.

22. Interview with Helen Joseph.

23. Interview with Miriam Saloojee.

24. Interview with Ama Naidoo.

25. Interview with Miriam Saloojee.

26. Interview with Amina Cachalia.

27. Interview with Amina Cachalia.

28. Interview with Amina Cachalia.

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31. Letter from the Transvaal Indian Women's Association to H.F. Verwoerd, then South African Prime Minister, dated 9 December 1963. Personal copy belonging to Amina Cachalia.

32. Freund, B., 1993. '**The Destruction of Communities 1930 - 1980: The Indian Working Class of Durban and the Group Areas Act**. African Studies Seminar Paper 346. p. 23.

33. For a critical discussion of the impact of the Group Areas Act on the South African Indian community, see K.A. Moodley, '**South African Indians: The Wavering Minority**' in Thompson, L. and Butler, J. (ed.), 1975. *Change in Contemporary South Africa*. p. 260-265.

34. Letter from the Transvaal Indian Women's Association to H.F. Verwoerd, then South African Prime Minister, dated 9 December 1963. Personal copy belonging to Amina Cachalia.

35. Interview with Amina Cachalia.

36. Interview with Miriam Saloojee.

37. Interview with Amina Cachalia.

38. Interview with Amina Cachalia.

39. The Rand Daily Mail, 15 December 1963, notes that there were eight buses carrying about 50 women each. Thus I conclude that there were about 400 women at the march.

40. The Post, 15 December 1963.

41. Interview with Amina Cachalia.

42. Interview with Villanagee Pillay.

43. I was alerted to this report in the course of my interview with Villanagee Pillay.

44. Rand Daily Mail, 10 December 1963.

45. Rand Daily Mail, 10 December 1963.

46. Letter from the Transvaal Indian Women's Association to P.W. Botha dated 10 February 1964. Personal copy belonging to Amina Cachalia.

47. Letter from the Indian Women's Association to P.W. Botha, dated 10 February 1964. Personal copy belonging to Amina Cachalia.

48. Letter to Sir De Villiers Graaff, dated 2 March 1964. Personal copy belonging to Amina Cachalia.

49. The Post, 15 December 1963.

50. Interview with Amina Cachalia.

51. Interview with Miriam Saloojee.

CONCLUSION

> **I think, it was in my blood, something was wrong with me because anything political, well I just wanted to be there and I just wanted to be there, by hook or crook, I was there. It was as people used to say, like you know, politics is like a disease.**[1]

The harassment and intimidation women suffered during that final march in 1963 was a sign of the kind of repression that was to be experienced in South Africa for many years to come. By 1964 the TIC had begun to disintegrate. Along with other political organisations, it had suffered the banning of its leadership, police intimidation, the difficult years of the Treason Trial, and by the early 1960's much of its financial and human resources had been so severely depleted that it could no longer function. Furthermore, the stringent implementation of the Group Areas Act visibly divided communities and scattered people across Transvaal.

Key figures within the TIC, such as Amina Cachalia, Rahima Moosa were severely restricted. Without strong, coherent leadership organised political action on the ground was difficult. The momentum of previous years was thus lost and the TIC resorted to low-key activities. Coupled with this the fragmentation of the joint family structure and of the community meant the collapse of political network structures. Consequently, mobilizing within the Indian community became extremely difficult.

The above factors completely changed the social and political climate of South Africa and consequently impacted on the ability of all Black people to voice their protest. Indian women were amongst those who were effectively silenced within the public domain. This

is not to say that political activity ground to a halt altogether. As Miriam Saloojee points out:

> I don't think people can say that there was a period when there was no activity. There might have been no active campaigns but activity was always there.[2]

Looking back over two decades of political activity and protest, it is clear that the 1940's and the early 1950's were years in which the political awareness of Indian women in the Transvaal had been nurtured and developed. Women responded to the legislation passed by the United and National Party governments during this period because it directly impacted on their families and their livelihood. Through organisations like the TIC, the PWU and later the FSAW, they were drawn into the public domain and mobilised around both national liberation issues and those that affected women specifically.

The apartheid system was highly successful in creating buffers between the different race groups. With the introduction of the Group Areas Act and the Separate Amenities Act, each race was physically separated from each other which made contact and interaction amongst the races particularly difficult. Within such a framework participation in joint actions with the African National Congress gave Indian women the opportunity to interact with women of other races. The long years of activity from the beginning of the Defiance Campaign through to the end of the Treason Trial helped Indian women to acquire varied organisational skills, as well as exposing them to ideas from across the political spectrum.

These influences generated a shift from the partisan politics of Indian nationalism to issues particular to South African politics at the time. Amina Cachalia notes that:

> The foundation that the ANC together with the SAIC formed, at that early stage in the history of struggle in this country, is very, very important and it had laid the basis for this continuous joint struggle of people in South Africa.[3]

Indian women responded positively to the ideological messages emanating from the various political organisations at the time. These messages focused on women as individual home- makers and as mothers of the nation. The demands specific to the needs of women were sacrificed in favour of the demands for national liberation; and this meant that individual needs, for example relating to pregnancy, and child care were seen as necessary sacrifices for the struggle.

Chetty also acknowledges one of the major constraints that inhibited the women from participating in political activity:

> The division of labour meant her burden was simply expanded to include politics, not reorganised to shift greater responsibility to her husband. This increased burden and her success at coping with it are remembered with pride, as a sacrifice, yet they are also the very constraints under which women were immobilised and kept out of the public eye.[4]

I would argue, in accordance with the above quote, that many Indian women were left out of the public political arena because their domestic responsibilities demanded so much of their time and energy. In my introduction I acknowledge two such women: my mother and my aunt. The women who did overcome these constraints and found avenues to channel their commitment were a remarkable minority. Ama Naidoo, Amina Cachalia, Rahima Moosa and Miriam Saloojee are shining examples of women who overcame odds in order to consolidate their commitment to the struggles of the wider community. I would argue further that these women's political participation constituted feminist action.

Although the organisations in which they participated did not challenge women's inequality within the domestic sphere or in the wider societal arena, numerous Indian women did leave their homes to participate in political activity and, in many cases, defied the unwritten laws of their communities in order to do so. Through active participation, women were able to develop a broader understanding of their own life experiences and thus were able to link those experiences to the oppression suffered by other black women in South Africa.

Indian women also used the traditional family and community networks as a means to become involved in the wider political arena. Furthermore, and as argued in earlier chapters, the survival of the family was an important factor in motivating Indian women's participation in politics. This view is similar to that held by African women, as described by Hassim et al:

> In fact, maintaining the family against the attacks wrought upon it by the apartheid state is in itself seen as an act of resistance by African women. In the face of poverty and political inequality, the family is seen by women as empowering.[5]

A growing political consciousness generated Indian women's participation in a range of political activities. Gradually they became confident and went out campaigning and addressing public meetings. By the end of the 1950's, they were not participating simply under the influence of active family members or spouses as, I suggest, was the case in the campaigns of the 1940's. As Miriam Saloojee comments, by that time:

> Women had played a very prominent role, [they] were women who were conscious of the political situation. It wasn't just because people had said to them, it was unjust society or because the husbands or families were involved in politics, it was something much more profound and because of this they were very interested in politics.[6]

I argue that the testimonies of Indian women that appear throughout this dissertation contested the gender-specific language and images that have been applied to Indian women throughout the world. Chetty states that the popular images of Indian women represented in print and visual media are those of 'widow sacrifice, child brides and back-breaking domesticity.'[7] I would suggest, further, that these images, the mechanisms and institutions that reinforced them, served to devalue the political actions and contributions made by those Indian women who participated in politics during the period under review and even in the decades prior to it.

The Indian women discussed in this study contested and manipulated the notion of passivity through their actions and symbolic gestures. In the case of South African Indian women protesters, white saris and veils were worn not only as symbols of purity and chastity, but also symbols of defiance. As illustrated in Chapter Three of this dissertation, the media focused on and drew incorrect assumptions about the attire chosen by Indian women and thus falsely interpreted a radical protest action as an occasion for 'cultural' clothing.

In this dissertation, I have attempted to highlight the political and social histories of some Indian women activists in the period under review. Through their testimonies we are given insight into the social fabric of these women's lives and how the threads of their family and community life were woven together to develop a political dimension to their experience. The value of these experiences is perhaps reflected in the changing nature of Indian women's position today. The increased numbers of Indian women working outside the home and attending universities, the change in family structure from a joint arrangement to a nuclear composition, the liberalisation of the dress code, an increase in inter-ethnic marriages, and larger numbers of Indian women engaged in public and domestic politics, can all be read as challenges to the erstwhile trends within the Indian community.

More importantly, these changes testify to the sacrifices and struggles of the Indian women who came before them; those who spearheaded the change and influenced the thinking and practices of most of the Indian women activists of the present day. The words of Amina Cachalia capture the essence of that commitment and resolve:

> When a liberation movement gathers momentum on a day-to-day basis and the politicising of women, of people in general began very long ago in South Africa and as the years go by, we gather greater momentum and confidence that things will come to an end, and they will come to an end. It has taken a long time, my entire life, and I don't know if freedom is going to come in my lifetime. Let's hope that it does, but it must come and my grandchildren will have that freedom.[8]

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5. Hassim, S., Metelerkamp, J., Todes, A., 1987. **'"A Bit on the Side"? Gender Struggles in the Politics of Transformation in South Africa'**, Transformation, No. 5. p. 21-22.

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