

**SHATTERING THE SILENCE:  
ANALYSING THE THEATRICAL PORTRAYAL OF  
DOMESTIC ABUSE IN THE INDIAN SOUTH  
AFRICAN COMMUNITY - A TEXTUAL STUDY  
OF THREE SOUTH AFRICAN PLAYS  
(BETWEEN 1993 AND 2002)**

**BY SHIRDIKA PILLAI**

2023

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**BY  
SHIRDIKA PILLAI**

Submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of  
Master of Arts in Drama and Performance Studies  
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2021

DURBAN  
FEBRUARY 2021  
SUPERVISOR: TAMAR MESKIN

## DECLARATION

I, Shirdika Pillai (205503398), declare that:

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As the candidate's Supervisor I agree/ ~~do not agree~~ to the submission of this dissertation/ ~~thesis~~.

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**Tamar Meskin** (Supervisor)

January 2021

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

My sincere gratitude to:

- \* **Mom.** No words will ever be enough: Thank you.
- \* **Sajal.** For being my biggest and best cheerleader.
- \* **Tamar.** For your patience, guidance and braving the storm with me.
- \* **Clare.** For your time and invaluable insight.
- \* **Mrs. Tate & Mr. Morris.** For introducing me to my first love: Theatre.

*Women, you are not rehabilitation centers (sic) for badly raised men.  
It is not your job to fix him, change him, parent him or raise him.  
You want a partner, not a project.*

(Backer 2018)

## DEDICATIONS

This dissertation is dedicated to the memories of:

- \* My father: **Yanasegaran Arumugum Pillai**.
- \* My forebears.

My humble respect for you, on whose aching shoulders my today was built.  
Your struggles and pain were not in vain. I stand proud and strong on the land in  
which you sacrificed your lives, shed your blood and wept your tears.  
This Indian South African child honours you with humility and deep gratitude.

## ABSTRACT

In this dissertation, I use diasporic identity theory and cultural theory to argue that the political and social structures of the country have influenced how the Indian South African community viewed itself in relation to South African society. The race politics of South Africa played a significant role in the community closing ranks to shield itself from external criticism and ensuring cultural practices were preserved. Members of the community who chose economically advantageous pursuits, forged ahead socially while confining women to the private domain and tasking them with the role of gatekeeping culture, tradition and language. This responsibility, taken up by Indian South African women, has endured over generations and over time, many women have become shackled by this role of cultural policing. This, coupled with young girls being taught their roles are subservient to males in the home - regardless of whether he is her father, brother or husband – has seen an enabling of patriarchal practices being perpetuated. Thus, in homes where domestic abuse takes place, women have little to no agency to confront the man in the home and challenge his authority. As an Indian South African myself, I have witnessed how the social ill of domestic abuse has remained tightly contained within the boundaries of the community. It is the silence around this matter that I confront with my research.

While it has almost always pursued a male agenda (as it is considered the public domain), over the years, Indian South African theatre practitioners have transformed the role of theatre to cater to the needs of the community. In my research, I have analysed three South African plays, written by Indian South African male playwrights, who have turned the public spotlight of the stage onto the private experiences of domestic abuse. The three plays are Ismail Mahomed's *Purdah* (1993), Robin Singh's *Till Death do us Part* (1993) and Vivian Moodley's *A Cookie in the Kitchen* (2002). While written almost a decade apart, all three playwrights' perceptions around how domestic abuse is experienced in the Indian South African community, are strikingly similar. Through textual analysis, I interrogate how these playwrights have chosen to dramatise domestic abuse. In understanding the theatrical representations of the violence - influenced by social, economic and cultural factors - interpretive assessments can be made about how it is experienced in homes in the Indian South African community.

It is my belief that the medium of theatre can act as a catalyst for social change; in this regard, I use the theories of Bertolt Brecht's Epic Theatre to support my argument. Brecht believed that an active audience could be propelled to make the changes in their own lives that they wanted to see reflected on stage. My intention is to illustrate how the plays engage difficult questions around the gendered power structures enforced by the community, challenging systems like patriarchy. Through such experiences, I hope that Indian South African women may claim the agency necessary to shatter the silence.

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## INTRODUCTION

I am an Indian South African woman who was born and raised in Durban, KwaZulu-Natal, the place I have called 'home' for nearly all my life. Durban is the city with the highest concentration of Indians outside of India (Khan, 2017), and the lens through which I viewed the world was highly influenced by this filter. However, while the Indian South African community may appear homogeneous from an external perspective, in reality there are many cultural, linguistic, and religious divisions, which play a role in the ongoing construction of identity. My identity as an Indian South African woman has been shaped not only by the country in which I was born, but by the culture in which I was raised, where issues around gender, religion, family and community all play significant roles in negotiating that identity.

In this negotiation, my first challenge is gender-related, and specifically focussed on imbalanced power structures and gender expectations within the Indian South African community as a result of entrenched patriarchal attitudes. This imbalance of power and prevalence of patriarchy is central to my research. As an Indian South African woman, I hold citizenship in South Africa but my ancestral roots lie in India. Not only am I bound by societal gender implications as a woman, I am also hindered by the fact that my identity is fractured by the duality of being both a South African and a product of the Indian diaspora. I am thus triply challenged: by my gender, by the framing notions of patriotism and nationalism, and by the implications of being a product of the Indian diaspora and the cultural restrictions thereof.

Primarily, the cultural restrictions alluded to above relate to religion, which plays a significant role in the Indian diaspora and is the second element affecting my identity. The three primary religions followed by Indians in South Africa are Hinduism, Christianity and Islam. I was raised in a Hindu home; from the outside, this might appear to be an homogeneous classification, but within the category 'Hindu' there are many divisions fraught with internal tensions associated with language, caste<sup>1</sup> and cultural beliefs. As

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<sup>1</sup> India's caste system is a complex system of social structuring that has endured for centuries. It divides Hindus into four distinct categories along which social hierarchy is determined. Privileges are accorded to higher castes, while lower castes are often discriminated against. According to the BBC A (2019), "caste has dictated

Gopalan (2010, 7) notes, “the early indentured labourers lacked a ‘common’ Hindu identity as they arrived from various parts of India, bringing with them a myriad of traditions, languages, castes, and beliefs.” This lack of homogeneity has persisted through the generations and continues even today in that “South African Hindus [...] can be divided into four linguistic groups [...] which can be further divided along other communal lines. And there are caste and class divisions as well. [...] These groups see themselves as different on a number of levels.” (Gopalan 2010, 9). Growing up, I was aware of the fractured nature not only of the Hindu community but of the tensions I witnessed that existed within the larger Indian South African community<sup>2</sup> related to differences such as language, religion and caste. Being raised in the Indian community has taught me that such anxieties and fractures are only evident to someone who witnesses the community from within.

Despite the fault-lines in the community, there are nonetheless shared experiences and ideas that frame the Indian South African community as a single unit, a fact that also produces its own challenges. The Indian South African community appears extremely tight-knit and closed to outsiders, as a way of shielding engrained cultural practices from external criticism and judgement. This means that without being privy to life within the Indian South African community, outsiders are seemingly oblivious that such tensions, fractions and anxieties that exist. As I grew older, I became more aware of how firmly entrenched these tensions were amongst individuals, and it compounded the divisive nature of the community as a whole. However, in the face of perceived rejection by the rest of South African society, these divisions became subsumed, as the community turned inward, depending on each other for support. It is important to acknowledge the duality evident in the Indian South African community: while there are tensions that exist which divide the community, there are equally aspects of unification where the community operates as a whole, especially when viewed from the outside.

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almost every aspect of Hindu religious and social life. [...] Rural communities have long been arranged on the basis of castes - the upper and lower castes almost always lived in segregated colonies, the water wells were not shared [...] and one could marry only within one's caste”.

<sup>2</sup> The term ‘Indian South African community’ is used in this dissertation to refer to the entirety of the Indian community that resides in South Africa. It is an umbrella term under which there are many fractures and internal divisions. While these tensions exist within the community, the term is used to reference the group at large inclusive of its complexities and idiosyncrasies.

For the most part, Indian South Africans felt like they were constantly on the margins of South African society, looking in, striving for equal recognition and assimilation; that it was not forthcoming, resulted in the Indian South African community turning inward, forced to rely on one another to develop a deep sense of community and identity, and in so doing covering the existing and already entrenched internal fissures and fractures. Among the fractures hidden in the overt adoption of a communal identity were issues related to domestic experience and gender roles within the community. A consequence of turning inward connects to keeping communal idiosyncrasies and collective immoralities largely hidden from observers, which is a key consideration for my research. It made me wonder what else the community was holding onto and it made me question what was being hidden.

This is the context from which my research emerged. Indian South Africans have endured historical power struggles, first between the indentured Indians and the British coloniser<sup>3</sup> and thereafter, between Indian South Africans and the Apartheid authorities. As a result, the community's fractured sense of diasporic identity has been affected, with serious consequences. The challenges are further compounded by the internal fissures that exist within the community itself along religious and linguistic lines, to name but two factors. Among these consequences are social ills and unspoken taboos existing within the community that are very rarely confronted, or even acknowledged. I have witnessed the impact that vices such as alcoholism, gambling addiction and drug addiction have had on families in the community, very nearly tearing them apart, or pulling at the seams with such might, I wondered how anyone could retain their sanity under such trying circumstances. And yet, the conversations were hushed, almost as though speaking about the vice aloud would force family members to usher in an unwelcome guest, as though their quiet tones would silence the visitor of vice who stood at the threshold of the family home.

Domestic abuse is one of these offences. The significant difference with domestic abuse, in my opinion, is that while the other vices mentioned above stem from addictions or the abuse of an intoxicant, domestic abuse relates to a combination of factors including an

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<sup>3</sup> In this dissertation, I have chosen to use British spelling except for quotations, where the original spelling is retained.

attitudinal mindset and socio-economic conditions, where “socioeconomic status is a factor that influences the occurrence of domestic violence. Although it may not directly cause domestic violence, there is an association between the two” (Lubker 2004, 90). Based on my own understanding, domestic abuse manifests as a way to exert power over a situation or a person; these sentiments are echoed by Bonnie Brandl (2000, 40 – 41) who says abusers

hurt [...] people to exert power and control. [...] To get their own needs met, believing they are entitled to use any means necessary to achieve their goals. The abusers feel justified, believing they have a moral right to control their victims. Most hold rigid stereotypes about the people over whom they have power.

In my experience, an engrained attitude of patriarchy and patriarchal practices in the Indian South African community prioritises male dominance in the home environment thus giving rise to incidences of domestic abuse, as highlighted by Boshoff (2005, 97):

Young women and men both have strong ideas about the place of patriarchal values in their and their families’ lives. Young women in particular are ‘looked after’ carefully by parents, and their brothers are given much more freedom of movement and behaviour generally.

This example resonates with my personal experience in the community, where, for years, I have witnessed how the male stance and viewpoint is valued and is regarded as the voice of authority in the Indian South African community. I have seen numerous incidents where the male of the home is considered superior to the woman. Very often, based on gender dynamics alone, males in the Indian home are treated with something close to reverence, regardless of age. I have seen men and boys being served first, while the women and young girls have confined themselves to the kitchen in order to cater adequately to the dietary needs of the males. I have seen women running between the kitchen and dining room table to fill a glass, so as not to disturb the male meal-eating process. I have seen boys being given preference over their mother or female elder when sitting in a car. Instances like these trigger a deep anger within me. That such patriarchal perspectives continue to be allowed to flourish generation after generation does not sit well with me. I cannot accept that the needs and wants of men are prioritised over women due to a natural selection of chromosomes. I can tolerate even less that I have seen Indian South African women participate in upholding these entrenched power systems, to their own detriment. Due to the engrained patriarchal attitude in the Indian South African community, in homes where domestic violence takes place, women are not given the agency they need to express their

discontent. As a result, the needs of the woman are largely ignored in favour of the predominant male figure in their lives, usually a husband or father.

As such, my research interrogates the construction of Indian South African identity in relation to notions of domestic abuse, as it is represented theatrically, in terms of (though not limited to) the diasporic experience. I examine three plays in which there are characters who experience social, political and cultural burdens similar to my own. While it is clear that there are distinctions between life and art, and in particular the representation of life in art, my focus in this dissertation is to interrogate the way in which portraits of Indian South African women's lives may be drawn through theatrical representation. I aim to show how the fractured sense of Indian South African identity has had an impact on how domestic abuse is experienced in the private domain of homes within the community. I will further explore how entrenched patriarchal attitudes within the Indian South African community have generally prevented victims of the violence from challenging it, which perpetuates the continuation of the cycle of abuse.

I have always believed that theatre is a powerful medium to encourage transformation and change. In this dissertation, I analyse three play texts to explore, within a framework of diasporic identity construction, to determine whether – and how – the constructed characters in the plays offer authentic representations of individuals within the Indian South African community. Their authenticity and relatability as 'real' Indian South African women is key to being able to draw conclusions about how insidious domestic abuse is within the Indian South African community, and how theatre as a medium offers one means to confront the community's deafening silence around the issue. I will also be exploring the reasons and motivations of each playwright related to his respective play.

The three texts I have selected for analysis are Ismail Mahomed's *Purdah* (1993), Robin Singh's *Till Death do us Part* (1993) and Vivian Moodley's *A Cookie in the Kitchen* (2002), each of which addresses the issue of domestic abuse in a different way. These play texts represent the voices of the victims in the community as perceived by their Indian South African (male) authors. Each of the playwrights address and deal with notions of abuse as they understand it; in doing so, a space is created, through the medium of theatre, to allow

the voices of victims of abuse within this societal microcosm to be heard, as well to offer a vehicle for social conscientisation.

I will be engaging the theories of Bertolt Brecht's Epic Theatre because Brecht believed, through theatre, an audience has the potential to bring about social change. Brecht did not believe that theatre should be a passive experience for an audience; rather, he wanted audiences to engage critically with what was being depicted in the hopes that they would question the action on stage and, in turn, question the circumstances which they had taken for granted in their lives. Similarly, I will argue that theatre can be used as a tool to confront and expose a social ill that exists in the Indian South African community.

My central research question is: How have three male playwrights within the Indian South African community represented the issue of domestic abuse in each of their plays to illustrate how domestic abuse is experienced within the community?

Thus, the primary objectives of my research are as follows:

1. To assess how attitudes of male superiority and patriarchy are depicted in each of the plays.
2. To determine whether or not the domestic abuse depicted in each of the plays is challenged by any of the victims.
3. To establish why theatre is a relevant medium to expose a social ill within the Indian South African community.

The research questions that follow are:

1. In each of the plays, are patriarchal attitudes evident within the dynamics of each couple and how does this impact the depictions of domestic abuse?
2. In the plays, how do the victims respond to the abuse?
3. How can theatrical representations of domestic abuse enable engagements around the issue, which may otherwise not be addressed in the private domain?

As my research is located within the Indian South African community, it is imperative for me to set up the context of the Indian community within the landscape of South Africa. Chapter One thus explores indentured labourers and the emergence of an Indian diaspora in South Africa. It establishes the historical struggles Indians have faced since arriving in South Africa



more than a century and a half ago, and their impact on the creation of a diasporic Indian South African identity. It also focusses on how Indian women have, for generations, been disempowered, as explained by Krijay Govender (1999, 12):

Unchallenged capitalist and religious perspectives [...] has ensured the subservient roles of *Indian* women in the South African context. Cultural and religious practices keep women within the private domain of the home, whilst capitalism has devalued the home.

This statement echoes that it has been easy for Indian South African men to enforce dominance over Indian South African women, thus highlighting the entrenched attitude of patriarchy. In relation to gendered identity construction, I will be engaging the theories of Jana Evans Braziel (2008), Robin Cohen (1997), William Safran (1991), Kathryn Pillay (2014), Bhikhu Parekh (2008), Pallavi Rastogi (2008) and Priscilla Boshoff (2005).

It is my belief that theatre is a means through which social ills such as domestic abuse can be confronted, and Chapter Two speaks directly to this stance. In this chapter, I attempt to outline the significance of theatre within the Indian South African community from the time of indenture. Historically, theatre has played a pivotal role in the lives of Indian South Africans, who have transformed and adapted genres to meet the needs of the community. I further argue that through the chosen play texts, the confronting of such taboo subjects like domestic abuse can take place.

Chapter Three is my methodology chapter. I adopted a qualitative approach to the textual analysis of three play texts, *Till Death do us Part* (Robin Singh, 1993), *A Cookie in the Kitchen* (Vivian Moodley, 2002), and *Purdah* (Ismail Mahomed, 1993). I conduct a comparative study of the plays using close reading and textual analysis to make interpretive assessments within a theoretical framework that engages diasporic, gendered identity construction and its impact on the representations of domestic abuse evident in the plays. Since my study focuses on the representations of domestic abuse located within the three Indian South African plays, the information cannot be quantified, thus it must be analysed qualitatively.

Chapters Four, Five and Six are the textual analyses of each of the plays. The focus of my textual analysis engages both the content and the form of the plays, and similarities and/or differences between their stylistic approaches. The final component of the analysis is

interpretation. I conducted close readings of the plays which have been complemented by data obtained through interviews with each of the three playwrights in question. My aim was to examine the theatrical depiction of domestic abuse within the Indian South African community in each of the plays, and how these representations reflect and/or challenge existing attitudes of patriarchy and victimhood within that context.

Chapter Seven is the comparative chapter, where I explore the main similarities and/or differences between the texts, taking all the previous discussions into consideration and tying all the texts together. Despite the plays being written at different points in the history of the Indian South African community (two in 1993 and one in 2002), it is alarming to realise that the experience of domestic abuse remains largely the same. Based on statistics released as recently as 2018, from official sources like Statistics South Africa, the violence inflicted on women continues unabated across the country. From these numbers I infer that the needs and rights of women are still regarded as being subordinate to men.

The final chapter is the conclusion where the closing argument is made for the use of theatre as a medium to highlight and confront social ills in the Indian South African community, specifically focusing on notions of domestic abuse. I will highlight that the nature of diasporic Indian identity has contributed to notions of male superiority and patriarchy in the community. This has, in turn, resulted in the continuation of problems like domestic abuse over generations. Its perpetuation has been at least partially enabled by the very individuals who face the violence directly, the victimised women. In order for the issue to be acknowledged in public spaces, the community's deafening silence around the matter needs to be challenged - the theatre offers one medium to do so. This is why each of the three chosen plays become significant as a means of turning the spotlight on a rarely acknowledged issue in the community.

As a way of highlighting the reality of the situation and extreme form of violence to which women are subjected in South Africa, each of my chapters have been named after victims of such incidents of violence. All the names I have used are of women who were allegedly killed by their partners in 2020. These names are taken from news sources that have reported these crimes, and as such are in the public domain. Using their names as chapter

titles is a way of illustrating that the issue of domestic violence has very real consequences if it goes unaddressed and unchallenged. Further, it is a way to honour these women who allegedly fell victim to their violent partners.

## KWASA ZOZO LUGANO:<sup>4</sup>

### 1. INDENTURED LABOUR AND DIASPORA

The knowledge that this was the last they would see of their homeland, created an atmosphere of truculence and uncertainty. [...] No matter how hard the times at home may have been, in the ashes of every past there were a few cinders of memory that glowed with warmth – and now, those embers of recollection took on a new life, in the light of which their presence here, in the belly of a ship that was about to be cast into an abyss, seemed incomprehensible, a thing that could not be explained except as a lapse from sanity.

(Ghosh 2008, 364 – 365)

This dissertation seeks to explore how stories about domestic abuse are represented in Indian South African theatre. Since the context of the community, I believe, impacts significantly on this subject, it needs to be understood. In this chapter, therefore, I will establish the history and background of the Indian community in South Africa. In particular, I want to illustrate that women in the Indian South African community have very rarely, if ever, had power over their own lives, and have always had to accommodate the needs and wants of those in charge - powerful men, including their husbands; as Smitha RadhaKrishnan (2005, 271) states, “women perform various kinds of culture, which men oversee and organise.” Because of entrenched gender dynamics, and patriarchy in particular, women have had to yield to engrained power structures determined by men. This power has been exploited and manipulated, and women have been on the receiving end of various forms of abuse as a result. It is the representation of the domestic aspect of this abuse that I aim to interrogate further in my research when analysing the three play texts.

I aim to demonstrate how the changing political climate in the country affected Indian women’s agency both within their community and in the broader narrative of South African society. I do this to show how, since the time of their arrival in South Africa, Indian women have never been in the driver’s seat, so to speak, where their lives are concerned. This is echoed by Krijay Govender who states that “gender-related issues have always been secondary to issues of race and class in South Africa” (1999, 12). Indian women have always

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<sup>4</sup> Twenty-year old Kwasa Zozo Lugano, was allegedly stabbed to death by her 19-year-old ex-boyfriend in 2020 in the Eastern Cape (Nemakonde, 2020).

been at the mercy of those in power, those making decisions on their behalf, whether it was the British through the system of indenture, or the white man via Apartheid, or even the patriarchal norms that continue to prevail in the Indian community long after the advent of democracy in 1994. Govender (1999, 13) adds these norms of patriarchy are largely maintained through cultural and religious experiences in the Indian community:

[U]nquestioned cultural and religious practices and the marginalisation of gender as a category for liberation are in part responsible for South African Indian women's naturalisation of their roles. Furthermore these roles are located within practices of patriarchy.

Since the notion of patriarchy is central to my research, it is necessary for me to unpack the meaning and implications of the term, especially in relation to the Indian South African community. I use the term to reference the imbalanced power structures embedded in the Indian South African community that privilege and prioritise the rights, needs and wants of men over that of women. For me, "patriarchy is about the social relations of power between men and women. [...] It is a system for maintaining class, gender, racial, and heterosexual privilege and the status quo of power [...] to perpetuate inequality" (APIGBV). The definition of patriarchy is further elaborated on by Abeda Sultana (2012), who states:

Patriarchy is the prime obstacle to womens [sic] advancement and development. Despite differences in levels of domination the broad principles remain the same, i.e. men are in control. [...] Patriarchal institutions and social relations are responsible for the inferior or secondary status of women. Patriarchal society gives absolute priority to men and to some extent limits womens [sic] human rights also. Patriarchy refers to the male domination both in public and private spheres.

This explanation is relevant for my research in that the patriarchal practices in the Indian South African community operate not only within the private sphere of the home, but the public sphere of (though not limited to) theatre, where women's voices have been historically marginalised.

It is also apparent, I suggest, that an individual's age does not determine the level at which patriarchal practices operate in the Indian South African community. Patriarchal practices are enforced regardless of age; for example, a young boy is generally given the same, if not greater (in some instances), privileges as a man, by virtue of gender. In the Indian South African community, defined gender roles have been prevalent since the time of indenture

(as will be elaborated on later in this chapter), and these engrained patriarchal practices have meant that women have always been disempowered in comparison to their male counterparts. Women's subjugation is impacted by Indian South African diasporic identity creation (as explained below), and reinforced using cultural and traditional practices, since "patriarchy is a social structure in which men are considered to have a monopoly on power and women are expected to submit" (Lumen Learning). Entrenched patriarchal practices that operate within the Indian South African community have created silences around issues like domestic abuse. I propose that theatre is a vehicle through which these silences can be shattered. However, research dealing with the Indian experience in South Africa in relation to theatre is limited; as Betty Govinden (in Moodley 2013: 2008, 112) notes, "South African writers of Indian extraction seem to have been marginalised in the Black-White dichotomy that pervades the South African literary landscape."

Before engaging with any of the major theories related to this dissertation, it is important to locate the context in which those theories become relevant. It is futile to discuss diasporic identity theory and the creation thereof, gender theory, or cultural theory (amongst others that will be utilised), without first establishing the history and context in which these theories are couched and thus ensuring their relevance to the issues which will be addressed in this dissertation. To this end, I will briefly elaborate on the history of the Indian South African community so that the context and the environment in which they find themselves today, may be fully understood.

## **EMPTY PROMISES**

Before 1860, Indians were foreigners to the landscape of South Africa, and more specifically what was then known as Natal, and is now KwaZulu-Natal.<sup>5</sup> Not indigenous to the country, Indians were brought to South Africa as labourers, largely lured here under the false pretence of a 'good life' promised by the British. The payment terms were good, as were the

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<sup>5</sup> Following the ANC's victory in the first democratic elections on 27 April 1994, and the abolition of Apartheid, Natal was officially renamed KwaZulu-Natal as a way of honouring both ethnic groups who had impacted this region. 'KwaZulu' references the Zulu people (who constitute the majority ethnic group in the region), while Natal was a name given by the Afrikaners. (Tourism KwaZulu-Natal B, 2021)

promises related to dwelling and food. According to the official notice issued to Indians intending to emigrate to Natal, the terms and conditions were as follows:

You will have a house rent free to live in, with plenty of garden ground to cultivate at your leisure, and care is taken not to separate families and relatives [...] there is an abundance of good water, fruits and vegetable. If you are ill, medical attendance, medicines, and nourishment, are provided free of charge. You will have to work for five years, six days in the week, for nine hours, between sunrise and sunset - all Sundays and holidays excepted. (Desai and Vahed 2007, 96 - 97)

From the notice above, it seems the labourers were being offered holistically a reasonably good deal. For many, what they were being promised appeared on paper to be far better than the lives they would be leaving behind.

In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, South Africa was a part of the British Empire and the British had discovered the financial benefit of cultivating sugar in the KwaZulu-Natal area via enormous sugar cane plantations. Initially, these plantations were staffed with indigenous Zulu labour; however, the Zulus were increasingly unhappy working under white leadership and their refusal to do so meant that sugar cane could no longer be harvested (Govender and Naidoo 2010, 6 – 8). With necessary labour in short supply, the British sought an alternative source for cheap labour. As slavery had been officially abolished,<sup>6</sup> they needed a new model that would allow them to legally fulfil their labour needs, and thus the term ‘indenture’ was born. India, another British colony, was used as the picking-ground to source this labour. Potential labourers were wooed with false promises of a life of little to no hardship. And thus began the journey of Indian indentured labourers travelling across the ocean from India. The first transport ship, the SS. Belvedere, left the port of Calcutta on the 4<sup>th</sup> October 1860, and the SS. Truro left Madras a week later on the 12 October (Desai and Vahed 1997, 66); each ship carried 342 passengers on board (Tourism KwaZulu-Natal A). The SS Truro reached Natal’s shores first, arriving on the 16<sup>th</sup> November 1860, while the Belvedere took an additional ten days to arrive.

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<sup>6</sup> The Act for the Abolition of Slavery in the British Empire was passed into law in 1833 (African Democracy Encyclopedia Project, 2009).

## INDENTURE

The initial period for which an Indian had to indenture was five years; thereafter, they were given three options: return to India (at their own expense), reindenture for another five years (which would grant them a free return passage), or try to earn a living in South Africa as a 'free Indian'<sup>7</sup> (Desai and Vahed, 2007). Desai and Vahed (2007, 323) explain the complexity of this choice further:

Returning "home" was a path riddled with pitfalls. The years of indenture fundamentally altered the lives of migrants. The plantation became the "village", and in this village, traditions from leisure to religious practices and eating habits, while relying on memory from "back home", were just as often transformed as replicated.

Based on my readings of accounts of the labourers, it is my belief that most of those who indentured hoped to return to India after their period of indenture was over. They had hoped to have accumulated sufficient wealth to take back home and perhaps secure a better life for themselves and their families still in India. Without realising it though, the notion of home and their subsequent return to India was forever altered when they crossed the ocean and spent many months aboard a ship travelling to South Africa. These sentiments are echoed below:

Dreams of a better life and the opportunity to save money and return to the village as 'success stories' were not to be for many who returned 'home' with less than they had started out with, and found that home was no longer the place they had left. Neither were they the same people. (Human Sciences Research Council 2021)

Some of the reasons for that alteration may be attributed to the journey itself; for one thing, rigidly enforced caste rules had to change onboard to ensure survival. People from lower castes perhaps saw the opportunity of leaving India as a means to free themselves from the caste system and gain a chance at a life where they were not confined to the bottom rung of the social ladder. When they arrived on the shores of Natal, there was no one to ensure that the caste system was imposed once again. Life had changed for all who undertook that journey and there was no going back. Desai and Vahed (2007, 177) elaborate on this:

While caste may have been perceived as rigid in India, it was fluid when it travelled. Given the huge gender imbalance and common conditions of labour and living, central

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<sup>7</sup> Indians who had worked out their second period of indenture (as per their contract) were considered 'free' to earn a living independently. If they chose to forego their free return passage, they would receive a plot of land in exchange.



pillars of caste like endogamy, heredity, and status were compromised. [...] There were no mechanisms to enforce compliance.

As the excerpt above illustrates, aspects of life in India, as it was remembered, were transformed in the plantations. While they were adapted to suit the conditions of indenture, they still allowed Indians to feel connected to the Motherland.<sup>8</sup>

As history has shown, the conditions of indenture were brutally horrific and over the next three decades, while indenture was thriving, labourers would have needed outlets of leisure, activities that provided an escape from their everyday routines and the harshness of life. Many individuals who could not bear the atrocities, committed suicide as a means of escaping, and “Natal had the second highest suicide rate amongst the colonies that received indentured labour” (Govender and Naidoo 2010, 42). Suicide was not, however, the only way to escape the harsh realities of indenture; many used theatrical traditions, sport, alcohol and cannabis as alternative escape routes.

One of the traditions of leisure was the re-enactment of the religious texts of Hinduism, in particular, the *Mahabharata*<sup>9</sup> and the *Ramayana*<sup>10</sup> (Desai and Vahed 2007). The reason for the popularity of the re-enactment of the *Ramayana* was because in the religious text, Prince Rama was exiled from his home for a period of fourteen years, and his wife Sita and brother Lakshman chose to accompany him during the course of his exile. Similarly, the indentured labourers saw themselves as being exiled from their homeland, enduring what Prince Rama, Sita and Lakshman had to endure as far as leaving behind their loved ones and having to begin a new life elsewhere (Desai and Vahed 2007). They may have resonated with what Prince Rama had to endure in terms of being away from their home initially, but

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<sup>8</sup> The alternate term used to refer to India by Indian South Africans. This term also maintains and reinforces an imaginary relationship with India as the inference is that India is the metaphorical ‘mother’ who will always be open and welcome to receive her children, regardless of how much they distance themselves from her. I have chosen to capitalise ‘Motherland’ as a way of using the term interchangeably with India.

<sup>9</sup> The *Mahabharata*, written in India, is one of the central texts of the Hindu faith. *Mahabharata* loosely translates to: *Tale of the Bharata Dynasty*, and is a mythological retelling of the history of ancient India. The text itself comprises more than 1.8 million words, contained in over 74,000 distinct verses, which makes it one of the longest poems in the world (Wise Geek).

<sup>10</sup> The *Ramayana*, an ancient Sanskrit epic, recounts Prince Rama's quest to rescue his beloved wife Sita from the clutches of Ravana with the help of an army of monkeys. It comprises 24,000 verses in seven cantos, and contains the teachings of the very ancient Hindu sages. It is one of the most important literary works of ancient India, and has become central to dramatic traditions ranging from dance-dramas to village theatre (British Library).

over time I believe, the labourers became so enmeshed in the fabric of South African life that returning home became a nostalgic fantasy never to be fulfilled, as they had created a new home in South Africa, despite the hardships. As Kathryn Pillay (2014, 129) articulates, “although India was viewed as a ‘Mother land’, South Africa was considered ‘home.’” In this way, the relationship between the original home, India, and the new home, South Africa, irrevocably changed.

In the few hours they had available for recreational activities, the indentured labourers used various group activities to socialise and bond, prime among them was theatre. Thus, theatre and the re-enactment of religious texts played a pivotal role in the lives of the indentured labourers not only for leisure and entertainment but for social bonding too (Desai and Vahed 2007). It is interesting that despite the hardships the Indian indentured labourers endured, they found outlets for pleasure and leisure. That theatre was such an intrinsic part of this social aspect, evidences how performance and enactment were, to the labourers, a key means of conveying their emotions and sentiments to one another and also creating a bond between them. From the earliest days of their arrival in the country, theatre was a means not only to create joy but was employed to convey deeper meanings that resonated amongst the labourers and illustrated how they felt.

The working conditions for women during indenture were brutal as evidenced below:

Women were particularly harshly treated. Polkinghorne presented evidence showing that those with suckling children were out in the fields for eleven hours. When he raised this [...] he was told that Indians had never been “so well treated...”. Overworking women was a long-standing practice. (Desai and Vahed 2007, 137 – 138)

Women and children who did not/could not work were denied their rations and/or wages, regardless of what the factors were that inhibited their ability to work, including pregnancy. Whilst they were initially made to work until the seventh month of pregnancy, once denied their rations due to their inability to work, expectant mothers had no option but to work well into their ninth month. Women thus found themselves in a particularly vulnerable position, as “indentured workers and particularly women formed the lowest and most exploitable part of Natal’s labour force” (Govender & Naidoo 2010, 42). Abuse against women (including physical and sexual) by those in power, was a common practice; from

Sirdars<sup>11</sup> to managers, “women’s burdens stretched beyond issues of sustenance and labour. Many were subject to sexual violence and an unforgiving dismissive system” (Desai and Vahed 2007, 18). Effectively, anyone who wielded power (especially over women) took advantage of their position, as is highlighted by Desai and Vahed (2007, 201), saying “Whites ‘merely demonstrated their contempt for the Indians by taking their women casually.’” These accounts demonstrate the lack of agency that women had over their own lives.

The indentured labour system was manipulated to allow women to be exploited and their needs to be secondary to those of men. Once the colonial system of indenture ended, it was replaced by the system of apartheid, overseen by the Afrikaners, yet the entrenched subservience of women remained, regardless of what the political system reflected. This highlights that while there have been political, economic and social changes within the country, the enforced structures of male dominance in the community have ensured that Indian women in South Africa have rarely been in a position of power where their lives are concerned. They have found themselves vulnerable to the demands of the men to whom they answered. But it was not just the men in charge who exploited their helplessness.

Women were not spared abuse by their husbands,<sup>12</sup> as many women fell victim to extreme forms of violence which manifested as wife-killings. There are a few potential explanations for wife-killings offered by Desai and Vahed (2007). The first is the problem of a gender-imbalance. Far fewer women than men indentured and this created a great deal of sexual tension among (heterosexual)<sup>13</sup> men as adultery was rife. Many too had no option but to prostitute themselves when their husbands were ill and thus unable to work.

The second potential explanation offered for wife-killings, as stated by Desai and Vahed (2007, 200), was “colonial officials, planters, and missionaries held that the phenomenon of

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<sup>11</sup> Men who were seen as the ‘indentured’s own’ as they were Indian, spoke the language(s) of the labourers and were often of a higher caste. They were given authority (including the use of physical violence) by the sugar barons to keep the indentured labourers ‘in-check.’

<sup>12</sup> More than seven decades later, this is still accurate as a 2018 statistic reveals: “over half (61%) of women killed by men in the UK in 2018 were killed by a current or ex partner” (BBC B, 2020). While that study was located in the United Kingdom, I believe South Africa may reflect similar, if not worse, patterns of violence against women at the hands of her intimate partner.

<sup>13</sup> While it is beyond the scope of my research - which is located in the Indian South African community, specifically focused on the gendered power dynamics between men and women - in discussions of gender it is necessary to acknowledge related areas affected by patriarchal oppression such as homosexuality.

wife-murders was transplanted from India where men were predisposed to violence to resolve disputes.” This statement throws into focus the belief that Indian men were inherently violent and brought that violence with them from India to South Africa. The third and final explanation offered for wife-murders was that indentured labourers lacked a support system and the structure of plantations was “authoritarian” (Desai and Vahed 2007). Fatima Meer (1972, 37) summarises the situation women found themselves in as follows:

Because of their scarcity, they became focal points of male sexual jealousies, and so the source of evil-male conflict and violence. They were often obliged, out of economic need or fear, to cohabit with a number of men simultaneously, with-out the protection of marriage, and for the explicit purpose of gratifying male lust.

The issue of wife-killings is pertinent for me in that it illustrates how some Indian South African men, since the period of indenture, believed they were justified in venting their frustrations on the women in their lives. Their violence was so damaging that it often led to the death of their wives. This level of violence and the engrained power dynamics of women being subservient to men are critical ideas in my research. Especially given that indenture was abolished more than a century and a half ago, yet playwrights writing at the start of South Africa’s democracy, and even post-2000, are still grappling with the same gendered power struggles and violence. It highlights how fiercely engrained these attitudes and mindsets are between men and women in the Indian South African community.

Despite the hardship that the indentured labourers endured, South Africa became their new home and they envisioned building their futures in this land, as can be evidenced by the many schools and religious buildings that were built, and the low numbers of labourers who chose to return to India even after the agreement between India and Britain was terminated on 1 July 1911 (Desai and Vahed 2007, 345). Many who chose to go back to India, later decided to return to South Africa, having become familiar with the colony and thus preferring it. As Desai and Vahed (2007, 400) explain it, “the imaginary homeland became all too real for many, and perhaps also brought home the reason why indentured labour was something that they or their fathers or mothers had engaged with in the first place (economic, social or cultural degradation).” Returning to India forced them to confront the harsh realities of the economic situations (for example) that had been left behind to begin with. South Africa had offered an opportunity for growth and development, if not

economically then personally. Indentured labourers were no longer the same people they were when they had left India, the circumstances in which they found themselves in South Africa and the challenges they had overcome had moulded them into different people but it still allowed them to reconstruct nostalgic imaginings of the home they had left behind in the Motherland. As Desai and Vahed (2007, 400) note:

Many of the indentured constructed an 'imaginary' homeland 'from the space of distance to compensate for a loss occasioned by the unspeakable trauma' of the break with India. This imaginary world was often at odds with the reality of village life in India itself. [...] These were an important refuge for Indians as they continued the struggle against the worst excesses of White rule.

### **DIASPORIC IDENTITY CREATION**

From the many constructions in South Africa built to recreate Indian traditions as well as religious and cultural symbols such as temples and mosques, it is clear the Indian indentured labourers tried desperately to cling to their roots and traditions from the Motherland, and this is one of the many reasons Indian South Africans can be defined and categorised as being part of a diasporic community.

Diaspora refers to (a group of) people who no longer reside in their homeland but occupy residency elsewhere (Brazier 2008). William Safran (in Brazier [ed] 2008: 1991, 83 – 84) states further that there are six factors contributing to identity construction in the diaspora. These include:

1. Residency away from the homeland;
2. A firm dream of return that is fastidiously maintained;
3. A relationship with the host nation that is constantly being forged;
4. Memories regarding such a homeland are held collectively;
5. Integration and assimilation into the host nation will never be fully realised; and
6. The security of the homeland is the responsibility of the diasporic community.

Diasporic scholar Robin Cohen (in Brazier [ed] 2008: 1997, 24 – 25) adds four more factors stating that while enforced/forced removal from the homeland is often the cause of a diaspora, it is not the only manner in which a diasporic community can be formed; it can be created voluntarily as well, as is evidenced by the Indian labourers who chose to leave their homeland. Secondly, he states that diasporas need not necessarily be viewed with negative connotations. The third point Cohen notes is the group's rejection of full assimilation into the present (and, by implication, the host nation) and that an unyielding connection to the

past (home land) is what comprises “diasporic consciousness.” Finally, he adds that diasporic communities share a mutual consciousness with members of the same ethnicity elsewhere in the world.

From the definitions outlined by both Cohen (in Braziel [ed] 2008: 1997) and Safran (in Braziel [ed] 2008: 1991) above, it can be determined that the Indian indentured labourers found themselves unwittingly becoming members of the greater diasporic community when they left India for South Africa. Based on my understanding of the Indian indentured labourers, derived from readings and accounts of their experiences, I believe that many had no intention of making South Africa ‘home’; like the colonial powers, they too believed they would return to their families in India after their period of indenture. However, many also saw the opportunity of indenture as a way of bettering their lives in a new country; as Pillay (2014, 217) describes it, “ownership of land in Natal and prospects of wealth were the main reasons that enticed Indians into the colony.” Whatever their reasons for staying, no one had anticipated that the notion of ‘home’ would never again be the same for the indentured labourers. The colonial powers did not anticipate the number of Indians who would not want to return to India, since the laws of indenture “were designed to send or compel people to return to a land that had since become foreign to most and who many had never even set foot on before” (Pillay 2014, 129). The racial category ‘Indian,’ had never before existed in South Africa, and yet, due to the effect of importing indentured labour (as of November 1860), this classification would become fixed within the racial landscape of South Africa.

The British colonial powers were not willing to confer any citizenship rights on the labourers—referred to first as ‘Coolies’<sup>14</sup> and later as ‘Indians’—regardless of what they were called or for how long they had lived in the colony. Pillay (2014, 134 – 139) explains:

Nationality and citizenship was viewed as the exclusive domain of Europeans and all those of colour were excluded from the discourse of the nation. [...] Indian immigrants

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<sup>14</sup> The term used to refer to Indians until 1872. Thereafter the term ‘Indian’ was legislated (Pillay, 2014: 139). The term ‘Indian’ references the origins of the community based on a geographical location. Considering the term was only legislated more than a decade after the arrival of the first indentured labourers, being categorised by their country of origin was a means to further highlight their otherness. The term ‘Indian’ emphasised that they were of foreign descent and therefore did not belong to the country.

and their descendants were still viewed as belonging to another country, as foreigners, and in some instances as immigrants in the land of their birth.

It was against this backdrop, that Indian indentured labourers, now a diasporic community, found themselves having to create their unique Indian South African identity. There were many factors that influenced the shaping of their collective and individual identities, including nationality, race, religious and cultural orientations, education and languages, as Desai and Vahed (2007, 400 – 401) elaborate:

Progressive changes in the law after 1897 which, in their most basic form sought to send “Indians” back home, and other more personal reasons, saw many of the migrants return to India [...] The “comfort zone” of limbo was over and the ex-indentured had to choose between staying in India or return to South Africa [...] This was the moment when identities, in effect become dichotomised: either they were “Indian” of whatever background who returned to India, or “Indian” of whatever background who would remain in South Africa and establish their status and identity in the limited and limiting ways accessible to the ex-indentured.

As this dissertation will be dealing the theatrical portrayal of domestic abuse within the Indian South African community, it is important to understand how the depiction of this subject matter may be influenced by the fractured identity creation of this community. As a diasporic community, the Indian South African community is in a state of flux, reflecting continuous duality as far as identity construction goes. There is a dual need to identify as South African as well as Indian, and this complexity is constantly being negotiated depending on a variety of factors, including generational gaps and prioritising of needs from a social and political perspective. Bhikhu Parekh (2008, 192 – 193) articulates this complexity in relation to non-Western societies in general, although I am only referencing the Indian South African community:

Non-western societies are culturally diverse in quite different ways from their Western counterparts. Traditional and Western cultures compete for the minds and hearts of the citizens and are in a state of tension. In their social lives, non-western societies define themselves in traditional communal terms, in their political and economic lives in individualist terms, and in their personal lives, display sympathies towards both. They have one sense of time when they go to the office or place of work or take their children to school and another when visiting temples, attending social functions or meeting friends. Firms, government buildings and offices represent one way of structuring space; private homes, community centers and religious buildings a very different one. Caste or tribal membership matters a great deal in social life, but is strongly disapproved of in political, economic and other areas of life.

Parekh has managed to convey succinctly the conflicting aspects that are involved in the management of personal identity. Depending on where an individual is, he/she will have

normative behaviours that will define the way they act specific to that environment. For example, how one behaves and dresses in a religious institution such as a temple, may be very different to how one behaves and dresses at a place of work. These aspects are constantly being negotiated on a daily basis. Paresh (2008) elaborates below on how these competing systems of negotiation, rarely allow individuals of non-Western societies to have a static framework of identity that moves seamlessly between different spaces and time. He notes:

Since space, time, social relations, moral values, ways of relating to oneself and others are all informed by competing systems of meaning and involve constant conceptual leaps, almost all non-Western societies display varying degrees of cultural disorientation and yearn nostalgically of a pre-modern past. (Paresh 2008, 193)

I'd like to propose that the identity of the Indian South African community is what Jopi Nyman (2009, 22) describes as "hybridised," meaning there are multiple contributing aspects to it; he suggests that "diasporic identity is in this space of inbetweenness where the diasporic subject reconstructs itself, problematizing the issues of home, belonging and nation." Though there were many differentiating aspects within the group of Indian labourers, they were forced to accept the classification of 'Indian' as the broad category under which they existed. The complexities that lay within the Indian community, such as language barriers and religious divisions amongst others, were not taken into account.

Pallavi Rastogi (2008, 11) articulates this complexity:

South African Indian identities are always configured by multiple determinants such as indenture, migration for commercial purposes, language, religion, gender and class. As a vastly homogenous community speaking in tongues as varied as Gujarathi, Tamil, Hindi and Urdu and also belonging to different religious faiths, South African Indians are marked more by difference than by similarity. All this makes it difficult to characterize the lives of Indians with a prescriptive label such as "The South African Indian Experience".

Pillay (2014, 14 – 15) echoes below that though the term Indian South African appears to be a homogeneously inclusive term, it does not consider the multiple differences that exist within the classification:

[E]ven though a multitude of identities that were founded on language, class, religion and customs existed together within the category 'Indian', these fundamentally different individuals were drawn together and as a result a common 'Indian' identity surfaced in response to various political and economic exclusions.



These factors have led to a complexity that has come to signify contemporary Indian South African identity.

While the labourers held on to nostalgic reimaginings of India through cultural and traditional signifiers, they no longer saw themselves belonging there, as evidenced by the number of indentured labourers who chose to return to South Africa after making the journey to India once their period of indenture was over. This meant that South Africa was now home, but trying to assimilate into South African society was difficult as the British authorities did not regard Indians as South African, and they were still considered foreign. This identity struggle of being Indian yet not belonging there, and assimilating as South African yet being regarded as other here as well, is typical of a diasporic community, as these multi-facets are “not necessarily able to be reconciled, but are held in tension with each other and form part of both individual and group identity” (Boshoff 2005, 89). Despite the fact that they were officially categorised according to their race and land of origin i.e. India, Indians chose to remain in South Africa, realising that their longing for their homeland was imaginary in many aspects and was dissimilar from the familiarity they had created within their environment of indenture.

The perceptions and assumptions that had been created by the British government, about Indians, since they first arrived on the shores of Natal, continued to be perpetuated by them through the media. These became the entrenched “derogatory” stereotypes about Indians, (accepted by the colonialists), including notions that they carried disease, were accustomed to criminality, laziness, filth, heathenism and were intellectually inferior (Pillay 2014). This did not stop them from holding on to their roots largely through attempts to recreate the cultural and religious heritage of India in their new home. Despite choosing to remain in South Africa, the longing to remain connected to India continued; Pareesh (2008, 49) asserts that, “rejected by the dominant groups, they turned inwards, nurtured their sense of collective identity, held on to their collective memories and myths and gave strength and solace to each other.” As a result, indentured Indians chose to use traditional and cultural symbols to maintain that connection. It is important to understand how despite being so far away from the land where these traditions emerged, indentured Indians found a way to keep them alive, even if these traditional and cultural symbols were not authentically

accurate reflections of the practices in India. As has been mentioned above, the use of drama and theatre by the indentured labourers was inspired by Indian religious beliefs and so by extension, theatre, religion and culture were all deeply intertwined within the Indian South African community.

## **THE SIGNIFICANCE OF CULTURE**

In addition to being seen as separate from other South Africans, the emergence of a dominant culture within the Indian South African community was fraught with tension due to the diversity of languages, castes and religions that existed amongst its members. Muthal Naidoo (1997, 30) elaborates on this complexity:

Each separate group seeks to preserve customs and traditions which it perceives to be unique to its own grouping. There are three main religious groupings – Hindus, Muslims and Christians – and within each of these there are splits along language, custom, and class lines. [...] Different religious and language groups tend to develop along separate communal lines.

As Naidoo (1997) mentions, each group that fell under the broad categorisation 'Indian' tried to hold on to their own beliefs and used religious traditions as a way to provide emotional succour during such hardship.

Having to grapple with the complexities of finding themselves removed from the land wherein the original source of these traditions and rituals resides, holding on to their religious and traditional belief systems assisted the Indian labourers to assimilate in a new land by not rejecting one belief system for another. Indentured Indians held on to aspects of being Indian, and reinforced this using religion, culture and tradition; other aspects of their identity, however, assimilated with being South African. It also allowed them to construct a unique diasporic identity with which they could identify and confront the dominant culture they were being forced to navigate.

Being in an environment where race and race politics played such a pivotal role added a further challenge. As articulated by Paresh (2008, 31), the dominant culture that Indian South Africans confronted, imposed by the British colonialists, "denigrates their identity, requires them to conform to unacceptable norms, oppresses and humiliates them, traps them into a restricted and alien mode of being, and inflicts varying degrees of psychic and

other injuries on them.” This feeling of being down-trodden by the British authorities forced the Indian South African community to rely on one another to create their own sense of value and self-worth. As Pillay (2014, 23) explains:

There was no external pressure to conform to a single South African identity and so, creating residential pockets of ‘Indian’ groups encouraged ‘Indians’ to construct an insular identity through shared participation in sports, religious activities, and other social and cultural processes. [...] This shared oppression reinforced the impression of a fixed ‘Indian’ identity, not only from the ‘outside’ but also by those who define themselves as belonging to this group.

The Indian South Africans were united in their oppression by the British and this gave rise to their own cultural identity and sense of group belonging by depending on each other and their shared sense of community. This sense of community was created by active participation in group activities (as mentioned previously) such as sport and re-enactments, where “groups would gather to communally sing verses of Hindu epics while musical instruments [...] were played, or they would sit up all night to watch abridged versions of these plays enacted as drama” (Desai and Vahed 2007, 294). Their need to belong to something surpassed their individual differences and their shared marginalisation from South African citizenship resulted in the creation of their own cultural identity; as Pillay (2014, 14) notes, “as a result of being consistently indiscriminately grouped together, Indians progressively viewed themselves as a uniform unit who were compelled to respond accordingly.” This resonates with Stuart Hall’s (1997, 2) understanding of culture:

To say that two people belong to the same culture is to say that they interpret the world in roughly the same ways and can express themselves, their thoughts and feelings about the world, in ways which will be understood by each other. Thus culture depends on its participants interpreting meaningfully what is happening around them, and ‘making sense’ of the world, in broadly similar ways.

Despite the challenges and hardships they were enduring, the indentured labourers managed to find a way to navigate the terrain of the system of indenture by turning inward as a community and creating their own unique sense of culture and belonging which allowed them to safely express themselves within the confines of the group. This notion is further enforced by Priscilla Boshoff (2005, 61) when she states: “the Indian community turned inwards, towards itself, hardening group boundaries that had already been demarcated for them.” This is significant for my discussions later on related to theatre and performances being used as tools to bring about change or highlight certain issues within

the community. There are instances and examples within the plays I will be analysing that are unique to the Indian South African community. Those inferences can only be fully understood from the perspective of someone within the Indian South African community.

At this point it is important to acknowledge what the cost of a unified community was for Indian women. As has been explained above, Indian women lacked agency over their own lives from the time they arrived on (then) Natal's shores. The situation did not improve over time with women being handed the responsibility of being the guardians of tradition and culture within the Indian South African community. This is explored by Meer (1972, 37 – 38):

The home was the bastion of Indian life struggling against a foreign environment, surrounded by the strong forces of the dominant South African milieu; it depended upon its trustees, the women. [...] The responsibility of preserving tradition was a terrible one, for though the men appeared to have shaken off their traditional culture, they were rooted in it and could not bear the loss of it. Women thus became reified into that culture – they became that culture – and so it was incumbent upon them to remain pure, unadulterate, different from everything around them, protected from everything un-Indian, un-Islamic, un-Hindu.

Women came to represent the very thing men sought to protect, Indian culture, and sexuality became the key signifier which determined how worthy a woman was of the role. A woman's ability to protect cultural and religious traditions was intrinsically linked with her chastity. Men freed themselves of this burden and instead took it upon themselves to guard the honour of women, since "males saw themselves as guardians who had to protect the honour of women, which in turn would protect the honour of the Indian community" (Desai and Vahed 2007, 303). Women had no option but to perform their assigned duties; they saw themselves being as devoted as Sita (the wife of Prince Rama) who "shares her husband's every suffering, remains ever-faithful to him, no matter what the temptation, and patiently bears every cruelty and injustice inflicted on her" (Meer 1972, 38). This is reinforced by Govender (1999, 39) who suggests that the perceived value of Indian South African women is intrinsically tied to cultural dictates, since "the South African Indian woman as a cultural constructed being does not only dictate her position in society, but also recognises a constructed sense of femininity with that culture." From the above it is evident that women had no space to challenge the roles and responsibilities they had been handed.

It is worth pointing out that just as the structure (from labourers to middle-class citizens)

and focus (from social issues to internal community ones) of the Indian community was changing due to changes in the larger political scene, similarly, their collective identity was in a constant state of flux, changing, adapting and responding to the problems they were facing. This had an effect and influence on the individual identities that made up the collective whole. Paresh (2008, 10) articulates this fluid nature of identity:

Personal identity is not a possession, which, once achieved can be cherished passively. It is expressed in and retains its vitality only in so far as it is exercised and affirmed in appropriate choices and actions. It is never a finished product either. New experiences, new insights into oneself, social changes, exposure to other ways of looking at the world, and deeper self-reflection might reveal its ambiguities and limitations, and lead to its revision.

A century after their arrival would seem a suitable amount of time to assimilate and gain acceptance by the ruling system in any country; however, as Paresh notes, assimilation is a complex process. Paresh's (2008, 84) example below references a female but for the purpose of this discussion I use this example to highlight an Indian South African male's perspective as women were confined to the domestic sphere (as will be explained later):

The assimilating person is never quite sure when she has become assimilated fully and whether she is accepted. She is therefore quite anxious to prove [...] that she has assimilated [...] which makes her strangeness even more visible and comical. She is constantly at the mercy of others, who alone are in a position to certify whether or not, and how much she has assimilated, and remains permanently subordinate and heteronomous.

Paresh highlights above, that the success of the process of assimilation is not determined by the one trying to assimilate but by those in power. In the instance of South Africa, power and authority lay first with the British colonialists and thereafter with the Afrikaner authorities.

In an effort to be accepted by the Afrikaner authorities, thus rendering the process of assimilation complete, and to be recognised as equals, Indian South African males sought to "emulate white norms, values, and customs at the expense of their inherited culture" (Naidoo 1997, 30). This recognition was important for the Indian South African community as:

Recognition is closely bound up with success as judged by society's criteria, which in Western societies are largely economic. [...] They require positive state action in the form of equal opportunities and resources. [...] Such redistribution breaks the self-reproducing cycle of disadvantage and creates conditions in which self-images of marginalised groups and others' perception of them begin to change. (Paresh 2008, 52)

Despite knowing their identity construction was tied up in the ever-fluid terrain of race-politics, the Indian South African male community sought white recognition as a means of reinforcing assimilated acceptance. The political structure of apartheid emphasized category divisions by race, primarily whites and non-whites. There were several sub-categories within the non-white classification: black (whose origins were from the African continent and whose skin pigmentation was dark), Indian (whose origins were from India as a result of the indentured labour system), and 'coloured' (whose origins were racially mixed and could not be clearly identified as being either black or white). It is interesting to note that while the other racial categories were along lines of race, the very term 'Indian' was constructed around a difference of nationality. This further emphasized the otherness and exclusion of the Indian South African community. Race became the differentiating factor between people. Individuals were solely classified by race and anything beyond the superficial matter of race was not given any value by the Apartheid government. Thus, race came to be an integral component from which individuals constructed their identity, and the Indian community was no different. Paresh (2008, 10) defines identity as:

The beliefs and values in terms of which they define or identify themselves as certain kinds of person constitute their personal identity. It articulates their conception of themselves or their fundamental orientation, and provides a framework within which they view themselves and the world.

As Naidoo (1997, 30) states, "many "Indians" have tried to find identities which reach beyond the "Indian" community," and they specifically sought white approval "because Western culture has historically dominated education and leisure in South African cities, where most of the community lives" (Naidoo 1997, 30).

I specify males seeking approval to reinforce the notion that women were confined to their home environments, upholding the traditional duties with which they had been tasked. Men pursued economically successful activities and this created a gap between Indian men and Indian women who were now driven by different aims. Meer (1972, 38 – 39) elaborates on this:

Indian women looked fine at home with the babies and the cooking pots, but their relatively urbanized, sophisticated husbands found their peasant garb and peasant manners unseemly in public. They could not be trusted to walk properly, or sit properly, or contribute a single word to a conversation. The very thought of his wife accompanying him was an agonizing embarrassment to a husband. The wife knew this

and accepted it and did not dare to intrude into his public life and shame him. If on occasion husband and wife went out together, she trailed behind him with the parcels, or the babies, acknowledging him as the superior being ahead of her.

This example once again highlights the subservient position of Indian women in relation to their husbands. Meer articulates the patriarchal perspectives which women had no ability to overcome. A woman was regarded only as suitable to run her household and raise her children, all the while maintaining the cultural norms with which she had been entrusted; men, however, unencumbered by such restraints were free to pursue their ambitions. They sought equality in the eyes of the white man, “a drive [...] to exploit the new opportunities to become recognised as junior partners in the South African social elite” (Hansen 2000, 261), at the expense of the values they confined their wives to emulate.

Wives who represented culture and tradition, a reminder of their roots, were rejected by their husbands in the public sphere for fear of embarrassing them. In the public sphere, husbands were ashamed that their wives could not enhance their social stature as a result of the cultural traditions they were expected to police, so they were confined to their homes. It is necessary to point out the agonising public shame that Indian men felt where their wives were concerned, as a result of the same traditional values husbands expected their wives to uphold privately. Shame and embarrassment were the key reasons why women were unable to keep pace with their husband’s upward mobility in the public domain. Husbands rejected their wives in order to be seen as upwardly mobile and forward-thinking, embracing the white culture they sought approval from. This is further reinforced by Meer (1972, 39):

The urbane husband in affluent circles attempted to breach the gulf by the simple remedy of taking another woman, usually a foreigner, urbanized and South African. The wife whom he married according to traditional requirements bore and raised his children and cultivated and preserved his culture; the other woman provided the sort of companionship that complemented his social image. The wife at home knew of the other woman, and whatever her emotional pain, she was helpless. In her anxiety to keep her husband and avert the irrevocable shame and the emotional and economic deprivations of a divorce, she suffered with abject patience.

This scenario described by Meer shows the extent of the burden of expectations placed on the shoulders of Indian South African women within the community. The Indian woman was expected to safeguard her honour, the honour of her family and by extension her community by adhering to the cultural prescripts that had been imposed for her ‘safety.’

Indian men sought to protect that honour, to ensure their traditional roots were not forgotten and so bound women within the limitations of patriarchy while they pursued activities that had no restrictions.

The success of an Indian South African woman was limited to the boundaries of the Indian South African community, the only space in which tradition and cultural practices were revered. Beyond the community, those notions were not given any significance and were instead a source of shame and embarrassment for certain men. The hypocrisy of these notions is stark when one considers the virginal purity which women were expected to maintain in order to be deemed worthy of upholding and espousing traditional values, and yet some men deemed it suitable to not only have his wife but take another partner as well, to fulfil his social needs and uphold his public image. For such men, their wife's worth was limited to safekeeping his honour at their home, yet his social standing was enhanced by a woman who was in opposition to the very traditional beliefs he sought to protect at home. He was allowed to be one person at home and someone completely different in public. His wife was expected to bear his wayward activities in silence. Divorce was considered the ultimate shame and in order to maintain a marriage, women did not dare express unhappiness. For many women, being confined to the home sphere meant that they were financially dependent on their husbands and so would be unable to provide for themselves should the issue of divorce arise. And so Indian South African women held their tongues, shed their silent tears and looked the other way.

I highlight these moments in the history of the Indian South African community to depict how subjugated Indian women were. From my perspective, the theatrical depictions of domestic abuse within the Indian community, as I will discuss in this study, provide a greater understanding of the context of the domestic situations being put on stage, the patriarchy that has been enforced for generations and the miseries that women have been forced to endure silently. It is also necessary to establish how firmly Indian men held control over the lives of their wives. Regardless of what their husbands put them through, it was considered a betrayal of their contract of marriage to make utterances against her husband.



## **ASSIMILATION AND ASHAMED ACCEPTANCE**

From my experience as a member of the Indian South African community, this mindset of containing traditional experiences within the Indian community persists. Despite the contribution of the Indian South African community to the dismantling of the systems of oppression enforced by both the colonialists and the ruling government during Apartheid, Indian South Africans have yet to fully embrace their culture and traditions in mainstream arenas. While they have held on to their roots within the community, there are aspects of Indian cultural identity that are changing through the generations, including a liberation of sorts for Indian South African women; Barbara Fawcett, Brid Featherstone, Jeff Hearn and Christine Toft (1996) explain that areas of seemingly enforced limitation upon women may be contested as these boundaries are not universally binding. This means that women are no longer necessarily shackled by the singular requirement of traditional and cultural guardianship:

[I]ncreasing educational and vocational opportunities for women, have challenged and undermined this traditional system, with many hybrid arrangements being developed to accommodate the simultaneous demands of traditional Indian culture and a Western English-speaking world. (Wassenaar, van de Veen and Pillay 1998, 84)

As Wassenaar et al. note above, there are arrangements in Indian households that allow the opposing aspects of Western-modernity and Indian-traditionality to co-exist. I believe that where Indian South African youth are concerned, there is still a struggle to reconcile both aspects of their identity as there is still a pull to aspire to lives that are not culturally rooted within the confines of the Indian community, as elaborated on by Wassenaar et al. (1998, 83 – 84), “families wishing to retain a core cultural identity in their children find themselves increasingly faced with children who aspire to lifestyles and goals associated with other cultural groups.” This sentiment of the cultural Indian way of life being eroded by Western ideals among the youth is further echoed by Boshoff (2005, 32):

Each ‘Indian’ group is witnessing the diminishing relevance of their specific tradition among the youth. The youth is largely English-speaking, longs for a more Western and individualistic lifestyle, is more educated and has access to professions that were unthinkable for the previous generations.

I believe that just as the males before them hid their cultural and traditional values from the public domain, Indian South African youth, (males and females included) have continued to do so too. This has been done, and continues today, in an effort to mimic the Western

norms they are increasingly exposed to and aspire to be part of. The unspoken perceptions of Indian traditions being perceived as hindering social progression in the greater South African society and the desire to keep it confined within the Indian South African community still continues. Boshoff (2005, 95) suggests, “there is a perceived need to accommodate the pressures of today’s lifestyles at the same time as preserving what is of lasting worth within the traditions of the Indian community,” indicating that as much as Indian South African youth aim to move forward socially, they still desire to hold onto their roots, albeit within the boundaries of the Indian South African community.

This sentiment has been articulated by respected voices within the Indian South African community, including medical doctor and writer Deena Padayachee and author of *The Lotus People* (2002), the late Aziz Hassim. In post-apartheid interviews with both writers respectively, Pallavi Rastogi (2008, 117) posed to each of them the question of Indian South Africans battling with identity formation in favour of the prevailing white Western culture. Part of those interviews went as follows:

Pallavi Rastogi: Do you see Indians trying to be white during apartheid?

Deena Padayachee: Oh yes. Even now. It is a very big phenomenon, the children as well. They’re trying to be as Western as possible and they jettison a lot of Eastern values. They think they are important if they colour their hair and use blue contact lenses.

Padayachee (in Rastogi 2008, 117) clearly articulates that the desire for the Indian South African community, especially the youth, to emulate white Western norms has continued well after apartheid ended. Hassim (in Rastogi 2008, 117) articulates the notion of Indian South Africans being embarrassed of who they are as a people:

Pallavi Rastogi: What you are doing in this book [is] trying to make the Indians proud of being Indians [...] because you’re uncovering all these buried histories of courage, bravery, commitment.

Aziz Hassim: We have everything to be proud of [...] I don’t see why we should be ashamed of being Indians. But definitely, especially here in South Africa, [the idea exists] that to be an Indian is something to be ashamed of.

As discussed earlier, the notion of embarrassment related to Indian values is not new and continues to manifest itself. Rastogi’s statement expressing that Hassim’s aim in his book is an attempt to make Indians feel proud of who they are, is insightful in itself. Boshoff (2005, 105) echoes the same sentiments regarding Indian South African youth:

They find themselves in a place largely defined by hegemonic White culture [...] Cultural practices and religious observances are easily swallowed up by the temptations and distractions of another way of life, and also actively discouraged by the difficulties of

finding the spaces and times in which to carry out particular cultural practices [...] The young Indian person is suddenly on her own ... lost into the dangerous yet seductive anonymity of a highly individualised Western hegemonic White culture.

These examples illustrate how the Indian South African may identify with the racial term of being Indian and maintain their cultural and traditions relating to their heritage within the community; however, even in post-apartheid South Africa, the prevailing attitude is that being able to identify as 'South African' entails one identifying with the mainstream culture which is predominantly influenced by the West, whilst identifying with the classification 'Indian' encompasses embracing Indian roots, traditions and cultural practices. In this context and for the purpose of this argument, anything that does not have its origins from India, and is not rooted from traditions and culture born out of India and the continent of Asia, falls under the blanket-term of the West. Thus, identifying with the term 'Indian South African' means embracing different aspects of the West and the East respectively. The acceptance and/or rejection of either term are constantly being negotiated by an individual depending on how upwardly mobile one wants to appear within the broader context of South African society without bearing the brunt of social stigmatisation based on engrained stereotypes attributed to a racial category.

If factors such as traditions and cultural heritage are rejected by the community in the larger social context of South Africa, it can be assumed social ills and taboo issues within the Indian community would be hidden from sight with even more rigidity. Thus, broaching subjects such as domestic abuse, is a first step in addressing these issues. Using theatre as a tool to raise awareness about these matters and potentially have uncomfortable conversations about taboo subjects within the community, is a challenging task as the audience is not necessarily willing to engage with the subject matter. It is for this reason that the three playwrights that I have chosen to discuss and their respective theatre pieces become so pivotal to address a social ill within the Indian South African community.

## **2. THE ROLE OF THEATRE WITHIN THE INDIAN SOUTH AFRICAN DIASPORIC COMMUNITY**

Theatre has the power to move, inspire, transform and educate in ways that no other art form can. Theatre reflects both the extraordinary diversity of cultures and our shared human condition, in all its vulnerability and strength.

(Bokova)

Theatre has always played a significant role within the Indian South African community and has transformed to accommodate the social and political needs of the time. In this chapter, I will establish the significance of theatre within the Indian South African community from the period of indenture, in order to elaborate on its historical relevance for the Indian South African community specifically. As I will be arguing for the potential of theatre to be used as a medium to confront and challenge prevailing attitudes in the community, I will be engaging with Bertolt Brecht's Epic Theatre (as informed by David Barnett (2015), Anthony Squiers (2012), Anton Franks & Ken Jones (1999) and David Pan (2009)). I have specifically chosen to reference Brecht's theories because they are rooted in the core idea that theatre has the potential to effect change in society. Brecht believed audiences who engaged actively in the theatrical event – and, as a result, recognised in the events on the stage something that was problematic in their society – had the capacity to bring about the changes they wanted to see; they just needed to be made aware that change is possible. This is highly relevant for me because I argue that through theatre, the Indian South African community may come to recognise gendered power imbalances, and to understand that these imbalances play a significant role in domestic abuse. In this way, theatre can stimulate the questioning of engrained power dynamics.

### **THEATRE AS A MEANING-MAKING ACTIVITY**

In the history of theatre across the world, it has been regarded as a medium through which messages can be conveyed and meaning can be created, irrespective of where it has been created or performed, and whether or not it includes other forms of art such as music and dance. This sentiment is echoed by Kapil Kumar Bhattacharya and Debastuti Dasgupta

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<sup>15</sup> Twenty-year old Kgaogelo Shai was allegedly killed by her boyfriend in 2020 in Mokgoloboto Village, Limpopo. (Shange, 2020)

(2013, 5) who state: “since ancient times, the main function of the theatre has been to disseminate some form of information, either directly or indirectly to the audience.” The very nature of theatre is dependent on participation for success, whether it is through the participation of the performers creating a piece of work or through the participation of an audience for whom the art and its meaning are being created. On either end of the spectrum, theatre requires participation for its success. The participatory process, however, can be active or passive. An audience’s participation can, for example, be limited to silent observation. However, the process of theatre requires an audience who bears witness to what has been created, even if that is the complete extent of the participation. For meaning to be generated, it requires the interpretation of signs and symbols that have been used in a performance. These have been used by a group of individuals, i.e. the performers, for another group of individuals who understand those signs and symbols, i.e. the audience. As Anthony Jackson (2005, 8) observes:

[W]hile the artist creates the art and invests it with significance, it is in the appeal to our aesthetic imaginations and sensibilities that the reader/observer becomes an active maker of meaning. It is the percipient who completes the circle, contributes the imaginative filling-in of the gaps left in the text, and becomes a co-author in the work of art.

The type of theatre being created for an audience can be varied in objective. Some theatre performances may be created purely for the purposes of artistic pleasure while others may exist to raise awareness and catalyse change in society. It is the latter I will be focusing on in my research. Whichever form of theatre is being used, however, the audience is still actively taken on a journey within the fictional world that has been created by the performers.

Jackson (2005, 7) articulates this further, noting:

Art [...] is at root a meaning-making activity in which symbolic forms are deployed to take us on some kind of a journey, the kind of journey we might not have taken otherwise. It may be a retreat from the everyday, or it may be a detour, offering us vantage points from which to see the everyday in a new light or from a new angle. We may often agree to go on the journey not quite knowing where it will take us, nor how far to trust those who take us, but we are always fellow-travellers, tacit or active participants.

In this way, theatre can be used as a medium through which audiences are taken on a journey wherein they witness representations of their lives on stage. These representations may or may not motivate them to effect change in their lives.

## THEATRE AS A TOOL FOR SOCIAL CONSCIENTISATION

I echo the sentiments of Snyder-Young (2013, 3) who says “theatrical events can serve as a crucible to make citizens want to take action outside the theatre.” In this regard, I have selected three specific play texts as examples of a theatre presented for the purposes of prompting social awareness and change in order to draw conclusions about how such practice works, and why. I will analyse these texts in order to explore how they seek to effect such change. However, I do not attempt to quantitatively measure this change; rather, I seek to understand whether reflecting issues of the Indian South African community in the theatre space might function to enable individuals to recognise entrenched imbalanced power structures and begin to challenge and question them. As Brecht, in *A Short Organum for Theatre* (1964, 7) said,

We need a type of theatre which not only releases the feelings, insights and impulses possible within the particular historical field of human relations in which the action takes place, but employs and encourages those thoughts and feelings which help transform the field itself.

The field I seek to transform is the dismantling of patriarchal structures in the Indian South African community to put an end to the perpetuation of domestic abuse.

This is not a new form of theatre; theatre for social change<sup>16</sup> has been championed by many theatre practitioners throughout history, “from Ibsen to Brecht to Boal, Brook and Bond, one can trace a faith in the idea that through artistic transformations on the stage, society itself can be changed” (Snyder-Young 2013, 2). This type of theatre aims to be transformative in nature as it “teaches community members to teach others, and helps communities process issues which directly impact them. It can also raise awareness of issues, pose alternatives, heal, challenge contemporary discourses, and voice the views of the silent or marginal” (Taylor 2003, 1). This view is echoed by Jackson (2005, 5), who says that such forms of theatre provide a medium which employs “a repertoire of techniques that can be adapted as part of a process of engagement, challenge, and, it is to be hoped, emancipation.”

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<sup>16</sup> My reference to ‘theatre for social change’ does not refer to Theatre for Development or Applied Theatre. I am referring to the three relatively conventional play texts I have chosen to explore and analyse beyond the superficial function of entertainment. I consider each of these play texts tools through which positive change in the Indian South African community can be brought about.

I will be making a case for theatre to be used within the Indian South African community to highlight those issues which are otherwise concealed by shadows of silence and thus, begin to activate social change. It is my belief that the medium of theatre can potentially raise the awareness of the community related to sensitive issues like domestic abuse. It can create a space for dialogue, allowing victims of domestic abuse to feel more liberated by challenging patriarchal attitudes in the public space of theatre, their community and society at large. As Philip Taylor (2003, 7) elaborates,

The art form becomes a transformative agent which places the audience or participants in direct and immediate situations where they can witness, confront and de-construct aspects of their own and others' actions. The applied theatre is committed to the power of the aesthetic form for raising awareness of how we are situated in this world and what we as individuals and as communities might do to make our world a better place.

Similarly, through the chosen play texts, I draw attention to the possible transformation of the Indian South African community by breaking entrenched systems of power to stop incidences of domestic abuse, thus making the world a better place.

## **THE ROLE OF THEATRE IN THE INDIAN SOUTH AFRICAN COMMUNITY**

From the 1950s onwards, the apartheid regime and its policies ensured that white supremacy was upheld in South Africa. Apartheid enforced a policy of segregation, separating the population through race classifications. One of the key pieces of legislation, the Group Areas Act (1950), segregated the entire population along racial lines, and allocated separate residential areas. In 1953, the Separate Amenities Act came into effect. It normalised the separation of whites and those classified as non-whites in all public places and vehicles. That year also saw the actioning of the Bantu Education Act, which prohibited any education other than that provided by the state (DISA Archive, 1990). Since the state's ideology was premised on separation along racial lines, this was further executed through the education system. Different races were provided with different syllabi according to what the state thought was necessary for each race to be taught. One consequence of these policies was the isolation of the different communities' art and performance works. Indian theatre, for example, was performed largely by and for Indians within community spaces such as halls and schools, since Indian people were denied access to mainstream theatre

venues (Naidoo 1997).

As a result of apartheid's laws of segregation, there was political conflict which saw an acceleration in resistance to the apartheid policies. This resistance took many forms such as protest marches and boycotts and this activity had a ripple effect on theatre. Theatre in South Africa became a key tool to fight and criticise the apartheid regime. One of the significant theatre forms that emerged during the period was Protest Theatre which focused on the use of satire, as explained below:

This form of theater (*sic*) poked fun at and satirized the laws and leadership of the apartheid government. [...] Although protest theater (*sic*) provided a form of true entertainment for the suffering, its real value could be found in its aim of mobilizing the oppressed to explore ways of fighting against the oppression. (SASA Blog 2010)

Thus, in South Africa, theatre became a powerful medium through which to challenge the political power structures and the racially divisive system of apartheid.

Up until the 1980s, Indian South African theatre preoccupied itself with addressing race and working class issues, issues in which Indians found themselves caught up as a result of apartheid. However, as Govender (1999, 25) notes, "they failed to address the issue of gender as equally important in the discussion of oppression."

From the very outset, education and the value of higher learning was fundamental to the progression of Indian South Africans and by the 1980s, this emphasis was bearing fruit. Despite the impact of apartheid, significant pockets of Indian South Africans began living middle-class lives, i.e. they were educated, had their own homes and earned relatively well. It was also a time when certain individuals within the community made conscious strides to be recognised and acknowledged as the new successful elite (Hansen 2010), identified primarily by their ease of access to money and by extension, power. This, in turn, would result in the elevated social status that is associated with being upper as opposed to middle-class. The economic and social shifts were not without critique, however, particularly from political activists who rejected the class and status system. As Hansen (2010, 261) elaborates: "This was a perplexing situation that produced embarrassment among many Indian intellectuals and activists – embarrassment at the Indian community's unrestrained drive for middle-class respectability and its own political conservatism." Something I



inherently understand is that many Indian South African men strove to emulate white ideals in public arenas. This, as Hansen says, produced embarrassment not just for activists, but these men unashamedly and unapologetically seeking white recognition made the Indian South African community uncomfortable. The Indian South African community had always felt marginalised and discriminated against, yet it was men of this very community who sought the same status as white men. Thus, the community used humour to respond to this anxiety. These men did not reject tradition, they simply sought power, approval and acceptance. Where the Indian South African community was concerned, pursuing these motives was perplexing, it was just not something one did. This embarrassment by sectors of the Indian South African community, towards other members of the community, manifested as satire and comedy in the theatre space.

It is interesting to note that as changes unfolded socially theatre practitioners responded, by adapting quickly to reflect the thoughts and opinions of the Indian South African community. It is also interesting to reiterate, as mentioned in Chapter One, that since Indian men were content – and determined - to relegate their wives to the private domain of their homes, it can be inferred that the individuals striving for recognition by those in power were predominantly male. In the theatre space, this translates to comedy being used to reflect notions of male embarrassment towards other men in the Indian South African community. Once again, the voices and perspectives of women were subjugated through patriarchal power imbalances.

## **HUMOUR AS AN ESCAPE**

Certain (predominantly male) members of the Indian South African community sought white recognition and equality but found themselves on the fringe, looking in. This unbridled desire by certain Indian South African men to stand, shoulder-to-shoulder as it were, with white men, and the anxiety of not being able to do so, became a source of comedic fodder. Indian South African theatre practitioners transformed these anxieties into material that allowed community members to recognise their personalities on stage, in a humorous way, and not take themselves too seriously. As Thomas Blom Hansen (2010, 267) notes:

The feeling of non-recognition has turned into strong sentiments of marginalisation [...]

the issue at stake was a very elusive sense of Indians being invisible – being unrecognized as individuals and as a group. Because this recognition is not freely given by what many Indians see as powerful and dangerous others threatening the community, and because the ‘community’ only seems to exist when it is talked about, or looked upon from the outside, the elusive sense of Indianness has to be tapped from negative stereotypes and from the long tradition of self-depreciation in community theatre. There is, in other words, a latent need for the humour and the irony to deal with these anxieties.

The need for this humour and irony did not diminish and only grew over the years. By 1983, Indian South African theatre had begun focusing (almost exclusively) on concerns that arose within the community, using comedy and more specifically, satire to articulate these problems. Brecht too believed in using comedy as a way of drawing attention to class divisions and social issues. For him, comedy represented a way to make audiences think critically, realising that “while we are laughing we are also thinking. [...] Even if the message itself is serious Brecht realised that comedy could be an excellent way of engaging the audience and forcing them to think about issues” (Bitesize). Without realising it, the Indian South African community had been engaging in comedic Epic Theatre devices to highlight and critique their social and political issues.

This trend of humour continued well into the nineties although the nature of that humour changed. No longer was humour being used as a way to critique, its function became purely light-hearted entertainment. Even today, comedy and humour for entertainment purposes appear to be the most successful way to appeal to Indian audiences and guarantee a profitable show. Hansen (2010, 267 – 268) offers significant insight into why humour and comedy became the genre of choice within the Indian community:

The irony and the self-mockery is, however, deeply ambivalent as it negotiates the slippery terrain of current Indian identity. [...] Laughing at lewd jokes, mocking ‘family values’ and political leaders, ways of dealing with anxieties and bewilderment in the face of the actual dissolution of these perceived pillars of the ‘community.’ But the use of humour also indicates a certain disarming broadmindedness and signals a capacity for critical self-introspection to the outside gaze.

As Hansen (2010) indicates, humour became the means by which to mask communal anxieties around the disintegration of the traditional values by which the community was defined. He further adds the capacity of the community to laugh at themselves, triggers self-introspection for outsiders looking in. I believe that, in a similar way, theatre that unflinchingly dramatises domestic abuse can trigger a reflexive engagement that might

eventually alter the circumstances that contribute to the abuse.

## **THE MARGINALISED FEMALE VOICE IN INDIAN SOUTH AFRICAN THEATRE**

Whether theatre in the Indian South African community explored socio-political issues or sought only to entertain, in both instances, the plight of women, and their problems, was very rarely addressed. Theatre, within the Indian community, has a history of being written largely by men, and articulating the male perspective. Govender (1999, 16) expresses this sentiment by stating that:

[Theatre] has not been fully explored by South African Indian women to articulate their own subject position. This is mainly because the naturalized roles of women under the banner of culture and cultural preservation confine women to the private sphere [...] it has been primarily dominated by the Indian male voice. The notion of using playwriting and theatre as a way in which the South African Indian woman can liberate herself is a notion that is historically foreign too. Firstly, because writing itself is envisaged historically and culturally as an activity that is a part of the public space and therefore by implication it is primarily male activity.

Govender (1999) argues that engrained gender roles have limited women to their stereotypical cultural positions of subservience, which has kept them strictly confined to the private domain. When a woman conforms to the oppressive patriarchal demands of her community, she sacrifices her voice in the public area. This notion is reinforced by Indu Pandey (2016, 49) who expresses that

[w]omen are compelled to accept their destiny with silence and without any protest. 'Silence' can be seen as something which is forcefully imposed on women in a patriarchal society. Women are never allowed to raise their voice against the evil practices against them and are forced to remain silent throughout their lives. In return, this silence kills them from inside from which they seek to escape.

I propose that theatre is a tool through which this escape can happen. Through my research, I illustrate how within the Indian South African community, the articulation of women's experiences in the public arena of theatre, offers a medium through which this silence can be shattered.

Fawcett et al., (1996, 14) elaborate on the complexities that exist when women are caught up in the dynamics of culture and race:

[W]omen live in a world where we know what is expected of us as women, and while our relationship to that knowledge may be ambivalent, many women do not question their destiny as defined by the group with which they identify until they personally experience progressively greater difficulties in living the expected kind of life.

As per my understanding of the Indian South African community, in which I was raised, this quote is of significant relevance for the large majority of Indian women who unthinkingly reinforce the patriarchal norms that are entrenched in the community, even if it is to their detriment, as elucidated in the Introduction to this dissertation. The Indian community views the theatre-space as a public arena and it is thus perceived as being the domain of men. This conditioning within the community subjects women who fall into this spotlight and within this arena to patriarchy and patriarchal practices. The result is that the voices of women who face challenging situations such as domestic abuse, for example, are largely neglected and unheard in public spaces, such as theatre.

Since Indian South African women have been primarily kept out of the public sphere of theatre, it is perhaps unsurprising that their stories and their issues have not been articulated adequately. Devaksha Moodley (2013, 30) echoes this point: “specifically regarding plays, work by South African Indian women is limited and even where such work exists, it is marginalized.” I see my research as contributing to the pivotal need to address the engrained gender constructs that exist within the Indian South African community, thus, in some way, giving a voice to women who have otherwise been largely marginalised, and whose issues have remained unexpressed. Govender (1999, 16 – 17) advocates for the use of theatre as a tool for marginalised voices and to challenge engrained gender stereotypes, specifically for women within the Indian community in South Africa:

If the theatrical arena is regarded as a political arena, the theatre then becomes a microcosm for the larger political and social context. [...] Through the process of playwriting (and theatre) the South African *Indian* woman is actively able to articulate herself. Through this articulation she is able to repossess her ability to name her own experience.

By telling their stories or having their experiences depicted on stage, a conversation around women’s lives can begin at the root level, between audience and performer(s), to address the problems being portrayed. I argue that theatre can be used as a medium through which the silence can be challenged. In order to substantiate my argument, I engage Brecht’s Epic Theatre in which he asked audiences to actively question and critique what they were witnessing on stage in order to realise their own ability to effect change in their lives. All three playwrights, whose plays I will be analysing, reflected that their intention in writing

their plays was to create awareness about how insidious domestic violence is in the Indian South African community. Their objectives were to generate conversations about the subject matter, create awareness that domestic abuse does not happen in isolation as there are many who endure it, and to get audiences to confront uncomfortable questions about the engrained gendered power dynamics.

## **BERTOLT BRECHT'S EPIC THEATRE**

Brecht (1964) argued that theatre could be used as a transformational tool, that no matter how insurmountable and impossible a perspective or an ideology may be, theatre was one way in which change could be instigated. Brecht was opposed to a theatre in which the audience was not actively engaging with what they were witnessing, and he did not approve of theatre in which audiences unthinkingly accepted matters depicted on stage as a reflection of reality; rather, he wanted audiences to be critical of what they witnessed. In *A Short Organum for the Theatre*, Brecht (1964, 6) writes of the audiences:

They scarcely communicate with each other; their relations are those of a lot of sleepers, though of such as dream restlessly because, as is popularly said of those who have nightmares, they are lying on their backs. True, their eyes are open, but they stare rather than see, just as they listen rather than hear. They look on stage as if in a trance [...] these people seem relieved of activity and like men (sic) to whom something is being done.

Brecht wanted to use theatre as a means of waking the audience (and by extension society) up from their seeming slumber. Brecht's ideas around theatre were "concerned with unpicking things that appear to be fixed, from the ways society is organised to the ways people think about themselves. What seems solid is undone by its own contradictions" (Barnett 2015, 24). Brecht wanted to change the way in which theatre-going audiences experienced theatre.

As an avowed Marxist, Brecht's theatre style developed primarily as a means to challenge the dominant capitalist ideologies which kept many people oppressed. Its chief purpose was to promote a questioning of oppression and a challenging of social injustice in order to show that such things were not inevitable and that, therefore, people had the power to change them. On theatre audiences, David Barnett (2015, 29 – 30) writes of Brecht:

His theatre has not taught them how to better themselves by bettering their society, but he has given spectators insights into the complex interrelationships between the

personal and the social, and has shown how a change in conditions can lead to a change in the characters. Brecht's wish to teach the audience to think dialectically does not entail a philosophical lesson in theses, antitheses and syntheses. Instead, spectators are encouraged to make connections for themselves.

In the above quotation, Barnett states that Brecht had no desire to dictate to an audience how they should respond to a situation. Nor did he dictate what is right or wrong about a particular set of circumstances; he left those decisions to his audience. What interested him, and what he made a concerted effort to do, was to simplify the complex nature of human relationships. He attempted to show an audience that simple changes in human relationships at a social level had the potential to impact them on a personal level. What he hoped to do was show the audience such changes are possible; how the connections were made and whether those choices were ever taken up, was up to them individually. Anthony Squiers (2012, 37) articulates this as follows:

[H]is theatre was a large-scale social experiment which sought to facilitate the advent of radical political and social change. It was also an experiment that was constantly adapting for the sake of greater effectiveness and one which extended throughout society.

Barnett (2015) further explains that Brecht's preoccupation was not about providing a moral compass for his audience, i.e. showing them, according to his own belief system, what is right or wrong. As Squiers (2012, 46) notes, "his epic theatre was not interested in moralizing [...] Brecht never intended epic theatre to instruct its audience in moral behaviour." He wanted to enlighten the minds of his audience that change is possible even in what is seemingly the most challenging situation. However, that change has to start with an individual recognising that he/she is part of wider society. The broad effects of wider society do not simply happen to an individual at a distance, what happens in society has a personal impact on an individual. If the individual is unhappy with such occurrences from broader society, by effecting small changes, both society and the individual have the capacity to change. Barnett (2015, 29 – 30) elaborates on this below:

Teaching the dialectical view of the world is far more about getting the audience to recognize a new way of understanding society, human beings and their capacities for change. Teaching is thus not about lessons as such, but is a process of sensitizing an audience to recognize the relationships between the characters and their social contexts. The insights gained in the theatre can then be applied to the spectators' own lives. [...] Brecht asks us to widen the lens to understand the individual as a part of a social system and to identify the dialectical tensions inherent to such relationships.

Taking all the above into account, Brecht's dialectical theatre is precisely the type of theatre

that would be able to challenge and confront the prevailing gendered power structures within the Indian South African community.

To achieve his goals, Brecht discouraged his audience from emotionally investing in, or identifying with, the action and the characters on stage. He hoped the emotional distancing would allow them to think logically and critically, and thus make rational decisions that were not tied up in emotional on-stage connections. He aimed to show that what was taking place on stage was not reality but an artificial construction of reality. In doing so, he hoped that audiences realised that just as the action on stage could be changed, so too could they effect change in their lives, based on their actions and decisions. This is relevant to my study as I see it as a way in which Indian South African women, who have been historically excluded from the theatre space can, through Brecht's style of theatre, become active spectators as opposed to passive ones who do not question what is happening on stage. As Squiers (2012, 48) observes, "once one understands the social environment, one can begin to alter social relations or the relations of social forces." By questioning engrained societal power structures, women can begin to reclaim their power that prior to this realisation, they did not know they could do. The knowledge allows them potentially to challenge the patriarchal shackles that bind and oppress them and confine them to abusive situations domestically. Questioning their situation and the circumstances in which they find themselves is the first step to bringing about change in their lives.

What is interesting about this type of theatre is that audiences are the agents of power as opposed to the performers themselves. In a conventional theatre scenario, a passive audience views a performance and is not required to engage actively with the content, as the actors are the sources of authority and influence, holding sway and control over society as represented by that audience. Narrative is conveyed through the actors, and based on their performances, an audience is transfixed. However, in Brecht's Epic theatre, the audience is responsible for driving change in their real lives using the performance of the actors as the catalyst and the vehicle through which questioning the existing status quo can begin:

For Brecht the idea is to bring about a new way of thinking, understanding and interpreting the world. In a word, the goal is to alter consciousness. What Brecht attempted was to provide a new way of thinking so that people would come to new

conclusions. (Squiers 2012, 38)

Brecht's style of theatre also engaged two other prominent aspects. First, that theatre is *political* in nature and second, that his form of theatre can be labelled as *epic*. Both these concepts I will engage and explain in order to provide a context from which the comparative textual discussion to follow, can take place. My intention is to show that the aims of Brecht's Epic theatre overlap with the objectives of the playwrights whose texts I will be analysing.

First, the notion that theatre is political. At first glance one may make the false assumption that the term 'political' refers simply to politics and governmental structures. However, the 'political,' for Brecht, relates to the existing capitalist oppressive power structures in a society. He was not interested in making theatre that was political but concerned himself with making theatre politically (Barnett 2015). According to Franks and Jones (1999, 182 – 183), "Brecht was at once a political theorist and a practitioner of politicised theatre – his theatrical art was intended to be educative, a source of aesthetic pleasure, and a basis for political argument and action." Barnett (2015, 32) elaborates on the term 'political':

Lenin [...] defined politics with two simple questions[...]: 'who? to whom?' Or to expand: he is asking who does what to whom. The question is consequently about power, law, ethics, economics, and politics is the overarching term that runs through them all. Brecht thus wants to craft forms of drama and theatre that can point to the political in the most apparently unpolitical of situations in order to alert the spectator that even these things could change in a changed society.

Based on the definition above, making theatre politically can be used to confront the situation in which a woman who is a victim of domestic abuse finds herself. Any relationship has its own political structure, in that there are always power dynamics involved in human interaction. Each individual has his or her own personal power, and they bring that to a relationship, where the balance of power should remain equal. In the case of a (heteronormative) marriage, the power dynamics between husband and wife ideally should be evenly weighted, where each exerts control and influence over the other in a way that is balanced. However, that is not necessarily the case in the Indian South African community where entrenched notions of male dominance skew the balance of power in favour of the husband; as Pulane Motswapong (2017) explains, "discourse has constructed and perpetrated the idea of the woman's body being the site on which male hegemonic



structures operate.” Power dynamics shift when one individual takes control over the other or exerts greater dominance or influence over the other. In each of the plays I have analysed, the power in the relationship lies with the abusive husband due to the social structures and systems that support and promote patriarchy. It is the man - whether it is Ahmed, Deva or Logan - who needs to have control and exert it over his wife, which manifests as domestic abuse. This has been reiterated by Follingstad et al. (1990, 108) who state, “the function of this type of [...] abuse appears to be one of control. By making the recipient [...] believe she is not worthwhile, she would remain within the power of the psychological abuser.”

The second notion associated with Brecht that needs unpacking, is ‘Epic Theatre’. The word ‘epic’ has come to be associated with subjects that are larger than life or executed in a larger than life fashion. Brecht’s understanding of the term Epic is very different:

Brecht was also keen to vary the ways in which a play communicates with an audience in order to create discontinuity and to disrupt the simple consumption of signs in the auditorium. Here he wanted to interrupt the dramatic flow by inserting different forms of narrative into dialogues, thus creating a different kind of ‘separation of elements.’ Indeed, he named the combination of dramatic and narrative ‘epic theatre’. Here ‘epic’ does not mean ‘on a grand scale’ as in a Hollywood epic. Instead, it refers to Aristotle’s division of the literary arts into the epic (that is, narrative poetry, like Homer’s *Iliad*), the dramatic and the lyric. Brecht’s aim was to switch between different modes of theatrical presentation in a bid to disrupt the relationship between a figure and the audience. (Barnett 2015, 71)

It is very clear from the description above that Brecht did not want an audience to engage with a performance without being aware of its artificiality and its contrived nature. Brecht wanted the audience to be aware at all times that what they were watching was a performance and not real life. However, if the spectator derived through his ‘separation of elements’ questions that reflected and potentially challenged real life and society as it was, that in itself had the power to effect change. Pan (2009, 24) describes this process as follows:

[I]nstead of functioning as a representation that tries to use aesthetic effects to convince an audience, such thinking exercises aim to establish a new type of political subject who is not just a passive spectator following the lead of authoritarian rulers but rather a thinking participant who can independently seek the truth through reflection and act accordingly.

If one had to adapt this notion today, to raise the subject of domestic abuse on stage, Brecht would not want the spectator to identify wholly with the characters on stage, he would want an audience member to be aware that what is on stage is not real, although the subject matter may be real to the individual. His epic technique would interrupt free-flowing action and force an audience to raise questions about how the issue was being handled on stage, and more importantly, question why the action was unfolding in that particular way. This conscious engagement would, Brecht hoped, be internalised sufficiently to pose those same questions in a real-life situation so that the status-quo of that scenario changes. Brecht (1964, 14) further explains this:

As we cannot invite the audience to fling itself into the story as if it were a river and let itself be carried vaguely hither and thither, the individual episodes have to be knotted together in such a way that the knots are easily noticed. The episodes must not succeed one another indistinguishably but must give us a chance to impose our judgment. [...] The parts of the story have to be carefully set off one against another by giving each its own structure as a play within the play.

Here again, when elaborating on the epic nature of his theatre style, Brecht articulates how imperative it is that an audience distances itself from the onstage action. The merit of this, for example, when dealing with the issue of domestic abuse, is when a spectator witnesses the action and is fully engrossed in it emotionally and intellectually, he/she may mistake the action on stage for being nothing more than a sequence of signs and symbols that have been choreographed on stage for the entertainment of the audience. They may consider the action on stage to be distinctly separate from their own personal circumstances. The fiction of the stage may never allow them mental engagement, consequently not allowing an individual to realise his/her individual power to change their own situation. Brecht hoped that in drawing attention to the artificiality of theatre, individuals could recognise their own power and capacity to effect change in their own lives. In the example of domestic abuse, a victim may realise his/her capacity to change the abusive situation by raising their voice against the abuser or even getting help by recognising the narrative being portrayed on stage does not have to conclude once the curtains have closed. The aim is to make people realise that even in the most seemingly helpless situations, change is possible.

As explained in Chapter One, theatre has always been used within the Indian South African community to articulate problems and reflect issues within the broader social context. In

analysing the three Indian South African play texts, all framed around domestic abuse, I explore how theatre is used as a medium through which discussions around this social ill can begin. By witnessing dramatisations of domestic abuse, audiences can reflect on the social structures that keep it in place in their own lives. Through this recognition, dismantling of these structures may begin, as Brecht advocated when furthering notions of theatre being epic, political and dialectic in nature. I seek, in my analysis, to illustrate how, within the Indian South African community, it is possible for theatre to articulate the problems and concerns of women. While Indian South African theatre has historically excluded women, these playwrights show that representation of the female agenda is necessary. Especially when the consequences for not allowing her voice to be heard is potentially fatal (as evidenced by the statistics around domestic abuse and recognising that two of the three plays ends violently or insinuating violence). These playwrights illustrate that the experiences of Indian South African women should not be too limited to the private domain of their homes; instead, through these plays women are able to reclaim their voices in the perceived public space of theatre, as expressed by Pan (2009, 222), who states, “an act that [...] embodies [...] an affective mobilization of individual consciousness for a collective cause that goes beyond the individual.” Whilst popular theatre in the Indian South African community has, for nearly three decades now, leaned on the side of humour and comedy, it has also mostly portrayed life from a male perspective with females being confined to the domestic sphere.

I engage Brecht’s theatre theory to highlight that regardless of whether the woman is a performer or an audience member, both roles can be considered agents of power, and the power they wield to facilitate transformation and change simply needs to be recognised. The plays employ Brechtian techniques to varying degrees; however, all of them have a character(s) that breaks the fourth wall<sup>17</sup> of the theatre and addresses the audience directly. Furthermore, the playwrights’ overall aim, like Brecht’s, is to illustrate to audiences that they have the power and capacity to effect change in their own lives. They may

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<sup>17</sup> The fourth wall is a theatrical term for the “imaginary wall that separates the story from the real world. [...] [T]hree surrounding walls enclose the stage while an invisible “4th wall” is left out for the sake of the viewer” (Lennox 2020). This fourth invisible wall separates the audience and the performers. While the audience can view what is happening within the parameters of the stage, the performers ‘pretend’ to be unaware of the audience’s presence due to the imaginary fourth wall.

approach their material differently, but all of them hope to stimulate an audience through the ideas, thoughts, words or actions they have witnessed on the stage.

As this chapter illustrates, within the Indian community theatre has been used as a tool to raise a variety of issues that concern the lives of individuals and the community as a whole. This has principally been done by men with a few female exceptions. Brecht believed theatre has the capacity to act as a catalyst for social change. I believe that theatre can promote change by creating a space in which the previously unheard voices of women might be raised; in this dissertation, I focus specifically on women who are victims of domestic abuse, to raise awareness within the Indian South African community.

### 3. METHODOLOGY

There is something about words. In expert hands, manipulated deftly, they take you prisoner. Wind themselves around your limbs like spider silk, and when you are so enthralled you cannot move, they pierce your skin, enter your blood, numb your thoughts. Inside you they work their magic.

(Setterfield)

Methodology is defined as a “contextual framework’ for research, [it] is the general research strategy that outlines the way in which research is to be undertaken and, among other things, identifies the methods to be used in it” (Relentless Fire & Safety 2020). My research focusses on the theatrical representations of domestic abuse in three South African plays written between 1993 and 2003. In order to draw interpretive conclusions about each of the plays and locate them as representations of the Indian South African community, I have to analyse them and understand them from multiple aspects including the structure of the text, how it was written, each of the characters, the overall themes and main issues being raised in each of them. Thus, it was most suitable for me to situate my research within a methodological framework of qualitative research. As my research questions are based on an interrogative as opposed to a quantifiable nature, a qualitative study was best suited.

Beverley Hancock, Elizabeth Ockleford and Kate Windridge argue that “all research, whether quantitative or qualitative, must involve an explicit, disciplined, systematic approach to finding things out, using the method most appropriate to the question being asked” (2009, 6). The three qualitative research methods I have used are close reading, face-to-face interviews and textual analyses in order to understand the social reality of domestic abuse as it appears in each of the texts.

The terms ‘close reading’ and ‘textual analysis’ are often used interchangeably; however, for the purpose of my research, I use them as two distinct methods offering the ability to access the plays differently. For me, a close reading, was precisely that – multiple readings of the

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<sup>18</sup> Mother-of-two, 32-year old Thokozile Kubheka was allegedly killed by her boyfriend in 2020 in the East Rand, Johannesburg. (Rahlaga, 2020)

play(s) which enabled me to recognise overarching themes, concepts and ideas. Through the close reading I generated a broad overview of the plays, from where I could build my interview questions for the playwrights. Equipped with insight generated from the interviews with the playwrights, the textual analysis allowed me to delve into the play texts themselves, uncovering answers to my research questions based on tone of language, stage and lighting cues, character reactions, and dialogue construction. For me, the close reading lacked the detailed depth and insight that I was able to generate through the textual analysis.

## **QUALITATIVE RESEARCH**

Hancock et al. (2009, 7) explain that:

Qualitative research is concerned with developing explanations of social phenomena. [...] It aims to help us to understand the social world in which we live and why things are the way they are. It is concerned with the social aspects of our world and seeks to answer questions about [it].

This explanation of qualitative research is relevant for my research in that I am using the three plays to make inferences about a social phenomenon, namely domestic abuse within the Indian South African community as it is represented in these three South African plays. My personal experience within the Indian South African community further contributes to my understanding of this phenomenon. I have sought to answer questions that relate to the issue of domestic abuse in each of the texts while locating the problem within the Indian South African community. I use the play texts as a lens through which to understand how the issue of domestic abuse is experienced within the Indian South African community. It is important to note the plays are artistic representations of how domestic abuse unfolds within the community. They are the playwrights' interpretation of the issue and are fictional depictions of non-fictional accounts of abuse. The plays offer one aesthetic window into how and why the phenomenon occurs and thus, allow interpretations of the subject and deeper understanding to take place. I will interrogate how the characters experience domestic abuse as way to make interpretations as to how the real issue of domestic abuse affects women in the Indian South African community.

According to Norman K. Denzin and Yvonna S. Lincoln (2008, 5):

Qualitative research is a situated activity that locates the observer in the world. [...] Qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them.

By this explanation of qualitative research, being an Indian South African woman, I use my own experiences in the Indian South African community to assist me to draw conclusions regarding how the depiction of domestic abuse in each of the texts is similar or different according to what I have experienced in the community, as well as the official statistics that have informed my research about the subject. My experience and familiarity with the community has allowed me to witness aspects like patriarchy and the silence of women first hand. Based on my experiences, confronting and discussing issues such as domestic abuse is taboo in many households. The matter is rarely confronted and usually ignored by the agents of power in that home – both the male figure (i.e. the father/husband), and the woman (i.e. the mother/wife). She too keeps silent and thus, for me, is complicit – even if unconsciously – in perpetuating the cycles of patriarchy and abuse. These are contributing factors to the issue which I was keen to explore and determine whether they were replicated in any of the characters.

Using the texts as a base, I will analyse the playwrights' fictional perspectives of how they believe domestic abuse is experienced within the Indian South African community. I will analyse the similarities and differences between the representations of domestic abuse in each of the texts, in order to draw interpretative conclusions about how domestic abuse operates within Indian South African homes as I understand it, based on both my research and my experiences within the community.

I should note, too, that my research related to domestic abuse is not intended to present an accurate quantifying of domestic violence incidents. I use the plays as a way in which to view the issue of domestic abuse through the subjectivities of the playwrights who have written them. The plays present fictitious representations of domestic abuse which allow me to draw interpretive conclusions about how the issue is experienced in reality within the Indian South African community. As these conclusions are subjective in nature, they cannot be quantified and a qualitative approach must thus be adopted. As R.L. Jackson II, D. Drummond and S. Camara (2007, 23) write of qualitative research:

It encompasses all forms of social inquiry that rely primarily on non-numeric data in the form of words, including all types of textual analyses such as content, conversation, discourse, and narrative analyses. The aim and function of qualitative inquiry is to understand the meaning of human action by describing the inherent of essential characteristics of social objects of human experience.

Similarly, I have analysed the three plays to understand the meanings of the actions and choices of the main characters, in order to make inferences about the experience of domestic abuse within the Indian South African community, and to explore the role such plays perform in addressing the issue.

### **CHOOSING THE PLAYS**

The three plays I chose to analyse – *A Cookie in the Kitchen* (2002), *Purdah* (1993), and *Till Death do us Part* (1993) – were all written by Indian South African males who address the subject of domestic abuse in their texts.

It is possible to draw several potential reasons why all the playwrights of the texts I am analysing are male. Firstly, it indicates to me that either Indian South African female playwrights are not raising the subject in their work or their work is not as well known. Secondly, it demonstrates that the Indian South African theatre space is still very male dominated and female playwrights have not had the same access as their male counterparts. Thirdly, the male playwrights potentially felt so strongly about the subject that writing about domestic abuse was more of a priority for them than their female counterparts. It was the basis of these ideas which helped me frame the questions I asked each playwright in our one-on-one interview sessions.<sup>19</sup>

The theories I use to frame my research, namely diasporic identity theory (Brazier (2008); Cohen (1997); Safran (1991); Rastogi (2008); Nyman (2009); and Boshoff (2005)) and cultural theory (Naidoo (1997); Pillay (2014); Hall (1997); Paresh (2008); and Meer (1972)), are similarly fluid and in a state of continuous change. What is true for me is not necessarily true for the next person; Jackson II et al. (2007, 27) state:

[E]xperience is always happening, unending, and fluid. Perspectives on experience can change from person to person, yet it is perspective that influences social cognition and social behaviour. Perspective influences relationships and interaction patterns.

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<sup>19</sup> The questions I used as the starting-point in my interviews with the playwrights are included in Appendix A.



A sensitive subject like domestic abuse cannot be explored without contextualising it. I was interested in how domestic abuse was represented in each of the play texts to make interpretations about the issue specifically within the Indian South African community. This required me to determine how the diasporic nature of the community has impacted the creation of gender roles. How are gender dynamics then explored within each of the texts? Finally, and most importantly, how have all these factors impacted the depiction of abuse in each of the texts? Qualitative research allowed me to ask these questions and determine the subsequent answers, as Hancock et al (2009, 7) observe:

Qualitative research is concerned with developing explanations of social phenomena. That is to say, it aims to help us understand the social world in which we live and why things are the way they are. It is concerned with the social aspects of our world and seeks to answer questions about:

- Why people behave the way they do.
- How opinions and attitudes are formed.
- How people are affected by the events that go on around them.
- How and why cultures and practices have developed the way they have.

These notions frame the probing questions to which I needed answers in relation to my topic. My research aims to set up my interpretation of the texts as cultural representations of abuse that reflect something about the structures of Indian South African communities; for example, that patriarchy is the norm within the community, or that women are seen as lacking agency in their own homes, or that, surprisingly, women may partially share the responsibility for allowing these cycles of abuse and unequal power dynamics to continue.

## **CLOSE READING**

Before I attempted speaking to the playwrights concerned, it was very important for me to have a thorough understanding of each of the texts. I chose to conduct a close reading of each of the texts in order to interrogate them. Close reading allowed me to focus on certain elements of the text at a time, to look not only at the issue of domestic abuse, but also to analyse the broader themes and issues being raised, such as the prevalence of patriarchy, for example. B.H. Smith (2016, 58) says:

The term close reading refers not only to an activity with regard to texts but also to a type of text itself: a technically informed, fine-grained analysis of some piece of writing, usually in connection with some broader question of interest.

The three plays I chose to analyse - *A Cookie in the Kitchen* (2002), *Purdah* (1993) and *Till Death do us Part* (1993) – were all written by Indian South African males who address the

subject of domestic abuse in their texts. As I read and reread the plays, overarching themes that ran throughout the texts became clearer. While there were some distinct similarities, however, as Nicholson (2017, 184) notes, “close reading can reveal the tensions and contradictions in a text, and it can illuminate moments of experience by placing them in the context of other cultural, artistic or social practices.”

My understanding of meaning found in each of the texts has come from multiple readings, enabling me to draw out the obvious similarities and differences, those readily apparent and those sometimes not-so-distinct; for example, the fact that despite their religious and caste distinctions, all the victims are females, being abused at the hands of their husbands. David Greenham (2019, 3), writing about how meaning in a text is created, notes:

[W]ords, when connected, can't help but affect each other's meanings. ... No word, however clearly it is articulated, has a discernible meaning outside of a specific context. The practice of close reading begins with that understanding: words get their meanings by working together. Words, individually, are unfixed and unsettled because most of them (possibly all of them) have more than one possible interpretation. Thus, any word outside of a particular context has too much potential meaning. The context in which a word appears shrinks that potential usually to one meaning and sometimes, where ambiguity remains, to two or more meanings.

As per Greenham's (2019) explanation, all the words in each of the plays have specific meanings for the context of that specific text. However, that meaning is altered and amplified when the three texts are analysed together. The themes become stronger and the messages become clearer. The words no longer remain aspects in which singular meaning is created, but multiple meanings and understanding can be derived from words that resonate with each other and overlap, which is key for the textual analyses. Thus, close reading facilitates deeper understanding of the subject under exploration, in this instance domestic abuse.

## **INTERVIEWING THE PLAYWRIGHTS**

While the texts were read as stand-alone pieces, it was necessary to determine the motivation of writing about domestic abuse by each of the playwrights. Questions around individual inspiration, context, implications within the community, broader themes and messages were pertinent to being able to analyse each play thereafter. My understanding of themes such as gender dynamics and power struggles would be deepened. It would also

contribute to my overall aim of determining whether the plays could accurately be viewed as cultural representations of the Indian South African community:

How people act and react is generally structured by culturally specific notions of cause-and-effect relationships [...] and shared understandings of what it means to act appropriately, legitimately, or strategically. By uncovering these meanings and logics, the researcher can explain why people do what they do - why they vote, fight, love, argue, pray, preach, and more - in the ways they do. (Fujii 2018, 74)

I conducted interviews with each of the playwrights since “as a learning process, interviewing enables the researcher to gain insight into participants’ worlds through interaction and dialogue” (Fujii 2018, 1).

While I managed successfully to interview all of them, I used a different medium to do so for each. The first interview I conducted with Robin Singh (2018) was a face-to-face interview, which I audio-recorded so that transcription was possible thereafter.

The next interview with Ismail Mahomed (2019). As Mahomed and I resided in different cities at the time, I did a Skype interview with him. I did attempt to record the interview for transcription purposes, however, due to poor connectivity, there were several times when the clarity of the call was distorted. As a result, I had to ask Mahomed to assist me later by filling in the blank moments of our conversation via email. Once I had transcribed the interview, I then sent it to Mahomed to insert the words that I had lost as a result of a poor connection, which he kindly did.

The last interview I conducted was with Vivian Moodley (2019). After several attempts to interview Moodley, we finally committed to a time and date that was convenient for us both as our schedules had not allowed us to converse before that. This interview entailed the use of technology by means of the popular chat application: WhatsApp, and in particular the voice note facility.

After listening to the interviews, transcribing the content and reading the material several times, there were glaring similarities and strong sentiments of commonality that emerged amongst all three playwrights. This is to be expected according to Fujii (2018, 76 – 78), who states:

After the initial perusal, the researcher might continue re-reading the transcripts or listening again to the audio files to begin systematically identifying key themes that recur. One type of pattern that is easy to begin noticing is the repetition of names, terms, concepts, or themes. [...] Patterns do not surface all at once. Some might emerge in a single, careful reading of the transcripts. Others might take more time and come into focus only when the researcher begins to make multiple links within and across the data as whole. This is not surprising, given the interconnectedness of the data.

As Fujii (2018) mentions, specific themes, messages and overlapping characteristics in the central characters became clearer to me after multiple readings of the plays, which assisted me with my textual analyses.

## **TEXTUAL ANALYSES**

The final step in my research is the textual analysis of each of the plays. As Catherine Belsey (2013, 160) states, “textual analysis is indispensable to research in cultural criticism [...] as well as any other discipline that focuses on texts, or seeks to understand the inscription of culture in its artefacts.” Using the information I had gathered through the close readings and face-to-face interviews, the textual analysis enabled me to draw the various threads of information together. The textual analyses further allowed me to hone in on information related to the theoretical aspects of my research such as patriarchal practices within the Indian South African community, as reflected in the plays. I had generated a significant amount of information about each of the plays, the themes I was interrogating, the characters I aimed to explore and how the subject of domestic abuse was depicted in each play. A textual analysis of each of the plays allowed me to articulate the layers of understanding with which I had begun to grapple. Some of the aspects I wanted to highlight included the form of each of the plays, the characters and how they related to each other, and the language used in each of the plays. Textual analysis allowed me to combine these varying aspects into a singular thread. As Carley (1994, 290 – 291) observes:

Language has been viewed as a window on the mind. Language is also a window on culture. Through analyzing texts the interplay between human cognition and culture can be examined. Through analyzing texts cognitive similarities and differences across individuals, which serve as a basis for culture can be described. Through analyzing texts the impact of culture on individual behavior can be examined. In addition, such analyses can locate similarities and differences across cultures and changes within cultures.

Each of the plays has its own textual analysis chapter and the overarching themes, similarities and differences found in all three plays are discussed in a separate comparative chapter. I have written the comparative chapter as a way of tying together the major

themes and ideas that have emerged from each of the analysis chapters. This chapter highlights the conclusions I have been able to draw in relation to the central research questions, namely: in each of the plays, are patriarchal attitudes evident within the dynamics of each couple and how does this impact the depictions of domestic abuse? In the plays, how do the victims respond to the abuse? How can theatrical representations of domestic abuse enable engagements around the issue which may otherwise not be addressed in the private domain? Belsey (2013, 167) states, “a substantial element of education [...] consists in acquiring a vocabulary, and it is this expanded vocabulary that permits us to think with greater clarity, to make finer distinctions.” Drawing on Belsey’s example, in relation to my research, the close readings created the foundation of my vocabulary. The interviews provided the expansion of that base and in drawing the threads of information together, I could refine my thoughts with greater clarity and depth, creating the finer distinctions I needed in the textual analyses.

## **CONCLUSION**

In order to interrogate the subject of domestic abuse as it is depicted in these three Indian South African plays, it was necessary for me to do a textual analysis of each of the plays to have a greater understanding of the plays as a whole, each of the characters, the form of the text and the context from which they emerged. All these questions could be answered by close readings and interviews with each of the playwrights. I needed to establish whether or not the plays were accurate cultural representations of the Indian South African community in order to make interpretive assessments about the community in relation to notions of patriarchy, gendered identity and domestic abuse.

**KGOTHATSO PULA:<sup>20</sup>**

#### **4. TILL DEATH DO US PART – AN ANALYSIS**

Having established the theoretical framework and methodology for my study, in this chapter I begin the analysis of the first of three plays written by Indian South African playwrights: Robin Singh's *Till death do us Part* (1993). The play gives us a representation of what life is like for a couple where domestic abuse is evident. It is a two-hander that, through the use of dialogue and monologues, sets up the relationship dynamics that exist between Sandy and Logan, the abused and her abuser. They are a married couple who have vowed to remain together until death parts them; however, Sandy, who knows she is being physically and mentally abused, is willing to do whatever it takes to prevent her potential death at the hands of her abusive husband.

#### **BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT**

In my interview with Singh, he was clear that he was not writing a play intended to speak to the Indian community exclusively:

RS: ...when I was doing the play, I didn't want it to be any specific race or culture, I was trying to avoid that. But what I couldn't avoid was getting actors of different backgrounds, different cultures, because I didn't want to necessarily introduce another source of conflict. So both of them look Indian but they don't have names that would suggest that they...

SP: Are Indian.

RS: Indian or whatever. So in a way they're meant to represent any young couple in a relationship like that where abuse is prevalent.<sup>21</sup> (Robin Singh interview 2018)

Despite Singh's position, I include his work here since he is a member of the Indian South African community. As an Indian South African himself, Singh's understanding of the sensitivities around the subject of domestic abuse is affected by his position as a product of the Indian South African diaspora, and this plays a role in the creation of his stories and his characters.

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<sup>20</sup> 27-year old Kgothatso Pula's body was found in a shallow grave in her boyfriend's backyard in Ga-Setati Village, Limpopo, five months after she went missing in 2020 (Ramothwala, 2020).

<sup>21</sup> For ease of reading, when quoting directly from the interviews, I use the initials and not the full name of the respective playwright as well as my own. For example, Robin Singh is RS while my responses are indicated by SP.

The play emerged in response to a request by staff at the Advice Desk for the Abused<sup>22</sup> who wanted to create a play to tell their stories, which were not necessarily located in the Indian South African community. Except for Singh's identity as an Indian South African, there are no references in the text that specify any race, religion or culture. Sandy and Logan could easily represent individuals from other race groups who exhibit similar characteristics and have been impacted by similar societal and cultural expectations. Except for their adherence to their marriage vows (albeit for different reasons – Sandy remains out of fear, Logan remains because he believes his marriage vows grants him ownership of his wife), there is nothing in the text that ties them to a particular set of ideologies or practices. The play is a fictional narrative, inspired by a number of real-life accounts and experiences of abuse shared with the Advice Desk, which Singh has woven together into a single narrative.

Singh says he made the decision to exclude any race, religious and class specifications because the issue of domestic abuse crosses divisions of caste, race and religion, as the individuals at the Advice Desk for the Abused informed him:

RS: I sat and chatted with them for quite a bit and they spoke a lot about this, that it's not specific to any culture/class of people. You know there's always the thought yes, it's common amongst the working class people, they have a rougher life, and there is perhaps alcoholism involved, drugs, whatever it is. But even in the, in the more affluent classes, it's quite prevalent, I mean, the abuser may not necessarily take a chopper and kill the person but there are other forms of abuse.

*Till Death Do Us Part* introduces us to some of the other, more subtle forms of abuse to which Singh refers above.

## **THE TOXIC RELATIONSHIP**

The play is set in a flat that is owned by the protagonist couple. The first person we see on stage is Sandy. Much of the story is told from her perspective although we are given insight into Logan's character as well later on in the play. Sandy is the victim in the play. She is well aware that she is being abused and bullied by her husband, and is under no illusions that the abuse might cost her life.

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<sup>22</sup> Established in 1986, the Advice Desk for the Abused is a non-profit organisation based in Durban that offers a range of crisis intervention services to anyone who is experiencing abuse, domestic violence or any form of social violence. Crisis counselling, referrals, advocacy and training are some of the services that are offered (Advice Desk for the Abused).

Almost immediately we learn of a male in Sandy's life that is not her husband: David. This information is established via a phone call that Sandy has with David about her husband Logan. One of her initial remarks to him is, "No David. N... No, we've been through all that before. My answer's still no. I can't run away. I can't leave him. You know what happened the last time" (1993, 315). From these words, one gets the impression that Sandy is being unfaithful to her husband and wants to get out of the relationship to pursue one with David. Social conditioning and stereotyping drive the assumption that because Sandy engages with a man who is not her husband, she must be unfaithful. Cultural expectations bind her to her husband in all aspects related to her sexual desires, and she is thus judged if she breaks that vow. This is echoed by Daniel Jordan Smith (2010) who says:

[M]arried women are made to feel —by their husbands, their families, and society—that as persons they are above all wives and mothers, and that their sexuality, their mobility, and their social and economic agency are circumscribed by the fact of their marriage. Indeed, in some respects (and certainly more so by some men than others), women are made to feel that their sexuality *belongs* to their husband and his patrilineage.

It is through such embedded social systems related to marriage that attitudes which disempower women and rob them of agency over their own bodies are perpetuated. We learn soon though that David is Sandy and Logan's neighbour who is simply looking out for Sandy's wellbeing. From Sandy's next few words in their conversation, "anyway he's already told me – if I run away he'll come and find me [...] and kill me" (1993, 315 – 316), one immediately understands why she has attempted to run away; her life is in jeopardy at the hands of her husband.

We get a sense of Logan's nature as a bully almost as soon as we meet him. While his initial interaction with Sandy seems to reflect a conventional romantic relationship between a husband and wife, that changes quickly. Initially, he is perceived as quite caring; then he appears to be rather mean by purposely withholding information of interest to her; and then, he becomes very dominating. As their conversation continues, we get a sense of the power dynamic between the two, as evidenced below:

Logan: I think I'll have a drink.

Sandy: Do you really have to ... supper's almost ready.

Logan: Hey girl you're forgetting yourself. I said I want to have a drink. OK?

Sandy: Sorry. (1993, 317)



This short interaction immediately establishes the power dynamic between the two: Logan holds the position of power and has the final say between them. This interaction is typical of the relationship dynamic in Indian South African homes where male superiority is usually enforced. While, in this instance, Sandy is polite out of fear of the consequences should she appear to be hostile, there is also no question of her challenging Logan's authority. As highlighted in Chapter One, identity politics and cultural expectations have taught Indian South African women that they are subservient to men, and that a man's authority cannot be challenged. The example highlights this entrenched attitude with regard to gendered power dynamics. Logan further reinforces his dominance by using the word "girl," a highly disempowering term to reference Sandy, a grown woman who runs her household. Calling her a "girl" devalues her as an adult, and limits her to the capabilities of a child, incapable of making her own decisions thus rendering her without authority and agency.

It is Logan who introduces the character of David to Sandy, at dinner that night, a sort of welcome for their new neighbour. What should be a very warm, pleasant evening, dissolves into an awkward night of crude insinuations by Logan regarding Sandy and David. While trying to make conversation, Logan narrates a crude joke about a man who offers to kiss another man's wife's breasts for a sum of R150.00. The husband agrees, without getting his wife's consent to do so. In short, the man caresses and fondles the wife's breasts at length, without ever kissing them as he doesn't have the R150.00 to do so. The humour is quite vulgar and while Logan is amused, Sandy and David are mortified. This 'joke' is an example of how men view each other as equals, but treat their wives as commodities and objectify them. This once again references discussions from Chapter One related to attitudes of patriarchy, where the Indian South African community expects married women to tolerate all their husbands' indiscretions because men have been given the status of superiority in the home. That Logan finds this 'joke' funny indicates that he sees Sandy as having the same value as the woman whose breasts were on offer; to him, Sandy is just a plaything, and he does not value her as an equal partner in their marriage.

The embarrassment continues as Logan quickly asserts his position in the home as the strong man that dominates the relationship, as evidenced below:

LOGAN: So Dave my friend, what do you think eh? Do you have a hundred and fifty rand for me? I'm sure my wife doesn't mind a little game.

SANDY: Logan, please. That's enough. Stop it now.

LOGAN: So what's the matter? You don't want to play a little game with our friend Dave? Perhaps she wants to hold out for more. Is that it then? You want more money? I'm sorry honey, if you want Dave to pay anything more he's going to want to fuck you, aren't you Dave, my man?

SANDY: That's disgusting. You're just being obnoxious.

[...]

SANDY: Excuse me, please (*Attempts to rise*).

LOGAN: (*Shoves her back on the seat*) You're not excused from the table. Not until I say so.

(1993, 319 – 320)

The extract above clearly shows Logan treating Sandy as an object. Not once does he ask her permission before insinuating that her body is on offer to another man, a complete stranger effectively. This incident also speaks to Logan's psychological domination of Sandy. He uses the joke as a means to reinforce his power over her. He establishes his absolute control over her and her helplessness is highlighted, since it appears that she has no capacity to object or assert her rights over her own body. Logan shows David that he is in control of all aspects of Sandy, including her body, and that he—and he alone—determines anything related to Sandy. This is typical of the nature of patriarchy where men believe their gender grants them the right to dominate women. Speaking on patriarchy, T.J. Mudau and O.S. Obadire (2017, 67) note:

It is an obsession with control as a core value around which social life is organized. Men maintain their privilege by controlling women and anyone else who might threaten their positions. Women are subordinated and treated as inferior because they are culturally defined as inferior.

This relates to discussions in Chapter One where Indian South African men organised their social lives around the ability to forge ahead economically and socially, while confining women to cultural and traditional policing. By confining them to the private domain, control of Indian South African women and their social expectations were secured.

By humiliating Sandy to this degree, Logan illustrates his capacity to mentally abuse Sandy, albeit in a relatively subtle way. He does not rage, scream at her or curse her; rather, he tortures her mentally by playing a game with her mind where he is in full control. He makes her feel powerless, unable to argue with him or raise any objections. She has no option and no choices available to her except the ones that Logan makes on her behalf.

It is interesting that such a situation is presented so early on, as Indian South African women may recognise this power dynamic immediately. It is no secret that historically Indian South African women have been confined to their home environments and it is hoped that within that space they are able to claim their power. However, through this incident, Singh is showing us that even in the home environment it is possible for a woman to be entirely disempowered and stripped of agency in her own life. Similarly, this example of Logan asserting his authority over Sandy and establishing himself as the primary decision maker, further highlights how Indian South African women are largely denied constructive power in their own lives. Attitudes of patriarchy are embedded in the social and cultural fabric of the Indian South African community; as a result, women are shackled, confined to the private domain, denied agency over their own lives, and prescribed gender roles that determine what experiences they are and are not allowed to have.

The whole interaction between Sandy and Logan, and the insinuations made, becomes so unbearable and embarrassing that David leaves. Thereafter, we learn, David blocks out the ensuing argument and fighting by playing music so loudly it drowns out Logan and Sandy's raised voices. David knows that where Sandy is concerned, Logan has absolute power, and in response, he drowns out their fights with music, which helps him forget that it is even taking place. For me, this points to the wider issue of how the community responds to abuse. As discussed in Chapter One, the Indian South African community expects a married woman to stay with her husband regardless of his indiscretions. That is the gender-constructed role she is expected to fulfill to uphold the traditional family structure, and as such, divorce is a taboo subject. That the community pardons the behaviour of its men, and expects women to tolerate and endure, points not only to the glaring hypocrisy of the community but also how willing – even eager – the community is to forgive actions like domestic abuse, or at least to ignore them. If the community's sentiment toward its men is forgiveness, irrespective of what the transgression is, and without either confrontation or questioning, then it implies a tacit acceptance of the abuse, which allows it to continue. This illustrates how the community is prepared to turn a blind eye to the goings-on between husbands and wives, in order to preserve the sanctity of the traditional family structure. Even though individuals know the abuse is taking place, it is far easier to turn a blind eye and deaf ear to what victims are enduring. It is easier to feign ignorance than to confront

the abuser. This implies that the abuser is all-powerful and irresistible. However, through confrontation and awareness, a shift in the balance of power might occur. It is precisely this sort of power dynamic that Brecht (1964) asks audiences to confront in order to facilitate change. Social customs within the Indian South African community have created imbalanced power dynamics between men and women, where men have been given unbridled power and authority; from a Brechtian perspective, these existing power structures must be confronted if anything is to change. Similarly, in *Till Death do us Part*, audiences are being asked to question the engrained power dynamics evident in Sandy and Logan's relationship, and in questioning, they can begin to challenge the power structures at play in their society, thus ultimately bringing about change.

The interaction at dinner is just a taste of what is to come as far as the domestic abuse goes. Sandy and Logan have a huge fight that night about David. Logan's insecurities take centre stage and manifest in the form of emotional, verbal and even sexual abuse. We are immediately made aware of the degree of abuse to which Sandy is accustomed and that even the smallest spark turns Logan's paranoia into all-consuming fury. This is evident in the following extract:

SANDY: He's not my friend. He's your friend. After all you invited him here didn't you?  
LOGAN: But I wasn't the one making eyes at him.  
SANDY: (*Disbelief*) What?  
LOGAN: You think I'm blind? You think I couldn't see what the two of you were up to?  
SANDY: You're paranoid.  
LOGAN: Paranoid am I? Bitch! If I wasn't here, you'd be fucking him on the table right now. Hear that? He's probably jerking off right now – listening to his music and thinking of you.  
SANDY: I think you're sick.  
LOGAN: Sick am I? (*Grabs her and tries to kiss her*)  
SANDY: (*Struggles*) Stop it Logan.  
LOGAN: Fucking bitch! (*Grabs her throat, throws her on the floor*) You want it, don't you?  
SANDY: No. Logan, don't. NO! (*Music builds up. Sandy on her back. Logan attempts to rape her. He is enjoying himself as she struggles*)  
LOGAN: Bitch, you like it like this don't you? (1993, 320 - 321)

By the last line in this encounter, it becomes apparent that this is not the first time this type of domestic abuse incident has taken place between the two. Despite knowing that there was no flirting between Sandy and David, and no eye-balling except for very awkward moments, Logan is so blatantly self-absorbed and so geared towards affirming his manhood

and dominance in their relationship, that he fails to see the harm and pain he is inflicting on Sandy who is helpless to defend herself against his physical strength. He calls her names, makes hurtful statements, bullies her mentally, is physically violent towards her and even attempts to rape Sandy. He takes pleasure in her suffering and enjoys seeing her in pain.

### **LOGAN (THE ABUSER)**

The play does not have a linear plot; rather, Singh gives us insight into the relationship between Sandy and Logan and pertinent moments in their lives using monologues and dialogues. Both these devices can be categorised as Brechtian. The non-linear sequence requires active mental engagement by the audience in order to piece the linear narrative of the play together. The monologues are spoken directly to the audience, an acknowledgement that they are present. This breaks the fourth wall and is an example of a technique used in Epic Theatre to bring attention to the artificiality and contrived nature of theatre. This would be done to make the audience recognise that what is being portrayed on stage is a fictitious depiction of reality and can be altered.

It is at this point that we begin to wonder how these two individuals ever got married to begin with, since they seem so ill-suited for each other. Singh then takes us back in time to Logan and Sandy's first meeting. From an audience's viewpoint, it is interesting to note their different perspectives at that meeting and their first impressions of each other.

Sandy and Logan met at a party. While Sandy is unimpressed by Logan's arrogant and narcissistic behaviour, over time she begins to enjoy his company. In contrast, Logan is physically and sexually attracted to Sandy, however he is annoyed that she asks him very personal questions related to his family and upbringing. While, at first, we see Logan's evasiveness as just being difficult, we soon realise that he is in conflict with his childhood memories. Logan experienced trauma as a child at the hands of his father and there is still very real, unhealed pain with which he is dealing, as he explains: "I told her very little because it is painful and embarrassing" (1993, 323). It is the first time since being introduced to the monster we know Logan can be, that we also see a vulnerable side to him.

Singh shows us this side of Logan in order to portray him as a very real human being complete with flaws and weaknesses. Rather than portraying him as a one-dimensional, control-obsessed man, in showing us his vulnerabilities, Singh makes Logan more relatable and more human. Like any individual, Logan is the product of his history and circumstances. His childhood was scarred by pain, abuse and fear and consequently he does not know how to be anything else, and thus continues to perpetuate the cycle of abuse in his adulthood with Sandy. It is a commentary on how the cycle of abuse is continued by abusive men; they do not become abusive from nothing. Such behaviour often emerges from a place of pain, being a manifestation of trauma that occurred in childhood, and evidencing how wounds and trauma inflicted in youth that are not healed can perpetuate cycles of violence and abuse in adulthood. As per my discussion in Chapter One, the perpetuation of patriarchal practices in the Indian South African community over generations has resulted in many children (boys and girls included) having little to no agency to break the cycle of abuse they have endured. Children exposed to that sort of trauma carry it with them throughout their lives and unless those wounds are healed, the pain will manifest later, in varying forms.

In his longest monologue, Logan gives us insight into the life he lived as a child. Initially, he appears to have had the perfect family: his mother and brother, in the safety and strength of his father's arms. That is, until his father started abusing alcohol. He would get so intoxicated that he became abusive and violent, first to his wife, and then to his children, until it reached the stage where his children grew to be afraid of him. As Logan describes him: "What a man! What a man! What a bastard! (*Pause*) I don't know anyone who wasn't afraid of him. When he came home drunk no one was safe" (1993, 323). When Logan starts with "what a man!", it sounds like he is somewhat in awe of his father. That awe is then replaced with criticism, as Logan takes us on a trip down memory lane as he shares some of his most painful memories. One of these, is the occasion of his eighth birthday, when his father brought home a play-truck for him as a gift. However, his father had been drinking so Logan refused to go to his father to accept the gift. Out of fury, his father throws the truck against a wall where it shatters into pieces. No one else touches the pieces of the broken truck for the rest of the evening. When Logan's father returns home that night, he spends

the next few hours picking up the pieces of the broken truck and glueing them together. It is a memory that still haunts Logan, the futility of it all:

LOGAN: When I woke up the next morning, the patched up truck was on the bookcase in my room. I never played with it, but it always remained there. *(Pause)* There was something very sad about the whole scene, and it was the only time I ever really felt sorry for him. *(Pause)* [...] Sandy doesn't understand me. I thought she did but she doesn't. Perhaps we shouldn't have married. (1993, 323 – 324)

This excerpt of text is significant for a few reasons. The truck is a well-crafted metaphor for Logan himself. While he acknowledges the sadness of the truck incident, he does not realise he personifies that broken truck. He too was an innocent, unharmed child, until his father's beatings broke and shattered his trust and belief. He grew into a mature adult with internal wounds only he knows about, so from the outside he appears to be a strong, confident man; on the inside, however, there is a lot of pain, and the innocent spirit of the child remains broken, much like the truck whose pieces were stuck together and repaired with glue. Similarly, Logan carries scars and pain from the trauma of his childhood although they are glued and held together by false bravado and confidence.

We also realise that Logan hated his father for what he did to them, and thus, Logan promises himself that the fear instilled into him and his loved ones by his father would never be replicated by him upon his own loved ones. What Logan does not acknowledge is that the circle of abuse has continued with him, arguably in a worse way. Logan's father became abusive when he was intoxicated by alcohol. Logan needs no such intoxicant to become violent and aggressive. He lashes out at Sandy as a way of restoring control when he feels like he is losing it. As a child, Logan was entirely at the mercy of his father which caused him immense pain and trauma. Now, as an adult, he has resolved to take absolute control over every aspect of his life as he is fearful of what may happen should someone else have control of his life again. To ensure those wounds are not inflicted upon him again, and that the pain is not replicated, he attempts to control everything and everyone including Sandy, thus repeating the cycle of abuse.

One can draw a comparison between Logan's need to exercise absolute control over Sandy in order to maintain power over her and the need of Indian South African men to control the lives of Indian South African women through patriarchal structures. Such structures

include relegating women to the private domain of their homes, excluding their voices from public platforms like theatre, ascribing socially and culturally accepted gender roles to them (for example, being a wife, managing a household, raising children), expecting married women to tolerate all their husband's indiscretions, and entrenching in women that even in the home environment, a man's authority is unquestionable. Just as Logan needed to control Sandy's life, so too do some Indian South African men feel the need to make decisions for Indian women in South Africa without taking into account the needs and desires of those women. While Logan has made decisions for Sandy's life according to what is best for him — she no longer works, she is isolated from her friends and family — similarly, it appears that the dominant behaviour in the Indian South African community reflects a disempowerment of women.

There is a cultural construct within the community that bases a woman's value on her chastity which enhances her eligibility for marriage, as Govender (1999, 39) notes, "the South African *Indian* woman is valued in terms of her innocence (virginity), her domestication [...] and her appearance." It seems apparent, thus, that Indian South African men in general have preconceived notions about women's sexual desires in the community. While a man may be allowed to have another woman to enhance his social profile (as elaborated in Chapter One's engagements around Meer (1972)), an Indian South African woman is only allowed to be sexually fulfilled within the boundaries of marriage, where procreation is possible. Beyond that, being sexually active outside of marriage creates the perception that she is promiscuous, Govender (1999, 80 – 81) further elaborates:

The status of woman in the community depends on her ability to marry and to procreate within the boundaries of marriage. [...] There is an assumption that because she is unmarried, she is sexually promiscuous. Thus marriage is presented as an institution to control women's sexuality.

It is evident that patriarchal structures have kept a sector of Indian South African women confined and disempowered while many men have forged ahead and blazed their own trail in the public arena. This is very similar to Sandy being forced to live the life that Logan wants her to live for his own self-assurance, while he can behave in any manner he wishes. By this stage of the text, Logan also begins to doubt his marriage. He blames Sandy's lack of understanding where he is concerned for their issues but never takes responsibility for his own role in the relationship. He never tries to understand Sandy and, as the text progresses,



one is made aware of the fact that all the sacrifices and compromises have been made by Sandy. Initially they are made to keep Logan happy and later, they are made by her to keep herself safe.

I believe that in revealing Logan's history to us, Singh has added another dimension to his character. Rather than being a two-dimensional monster, one recognises that Logan is not an out-and-out villain. He too is a human being, capable of feeling emotions, of feeling pain, and not just inflicting it. I do not believe, however, that witnessing Logan's pain changes the way his abuse is viewed. While there is an understanding of where it originates, and there are thus sympathies associated with his history, his actions towards Sandy are nonetheless inexcusable. His trauma and pain do not condone the violence he inflicts on her. I think Singh has included this aspect not only to view Logan as human, but also to ask us what are we capable of forgiving as individuals? It may further serve the purpose of highlighting the cyclical nature of domestic abuse. Logan experienced domestic abuse as a child; as it is a learnt behaviour from childhood, he continues it in his adulthood as he has not broken the cycle of violence, reiterating that "some men who are accustomed to domestic violence in their homes from youth grow up to adopt violence as a way of handling family disputes" (Ademiluka 2018). Similarly, in the Indian South African community, entrenched patriarchal attitudes which have been taught generation after generation, also allow social ills like domestic abuse to be perpetuated. Until and unless the cycle of abuse is questioned and the attitude of male superiority is confronted in the community, such violence will continue.

### **SANDY (THE ABUSED)**

As more about Sandy and Logan's relationship is revealed, we realise how isolated Sandy is from other members of society. Her friendship with David is hidden, for fear it would cause Logan to lash out. Later on we learn that she no longer has any friends or colleagues, all as a result of Logan's insecurities. He has isolated her completely. It is a technique used to ensure he has complete control of Sandy, as though she is no more than an object to him. Logan forced Sandy to leave her job by humiliating and bullying her in front of her colleagues, even slapping her. Despite attempts to reach her, Logan's rudeness to Sandy's colleagues ensure that they keep their distance – thus ensuring her total isolation. However, just as Logan remembers the moments of trauma associated with his father, that moment

at Sandy's job remains crystal clear to her as it was the first time Logan had raised his hands on her.

After that first moment of physical violence, Sandy proceeds to give us great insight into how quickly the abuse progresses and how she has become used to it, almost as though she expects it:

Yeah that day was the start of many such days and nights. By the time David moved in next door and started up with his music, getting slapped, kicked and punched around was quite normal for me. *(Pause)* It's strange [...] but sometimes, days... weeks would go by without any incident... then it would start up all over again. *(Pause)* The funny thing was that I thought Logan would be afraid to continue hitting me...but he developed a kind of art at doing it well...you know, beating me where he knew people would not see the bruises...my chest, stomach, thighs. Or I would cover them up by wearing long sleeved sweaters, jeans... or buttoning up my collar. *(Pause)* Now he doesn't seem to care anymore. (1993, 327)

What is alarming to note from the extract above, is that Sandy's 'normal' is now a very abnormal, abusive situation where she is battered physically, emotionally and mentally. She is still loyal to Logan despite the atrocities he commits and she even tries to hide the signs of his abuse using her clothes. Sandy's fear of Logan, and the life-threatening consequences of leaving him, terrify her so much that she keeps silent, and this becomes his shield. Despite the violence to which she is being subjected, Sandy continues to protect Logan by hiding the bruises and scars. Whether this is because she is terrified of him, or ashamed of what she is forced to endure at his hands, or that she simply fears for her life, her silence enables him to continue. She becomes an accomplice to the very trauma she is facing. This is the situation in which many abuse victims find themselves. They hide the scars of their pain. Victims of abuse are made to feel like they are to blame for the abuse. Abusers manipulate the situation so that their victims feel as though they are deserving of such punishment, and the feeling thus breeds silent consent resulting in behaviour such as Sandy exhibits. For me, this speaks to how patriarchal norms in the Indian South African community have led to a lack of agency for many Indian South African women. This lack of agency has ensured that Indian South African women do not confront the enforced power structures, and so allow them to continue, thus perpetuating the cycle of male dominance through silent consent. It is this silence that I argue theatre has the capacity to challenge.

Sandy's perception of what a normal, healthy relationship looks like, has changed to the degree that she accepts her situation despite the pain and trauma. Nonetheless, she is aware that she is being manipulated by Logan. After a particular incident, Logan, recognising that he has done wrong, attempts to apologise, to which Sandy retorts: "What's there to say? Whenever I do, you just twist everything I say and make like it's my fault and then you lose your temper and I get hurt... so what's there to say?" (1993, 327).

Sandy is not completely unaware that the abusive situation needs to be addressed and admits that she had once broached the subject on the suggestion of a neighbour. Sandy tries to be tactful with Logan and uses words like 'difficulties' to address the beatings she endures. However, all her attempts to work through their issues as a couple are met with violence and aggression by Logan. He believes Sandy's attempts to work through the abuse is a conspiracy against him. He threatens Sandy and effectively turns their marriage vows into ownership rights when he states: "You are married to me and you belong to me, you understand? And don't think you can run away from me... You go away and I'll come for you... I'll find you and... Bitch" (1993, 329).

To any person on the outside looking in to that toxic relationship, the most obvious solution would be for Sandy to leave the marriage. However, as Singh mentions, it is never that easy or straightforward, especially because there are many factors at play simultaneously in such situations, including cultural beliefs, familial responsibilities, and societal expectations, particularly within the Indian South African community:

RS: [G]o back to the old cultural thing, traditionally when a woman marries a man, she then is part of that relationship and generally her parents, this is practiced in the past, would send her back when she'd been abused or come to complain: "No that's your husband you've got to go back to your house." Even knowing that she may have arrived there with a blue eye or whatever it is, but it's like a, like a tradition that's evolved [...] But being a very conservative community, people would like to try and keep this to themselves and won't want to actually discuss this openly with people. Abused women [...] were not happy but they were accepting of the fact that, yes, this is part of this thing and I can't show this to anybody. (Robin Singh interview 2018)

As Singh notes, within the Indian South African community there is a culture of silence around abuse. That it takes place is common knowledge, but traditional values, such as adherence to the marriage vows, are considered of paramount importance. Once a woman

marries, it is believed she is the property of her husband. Regardless of how he treats her and what she has to endure, it is considered the proper and correct thing to stay with him. Since divorce is considered a non-option, for fear of judgement from society women stay and endure. A family's honour is equally at stake: A woman whose marriage has failed, jeopardises the prospects for her siblings to secure good proposals. A failed marriage is deemed to be the failure of the wife, and by extension the failure of the family that raised her. While these outdated attitudes are changing (especially among the younger generation), they still exist in pockets of the community. My research aims to confront notions exactly like this, through theatre. I believe that theatre is a platform through which such conversations and confrontations can be facilitated so that liberation from such archaic beliefs is possible. Similarly, it is not as easy for Sandy as just leaving. She is married to Logan and initially she loves him. However, as the incidences of violence continue, by the end of the play she is rather indifferent towards Logan and performs what is expected of her out of fear so that she is spared his wrath. She is also isolated from others so reaching out is not so easy as she is enduring her abuse alone.

We also begin to understand that part of the reason why Sandy has stayed for so long is because she fears that even if she escapes Logan's beatings, he will find her and vent his fury on her regardless, thus jeopardising her life. She also admits to David that she still believes she loves him, which is also part of the reason why she has stayed:

SANDY: I can't leave him, you know that. [...] I suppose it's because I still love him. [...] *(Hangs up phone)* [...] it's a trap isn't it? If I go, I live with the threat of his finding me...and then goodness knows what will happen. If I stay I get the shit kicked out of me. [...] My parents are not much help, they're not very sympathetic and anyway I don't want to drag them into it; after all they said that I chose to marry him... and I suppose I have to live with that. (1993, 329 – 330)

Despite Sandy's words, however, I do not fully believe that she wholeheartedly loves Logan anymore. I believe that his abuse has so dominated their marriage that it has tainted how she feels about him. To me, she is confused because she married Logan out of love, and a part of her still wants to connect to him because of that. However, he has hurt her to such a degree that she is mentally, physically and emotionally traumatised. Her mind wants to believe she is still with him due to some romantic connection, but I do not believe that feeling extends to her heart. I think a part of her does not want the marriage to fail, while another part has accepted that it has, and she is simultaneously conflicted by these

mindsets. This highlights for me the challenge faced by victims of abuse to leave the abusive situation, especially where an emotional connection existed. It is easy to be an observer watching the situation from the outside, not enduring the pain, confusion and conflicting emotions at play. Sandy probably knows it is in her best interest to walk away from the marriage, but there is a part of her that is tied to her abusive husband. Similarly, for victims of domestic abuse, the mental and emotional anxiety must be significant and it is one of the reasons why they remain tied to their situation.

Sandy's monologue here reveals a third reason why she feels bound to stay with Logan. She does not have much by way of family support as her parents blame her for choosing to marry Logan in the first place. Now that she has, she feels a sense of having to live with the consequences of that choice. She has made one escape attempt though, after being encouraged by David, but the attempt failed and Sandy has since become accustomed to how things are in her home and tries not to rock the boat too much. For me, this reflects the impact of abuse on victims. The type of abuse to which Sandy has been subjected not only affects the victim physically, mentally and emotionally, but isolates them from their loved ones. It speaks to the absolute control that abusers need to have over their victims where every aspect of the victim's life is determined by the abuser. It is not just limited to control over the victim's body, but their social circle as well including their peers, colleagues, family and loved ones. The victim inevitably is at the complete mercy of the abuser as that is the only person to whom they can turn. Thus, leaving an abusive situation becomes such a highly complex decision.

Even though her escape attempt failed, I think it is pertinent to acknowledge that Sandy did try consciously to leave her situation. She is aware that there are means for her to get help and for her to remove herself from the abuse that she faces. Unfortunately, however, her attempts have thus far been in vain. While we never know for sure the linear order in which the incidents revealed to us by the characters take place, we are aware that Sandy has made other attempts to address the situation. First, we are told that Sandy tried to broach the subject through conversation, attempting to address Logan's beatings through discussion. To that, Logan responds violently. Sandy changes course and tries to escape, this time with the assistance of her neighbour. Unfortunately, it was not a well thought-out plan and her

attempt to climb through the flat window, using her bedroom sheets as a rope, failed miserably; as Sandy says: “I nearly killed myself” (1993, 330).

In stark contrast to the situations that Logan endured as a child, Sandy’s youth was filled with happy and loving moments with her family. She enjoyed her childhood and remembers that period in her life with fondness. Even as an adult, those memories are the anchor that fill her with hope and happiness later on. Even in the midst of great despair, Sandy’s memory of childhood is what gives her solace. Despite the possibility that those memories are tinted with nostalgia, as were the memories of India to the indentured labourers, they still provide comfort to those doing the remembering in a time of great difficulty:

SANDY: [E]very time I feel depressed I look at my album [...] it has a way of sustaining us, pictures. I mean some of us. That’s all we have to look back to – some time, some place, when we were happy – if you’re that lucky. Me, I was very lucky – my mum, my dad, my brother Ben – all my cousins. [...] Those were good times. (1993, 331)

It is sad that in her adulthood, the happy place that Sandy defaults to is memories of her childhood. It shows that in her current situation, there is little for her to reflect on positively and draw strength from.

## THE DEPICTION OF ABUSE

Throughout the play we are privy to Sandy’s abuse and we are also aware that the abuse takes varying forms, including the mental and emotional abuse discussed thus far. The physical abuse, to which we are exposed, happens in stages, from slapping, to being told about the kicking and punching, and even the rape attempt. We are introduced to the violence slowly, and in so doing, we come to think that we understand how bad it can get. We are nonetheless shocked when we discover that the worst is yet to come.

Singh cleverly couches the violent climax in a scenario that begins with friendly banter and flirting between the married couple. We almost have a false sense that for a change, Sandy will not be subjected to Logan’s toxic aggression. However, things go horribly wrong when Sandy reveals that she is pregnant. From the warm, friendly interaction between the two, Logan immediately withdraws into a cold, hard, angry calm that quickly turns to hellish fury:

SANDY: Logan (*Pause*) I’m pregnant.

LOGAN: (*Coldly*) It’s your turn isn’t it?

SANDY: Logan... I said...

LOGAN: I heard you the first time (*Pause*). (1993, 333)

From the brief encounter above, we hope that Logan's pause and non-acknowledgment of the pregnancy is due to the fact that he is processing the happy news. However, we are given a startling reminder that Logan can be a beast at the best of times. He proceeds to vent his uncontrollable rage on Sandy, which takes the form of emotional and physical abuse despite her vulnerability as a pregnant woman. From what he says to her, it is as though the fact that she is pregnant is entirely her fault and that she has fallen pregnant in order to spite him and directly disobey an instruction given to her by him:

SANDY: I thought you'd be happy. Most husbands would be.

LOGAN: But I'm not like most husbands, I'm me. Anyway, you're missing the fucking point here. What did I say about children when we married?

SANDY: (*Mumbles*) "That we're not going to have any until you were ready."

LOGAN: Right. Again. (*Music fades in*)

SANDY: (*As she repeats the line slowly he strikes her with the rolled up newspaper on every word.*) Stop it Logan, you're hurting me.

LOGAN: Fucking bitch! I'm not over yet. This is jus the start. (1993, 333)

By now, we are horrified by the brutal aggression and violence that Logan makes Sandy endure. Once Logan has lashed out sufficiently, and has reinforced that he is always in power and in control of their relationship, (even forcing Sandy to repeat the fact that they have taken vows to remain together until death does them apart), he calms down.

In her unhappy state, Sandy questions why things always have to turn out to be so viciously ugly and Logan immediately responds with remorse, "I'm sorry Sandy. (*Pause*) Oh God I'm sorry. (*Turns and goes to her*) I'm so sorry, honey. I didn't mean it – all those things I said... and did" (1993, 334). The apology is not enough for her though, and she continues to question him, rejecting his apparently concerned touch. While Logan is initially deeply apologetic and remorseful, that quickly changes. When Sandy demands real answers for why she constantly lives in fear of him, Logan refuses to take any responsibility for why he is abusive, putting the blame on her:

LOGAN: If only you wouldn't push me. You know how I hate it when you get me to do things I don't like.

SANDY: But you don't have to react so violently. Can't we discuss things? It's getting so that I'm afraid of you. I never was like that. I don't know you anymore.

LOGAN: (*Irritated*) You see, you're doing it again – placing the blame at my feet. That's what annoys me about you. When are you going to learn? Just don't try and plan my life for me. (*Pause*) Anyway, let's just forget the whole thing. I said I was sorry. (1993, 334 – 335)

That is the shocking extent of concern Logan extends to Sandy. He believes that hitting her and abusing her is his right and sees nothing wrong with it, or at least refuses to admit that it is wrong; he also gives her no authority to question him. Logan is so consumed by attitudes of patriarchy and control, that he believes he has absolute ownership over Sandy, and is thus free to treat her and behave with her as he desires. This mindset is elaborated on below:

A patriarchal cultural system of indoctrination in South Africa has also created socialised gendered notions of male power and control, where violence is used to affirm masculinity. In this system, women are taught to be submissive to victimisation and men are taught to be dominant and abusive. (Saferspaces)

Logan wants full control of his life and hers and when any factor threatens to change that or affect it in some way, he lashes out at what he sees is his to abuse: Sandy. He has no consideration for the fact that Sandy is pregnant. And as a result of the beating that she has just endured by Logan, Sandy miscarries. What is interesting to note is that in the midst of her pain and despair of miscarriage, she cries out for help and assistance from David, her neighbour, even though she lives with Logan, her husband. This is significant for me because it shows that Sandy understands Logan is toxic for her. She has no one else to turn to for solace except her neighbour David as she knows she cannot depend on Logan for comfort, and she has been isolated from everyone else. David is the only person in Sandy's life who represents what life without abuse is. In her moment of absolute pain, that glimmer of hope that David represents, is what she hangs on to. Community members would rather ignore the issue and pretend it did not occur than try to be a source of comfort, support and healing which is what David represents to Sandy.

Disappointingly, even the miscarriage is not enough to stop Sandy from protecting Logan and lying to cover up his abuses. In the hospital, she lies about how she ended up in that condition: "I told them that I had fallen down the stairs... that the stairs had just been waxed... and I had slipped and fallen down a flight of stairs" (199, 335). By this point, we have resigned ourselves to thinking that Sandy will never leave the situation or her marriage. It appears as though nothing he does will ever force her to reassess her situation, even though it may very realistically jeopardise her life. Once again it seems that Sandy accepts Logan's reassurances that things will change after the incident and that his



apologies this time will not be for naught. However, Singh has a surprise right at the end of the play.

When we encounter Sandy again, we realise that the text is circular as the monologue that began the play is where we find ourselves again. This technique can also point to the cyclical nature of abuse and how it continues: “research suggests that child abuse is known to repeat itself from generation to generation. This cycle of abuse can occur when children who were victims of abuse and/or neglect or witnessed violence between their parents or caregivers” (Child Welfare Information Gateway 2016). Based on the circular nature of the play, once again, we see and hear the conversation that Sandy has with David, this time with the full understanding of who David is. We also understand why David is so desperately trying to encourage Sandy to leave the situation. She is adamant, however, that running away is not the solution as she is fearful that Logan will find her regardless. When she begins to convey to David that she is appreciative of him, she is interrupted by someone at the door, someone she presumes is Logan. Sandy then cuts the call with David, and the next few words presented to us are:

SANDY: *(Pause)* That was my friend David. *(Pause)* *(Removes pistol from bag. Points it to her head. Then points to entrance from which Logan is expected. Replaces gun in bag).*  
Hi darling! Back so soon. Come on in, I’m in here. (1993, 336)

Evidently, Sandy has had enough of Logan’s abuse and she has decided to take matters into her own hands. The fact that she has a pistol in her possession shows that she has taken a step to stand up to Logan and give herself a fighting chance. While we are unsure what will unfold next, and whether or not she will kill herself, kill Logan out of self-defense or provocation, or kill them both out of frustration, there has clearly been a mental realisation that the abuse can stop with Sandy’s effort. And now the assumption is that the abuse will be confronted. Whether it is because Sandy actually uses the pistol or whether the threat of it will suffice – we will never know, but it appears that a decision has been made not to allow matters to be out of her control anymore. The introduction of the pistol to an already tense situation highlights how desperate matters have become for Sandy, where she feels as though this is her only avenue to escape. The pistol is extreme but it demonstrates to me that Sandy recognises her power, the pistol is a way of enforcing it. Throughout the play Sandy has endured unspeakable trauma, and for the first time she realises she no longer has

to. Her decision, in my mind, points to the ability of domestic abuse victims to realise they have the capacity to change their situation. Victims should not feel that purchasing a gun is the only option they have available to them, but for Sandy, that choice appears to be her only option. According to Rhonda N. Lenton (1995, 304 – 405), “when stress is mediated by a personal history of aggressive socialization, and if social support mechanisms are lacking, violence is legitimized as a means of coping.” This quotation succinctly illustrates the Sandy’s situation: she has the support of none of her peers, or loved ones and over a period of time, she has been conditioned to accept the abuse that Logan inflicts on her. Her choosing to use a gun as a means of escape highlights her desperation. She is seeking any opportunity to escape her marriage, and has herself resorted to using violence as a means to escape. It shows how violence is perpetuated by the very individuals who have experienced it – first by Logan who experienced abuse as a child, and now through Sandy who sees no alternative but resorting to potentially perpetuating further violence.

It is the first time we see Sandy taking control of the situation and while we are hopeful for her, Singh gives us no clues as to how things end between them. This is a typical technique that Brecht suggests where audience members are given the freedom to make their own decisions. In this case, the audience decides what happens to the characters. I believe in ending the play as abruptly as this, Singh, like Brecht, forces us to ask a few pertinent questions – how do we want the play to end? Based on what we know of the characters, do we see that ending taking place? And if not, what needs to be done/ changed to ensure that ending comes to fruition? What we know is that Sandy and Logan’s relationship is highly violent and so even if Sandy uses a gun to threaten Logan, he is most likely going to challenge her and perhaps it might end with both their deaths. If Sandy had to take her own life as a result of this abusive situation, her victimhood is perpetuated, meaning she would never have been able to transcend the violence. If she kills Logan, I view it as the ultimate defiance and confrontation, albeit with tragic consequences for each of them. Given the nature of their relationship I cannot see the play ending without someone’s life being lost. Whether Sandy pulls the trigger out of self-defense or whether she is overpowered by Logan and it is used on her, I believe one of them will pay the ultimate price. I do not see a reduction in the levels of abuse with the introduction of a pistol; if anything, the tension and scope for even greater violence is only exacerbated. Fighting violence with violence is never

a solution and this decision of Sandy's further highlights how enmeshed she has become in the cycle of violence through fighting for her agency. This step is bound to end in tragedy and I believe this is why Singh has not indicated what happens beyond that scene. He does not want the play to suggest that taking someone's life is justified when challenging a complex situation like domestic abuse. By allowing audience members to create their own ending(s), Singh has effectively put the power in their hands to make the ultimate decision, as suggested by Brecht.

*Till Death do us Part* portrays the fictional account of a marriage where domestic violence is present. While the characters may find resonance with groups beyond race, class and religious lines, there are certainly parallels that can be drawn between Sandy and Logan's relationship and those that may exist in the Indian South African community. If Logan represents the insecure Indian South African husband who is dominating, controlling and aggressive, Sandy represents the domesticated Indian South African wife who lacks agency and control over her life while enduring her husband's abuse. Logan chooses to control every aspect of Sandy's life, using abuse to enforce his power, while himself being afraid of allowing someone else to inflict any pain on him. For me, this reflects the enforced structures of patriarchy that exist in the Indian South African community which limit the agency some women have in their own lives. The community has overcome oppressive structures like indenture and apartheid; however, some husbands may continue their own form of oppression by allowing the continued disempowerment of their wives. It has been illustrated that even in her home Sandy lacks agency, and this is true for certain Indian wives who are financially dependent on their husbands and are thus forced to accept his domination. Sandy has been isolated from her family, friends and colleagues; similarly, many Indian South African women may live their lives confined to the private sphere, as the public arena has been closed to them. Logan makes decisions for Sandy's life which are beneficial to him; many Indian South African husbands, too, display hypocrisy by holding their wives to a standard to which they themselves are not bound. In covering up her bruises, Sandy is silently allowing Logan to continue the abuse. Similarly, by reinforcing patriarchal practices, the silence of too many Indian wives allows it to be perpetuated.

It is important to acknowledge that just as Sandy made repeated attempts to escape her abusive situation, so too are Indian South African women breaking the shackles of patriarchy that kept them bound for so long. Sandy's eventual decision to reclaim her power, is the very attitude which the younger generations of Indian South African women are embracing, albeit not necessarily via a gun. I propose that theatre is a medium through which such sensitivities can be raised. Through theatre, rigidly enforced patriarchal norms in the community can be addressed, thus allowing a wife who is subjected to abuse to confront her situation and challenge the status-quo of the relationship in which she finds herself.

By showing that Sandy reclaims her power at the end of the play through arming herself, without dictating how the final confrontation will play out, Singh has attempted to show that there is scope for an abusive situation to be changed in a public arena like the theatre, insinuating that change in the private space is within the realm of possibility too. All that is needed is active engagement and connection by its audience members, as Brecht proposed. Leaving the text as open-ended as it is, Singh holds a mirror up to society and forces them to watch a very painful reflection. For that experience to end positively he asks audience members to question their own individual situations and prompts them to ask what can be changed in their own personal lives so that the play reflects an ending that is not potentially violent, or that violence is not sought as the only solution. It is exactly this conundrum that Singh leaves us to ponder. If a happy ending is what I foresee, I, as an audience member know that steps need to be taken to challenge the current patriarchal systems so that women feel empowered to seek the necessary help and interventions to break the cycles of abuse and trauma in their homes.

## **5. PURDAH – AN ANALYSIS**

The second of the three play texts being analysed in this dissertation is *Purdah* (1993) by Ismail Mahomed, which tells the story of Ayesha, an eighteen-year old Muslim girl who has been subjected to three years of emotional and physical abuse in her arranged marriage. The story is narrated from the victim's perspective and, whilst she is in a hopeless situation initially, by the end of the play Ayesha has taken her life into her own hands, choosing to defy convention and live life on her own terms.

### **BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT**

From the outset, before a word is spoken, the context of the play within a Muslim community is established by the title, "*Purdah*"<sup>24</sup> meaning "the veil." The term *Purdah* itself has a host of associations attached to it. A purdah is worn by Muslim women who, out of modesty, wish to conceal their faces and/or parts of their bodies from male gazes that are not their husbands. According to Islamic beliefs, when a man and woman wed, all physical aspects of the woman are for the exclusive pleasure of her husband. While it can be argued that it is equally empowering for these women to choose whom they allow to access their appearance or physical form, the converse can also be argued in that it is disempowering because not all women have a choice regarding the use of purdah, especially if the family dynamic is very conservative. The fact that the purdah is a veil, used to conceal, points to the idea that the subject matter to be dealt with in the text is related to issues that are usually concealed, hidden and kept out of public view. The aim of the play then is to confront that which is being concealed. While the subject matter may deal with issues that are hidden and kept from public view, i.e. domestic abuse, the play is an attempt to undo

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<sup>23</sup> Fifteen-year old Tshepo Diphoko was allegedly killed by her eighteen-year old boyfriend in 2020 in the Free State (Pijoos 2020).

<sup>24</sup> The term purdah has more than one meaning. The first meaning refers to a type of attire worn by women, the literal veil (explained above). The second is a state of being: Purdah is a custom practised in some Muslim and Hindu societies, in which women either remain in a special part of the house or cover their faces and bodies to avoid being seen by men who are not related to them. If a woman is in purdah, she lives according to this custom (Collins Dictionary). During the British hegemony in India, purdah observance was strictly adhered to and widespread among the highly conscious Muslim minority. Since then, purdah has largely disappeared in Hindu practice, though the seclusion and veiling of women is practiced to a greater or lesser degree in many Islamic countries (Encyclopedia Britannica).

what is hidden - that violence - to expose what lies beneath the surface of the veil to create transparency, thus allowing transformation within the community to begin. In my interview with Mahomed (2019), he echoed these sentiments and articulated why transparency is so important:

The play 'Purdah' is not so much about the physical veil; it's about the other veil that exists. The veil of deceit, the veil of lies. When we remove that artificial veil then we can have open and transparent conversations and dialogue and find the way that we need to build societies; and move away from the kind of violence that we have in our society.

By the end of the text, one realises that the protagonist Ayesha has chosen to metaphorically lift the purdah that conceals her face, and (in a broader context) her life, as she makes her own conscious decisions about her life that are not hidden from public view. They are her choices made of her own volition and not imposed upon her by any religious, familial or community constraint.

Mahomed took the story inspiration from an incident that sparked international condemnation in 1991. While on board a flight from New Delhi to Hyderabad, India, eleven-year-old Indian girl, Ameena Begum was found sobbing by female air hostess, Amrita Ahluwalia. When asked why she was crying, Ameena responded that her parents had married her off to a much older man who was taking her to Saudi Arabia and she did not want to go. Due to Amrita Ahluwalia's quick-thinking Ameena was rescued by police and placed in protective custody while her husband, sixty-year-old Saudi national Yahya M. H. al-Sagih, was arrested (Gargan 1991). The play may be inspired by an international incident, but its context is located squarely in the South African Muslim community. When asked about whether or not the play's context is informed by any South African influence, despite its catalyst being an international source, Mahomed (2019) says:

Yes, I think very much. You know, for example, the caricature of the aunt is very much a South African character, one that we'd find in almost every Indian community. The practices that existed at that particular time still exist to some extent, for example, the wedding proposals that are in the play were very much South African experiences from various Indian communities. So yes, there has been a local influence in the development of the plot but also in terms of the characters.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> The interview with Ismail Mahomed was recorded on Skype. I have edited the transcript to include punctuation.

## **AYESHA (THE ABUSED)**

In Ayesha, Mahomed has created a strong female character who laments her gender due to the impositions placed on her primarily due to the cultural observances practised by Muslim South Africans. As the play is a one-hander, the entire story is narrated by the character of Ayesha in a series of monologues where she addresses the audience directly. This is a device that Brecht would use in his Epic Theatre as a means of breaking the invisible barrier between the audience and performer. The character, Ayesha, conveys to us the struggle she has faced not only as a female, but as a Muslim female, and does not mince her words about it:

Being born a woman meant that I was destined to live a life with others deciding for me. The free will that God had bestowed me with was being denied to me by men assumed to be His vice-regents on earth. Look at me. I'm a prisoner within my own body. (1993, 156)

Ayesha frequently articulates not being able to make her own choices and as a result is condemned to a life of sadness and misery; for example, she says, "Only as I grew older did I realise that this unspeakable and sad mystery was to become a part of every woman" (1993, 157). She also conveys the expectations that have been imposed on her as a female: "The first time I ever overheard my parents discussing marriage plans for me was a few weeks after my mother told my father that I was beginning to menstruate. My mother convinced my father to delay the marriage plans for at least a year or two" (1993, 157).

From the extracts above and based on information she reveals during the course of the play, we can deduce how young Ayesha would have been at this stage of her life. Ayesha is eighteen-years old at the start of the play; we later learn that she was married for three years and had rejected five prospective grooms in the two years before being wed. This means she would have been thirteen years old at the stage of her life when her parents, especially her father, began considering marriage prospects for her. The fact that Ayesha is not surprised by this indicates that that is the norm within the Islamic community (although this practice is not limited solely to the Islamic community), which assumes that when a young girl reaches puberty, she is then of marriageable age. This thought process and the double standards between men and women becomes glaringly obvious when we learn later that Ayesha's husband is ten years her senior. No one considered a bride for him when he was thirteen years old and the fact that it is his first marriage (as we later discover),

indicates there was no family pressure to get him wed any younger or sooner. As if being burdened with potential marriage prospects at age thirteen was not enough, Ayesha's menstrual cycle heralds other major shifts in her life:

At the end of that year, I was informed that I would no longer be allowed to go to school. My brilliant academic achievements did not matter. The cuddly dolls and teddy bears [...] were removed and given to a younger niece. The tops and trousers that I sometimes wore were removed from my cupboard and replaced by a whole new range of full length hand sewn dresses. [...] I was abandoned to spend the rest of my childhood learning to cook and sew whilst most other girls my age were allowed to go to school and play outside till late. (1993, 158)

There are several examples of Ayesha pointing out the double standards that are practiced between men and women in the Islamic community in South Africa.

This is first evidenced with regards to gender-roles and how perceptions surrounding males and females are created. During her first sex-education 'talk', Ayesha's aunt says: "[I was warned that] boys were evil and would want to touch me in bad places. Friendly boys would get me into trouble and if I was ever caught alone in the company of boys, I too would grow up to be evil and be disliked by everybody" (1993, 158). These seeds of wisdom planted by Ayesha's aunt cause Ayesha intentionally to distance herself from boys in her class; when forced to interact with them, she would be overcome with feelings of guilt.

When a groom is sought for Ayesha, five prospective suitors are rejected by Ayesha but accepted by her father for reasons such as: "the first was wealthy, the second was handsome, the third was a relative. He knew the parents of the fourth and the fifth was the only son of his parents" (1993, 159). These are all positioned as substantial enough reasons for Ayesha to wed any one of them; however, when the families of these grooms go to visit Ayesha to assess her suitability as a prospective wife and daughter-in-law, she is asked to justify her eligibility by confirming that she is of marriageable age, can cook well, dresses well, and still has her reputation intact. Ayesha herself states: "The whole experience was totally humiliating! I was being treated like an object for sale" (1993, 159). This experience shows the vast differences in relation to marriage eligibility based on social and cultural conventions in relation to the construction of gender roles. Any reasons, even superficial ones, are acceptable signifiers of male eligibility: appearance, wealth, or established familial relationship. For a woman, however, the list of requirements becomes longer and the



woman is expected to fill all the roles and duties that society has assigned to her as the primary care-taker and home-maker. These socially constructed gender norms and their expectations are echoed by Seerat Chhaba (2020):

[T]he man is expected to be the primary provider for the family and must be financially secure. In other words, he should either have a well-paying corporate position [...] or a large inheritance to fall back on. The woman, on her part, must have traditional values, good cooking skills, good looks and a slim figure. Education matters, of course, but she shouldn't be 'too' educated or perform better than her husband professionally.

Chhaba's (2020) emphasis on 'traditional values' highlights how the Indian South African community expects women to be the gatekeepers of tradition and culture - they are expected to personify those values. Furthermore, the expectation of women to have careers that do not compete with their husbands, is deemed necessary to ensure that his traditional role of being the provider is not challenged, thus further entrenching patriarchal attitudes.

Another example of the obvious double standards that exist is when the marriage proposal of the sixth suitor is accepted by Ayesha's father. The different genders have different expectations of them in the engagement celebrations that ensue. Ayesha elaborates on this:

I was dressed in my finest outfit and had to sit in my bedroom with elderly women who passed their time talking about the trials and tribulations of being a busy housewife. The men sat in the lounge drinking tea and discussed their businesses. The other young girls of my age had to be in the kitchen on their best behaviour so that some aunt may notice them as potential brides for her nephew. (1993, 159)

A similar disparity exists in the build-up to Ayesha's wedding:

All my aunts were busy making a beautiful trousseau for me. The young girls would be baking. The men would smoke cigars in the lounge and at every opportune moment shout out to one of the girls to bring in a cup of tea. Outside little toddlers would play games of "mummies and daddies." (1993, 160)

Even on her wedding day, Ayesha again articulates her frustration at how she became a married woman without having any role to play in the ceremony, or direct contact with the groom. She was represented by her two uncles at the mosque where the wedding vows are taken. Then, once the uncles returned from the mosque, she was informed that she was now married and was given her wedding ring by her groom's best man.

Ayesha explains that the only indication of a conversation between her and her husband Ahmed, before they were wed, was a response from Ahmed of three words ("No, thank you"), declining her offer of tea when both families met each other formally. Despite not

knowing her husband, once married to him, she is expected to cater to him and his family's needs. She elaborates on the situation she finds herself in after the wedding:

I was inaugurated into the family and later into the kitchen where I was to become the family slave. The only time I was allowed to be alone with my husband was when we shut the bedroom door at night. [...] Our nights were spent with him exercising his prowess at sexual acrobatics and then dozing off to sleep. I was left unfulfilled but I feared to express this to my husband lest he think of me as being forward. (1993, 161)

Ayesha's referral to herself as the "family slave" illustrates her feelings towards her husband's family. A slave is someone who has no agency in their own life, whose actions and decisions are all determined by their master. Similarly, Ayesha feels as though she is not permitted to object to the expectations that have been placed upon her as she is the newly wedded bride of the home whose role and function is to serve and cater to the needs of her family. She does not see herself as anything more than a slave to their catering needs and does not share a more familial relationship with them. The happiness usually expected from marriage between two individuals and their respective families, eludes her. Even in the bedroom she does not feel as though she is an equal participant in the sexual relationship that should occur between a husband and wife.

Ayesha also articulates her desire to be sexually fulfilled. It is a bold opinion that Mahomed voices through Ayesha's character, especially given that the Indian South African community is very conservative about subjects related to sex. I have discussed how notions of value and honour within the Indian South African community are intrinsically tied to the virginal purity of women; this is echoed by Motswapong (2017) who states: "a woman's honour is presumed to reside in her [...] body, its violation [...] means that she loses the honour both of herself as an individual, as well as a group family or even the nation [to] which she belongs." In the case of the play, even within the home environment, and her bedroom specifically, Ayesha's sexual needs are not recognised by her husband and not considered at all. For fear of being branded "forward" in asserting her sexual needs, Ayesha suppresses them. The opinion of her in-laws is considered more important than her own needs and desires.

It is extremely interesting for me to witness a young Muslim girl have sexual expectations and needs of her own as the Muslim community is extremely conservative about sex. While

I am a Hindu, there are cultural expectations and traditions that overlap such as arranged marriages, a young girl expected to be devoted to her husband, and a woman's sexual emancipation being frowned upon. Mahomed, himself a Muslim man, has written Ayesha's sexual desires with such boldness and articulated so directly, that it is extremely thought-provoking and makes one view Ayesha as more than just a product of the Muslim community; she is an individual with her own thoughts, feelings and expectations.

### **THE TOXIC RELATIONSHIP**

During menstruation, Ahmed refuses to have any physical contact with Ayesha and whilst she hopes they can grow their communication with each other and get closer, he denies her even that, withdrawing completely. When she confronts him about his behaviour, Ahmed responds with the perception about menstruation and bleeding that has been engrained in him as a male: "menstruating women were unclean" (1993, 161). This attitude is consistent with Islamic beliefs around menstruating women, "Islam also forbids men to have vaginal sexual intercourse with their wives during menstruation" (Mazokopakis 2020). The perception of women as unclean is not new, but is so terribly ignorant considering the very role that Ayesha is expected to fulfil (with increasing pressure from both her husband and her mother-in-law) is based on whether or not she is menstruating, namely motherhood.

It is interesting that Ayesha chooses to raise her concerns with Ahmed. I believe by this stage she is so burdened by the duties she is bound to fulfil as a daughter-in-law, that the only place in which she believes she can find solace is to build some form of genuine relationship with her husband that extends beyond sex. Ayesha is unable to make decisions for her own life, as every aspect of her life as a married woman has been determined for her, whether it is through the expectations of her in-laws, her parents or society. She has no power to change what her daily routine is and what her life has become, catering to the needs of her in-laws, but she still has an expectation of her husband. Everyone expects her to fulfil the role that she has been given, and confronting her husband, I believe, is her last attempt to retain what little aspects of her individuality remain. She wants her husband to know her for the individual she is, not simply by the role she fulfils in his life.

After being horrified by the response her husband gives her justifying his cold behaviour towards her during her menstrual period, Ayesha begins to resent Ahmed. It is at this point that Ayesha takes small steps (at first) to reclaim her independence and freedom, but it also marks the start of her abuse at the hands of her husband. Ayesha's animosity manifests physically when she makes excuses to stop her husband from being intimate with her. Though she tries to resist his attempts, in the end she yields to his persistence, which indicates how insidious abuse can be. It is not always overt and despite attempts to stop the abuse, even someone as strong-willed as Ayesha more often than not discovers that saying no is near-impossible. She says:

I felt a deep sense that Ahmed was using my body for his own sexual gratification. I needed to express my resentment through denying myself to him. [...] Only once did I physically try to resist [...] As the weeks progressed, I learnt from other wives that it was not unusual to receive a beating. That one was to accept it as part and parcel of wedded bliss. (1993, 161)

Ayesha's reference to "wedded bliss" is highly loaded. Her husband is in no way a partner and all sense of her individuality has been relinquished. The community accepts that a bride no longer has agency over her own life as her in-laws now have full control. She is seen as nothing more than a medium through which others can fulfil their desires, whether it is her husband using her body for his sexual needs, or her in-laws having their dietary needs catered to. Even if Ayesha tries to protest, it is accepted that being beaten is par for the course. It is not unusual for a husband to beat his wife into submission to get what he wants. It is an accepted part of being married. Out of desperation, Ayesha decides to confide her despair to her mother-in-law in the hopes that she may receive some matriarchal understanding. This is not to be as her mother-in-law promptly betrays Ayesha's confidence to her son and the result is a very violent assault, which is witnessed, without intervention, by Ayesha's mother-in-law.

For me, the reaction of Ayesha's mother-in-law to the abuse of Ayesha, points to the normalisation of abuse within the private domain of the home. That Ayesha's mother-in-law accepts, without questioning or confronting her son about what he is inflicting on his wife, reflects that in her mind he is not at fault, it is how things are. This points to how complex issues of domestic abuse are within the community; women's silence is common, and a large contributor to enabling the abuse to continue. Despite seeking intervention by the

only other female to whom she has access – and even though Ayesha’s mother-in-law is fully aware of the consequences Ayesha’s speaking-out will bring – she does nothing to stop the violence that follows.

I believe that Ayesha’s mother-in-law and her parents represent the older generation who are perhaps more conservative and very traditional. Their generation has reinforced the patriarchal system within the private domain, thus they do not question the decisions made by the man of the home. This might explain why Ayesha’s parents and her mother-in-law turn a blind eye and deaf ear towards Ayesha’s suffering. They follow engrained cultural structures without question, regardless of whether it is right or wrong, regardless of what the consequences are. I believe this unquestioned adherence is linked to patriarchal attitudes which have been continued through cultural practices. In the Muslim community, where those cultural and traditional practices may represent religious beliefs, non-adherence is not an option. This sentiment has been articulated by Kathleen Ebbitt (2015), who says: “Islam isn’t patriarchal, but patriarchy has been heavily involved in the history of the middle east, and have subsequently seeped into the ways Muslims practice their faith.” Similarly, Ayesha’s parents are representations of the members of the Islamic community; their reactions to Ayesha’s behaviour stem from deeply engrained patriarchal attitudes that have, over time, become intertwined with their faith. Thus, questioning it would mean potential ostracism from a community that holds steadfastly to its beliefs.

Ayesha, however, represents a younger, modern generation with a different perspective. While not evidencing this initially, the circumstances of Ayesha’s life cause her to question that which she has always known. By the end of the play, the personal growth in her character reflects a changed perspective enabling her to question the traditions and cultural practices that have endured for generations without any consideration for their effect on the individual and the larger community.

One example of Ayesha upholding patriarchal attitudes is when she confesses pitying her husband despite the abuse he inflicts upon her:

Despite all the hiding that I was now becoming accustomed to, I still felt sorry for Ahmed. I saw him as the victim of the same society that caused my unhappiness. Men in our society are groomed to be strong and powerful and a disobedient wife is a product of his

weakness. I began to assume the same façade that my mother was so good at putting on – that one needed always to put on a happy face and that tears were to be absorbed into the silence of one's heart. I accepted that this was my fate. If my mother had bravely accepted her lot in the eighteen years of her abusive marriage to my father, how could I deny my own after only two months of marital bliss? (1993, 162)

This attitude does not last long though, as Ayesha herself admits such silent acceptance of her circumstances would be “short-lived” (1993, 162).

Mahomed gives us an insight into Ayesha's forward-thinking assertiveness when she aborts her baby using a knitting needle despite longing for companionship and the increasing pressure on her by her in-laws to fall pregnant (after just two months of marriage): “there was always the fear that my baby would grow up to be a girl [...] subject to the same misery as most women in our society. I did not want to bring a girl into this world knowing that she may curse me the same way that I sometimes curse my own mother” (1993, 162). From this quotation, it is evident that Ayesha chooses an abortion not to help herself, but as a way of protecting her potential daughter from the type of societal conditioning to which she has been subject. Ayesha fears having a daughter because for the whole of her life, she will be expected to live according to the rules and regulations that have been decided for her, without any of her own input. Aborting her child is a tragic and extreme choice to make. It is a difficult decision borne out of extremely difficult circumstances, and that for Ayesha, the only way to ensure the safety of her unborn child was to kill it. Thus, Ayesha is not the only victim of violence in her marriage. Her decision to abort her child also illustrates that she has not allowed the patriarchal systems, to which she has been confined, to disempower her to the degree that she cannot make decisions over her own body. It is sad that despite falling victim to violence regularly as a result of patriarchal power structures, Ayesha herself resorts to violence to protect her child from the same patriarchal systems. Once again, violence perpetuates violence.

Aborting her child worsens her domestic situation. She finds herself unable to be intimate with her husband thereafter and as a result there is no potential for a child to be conceived. Once again society's double standards become evident in that Ayesha's apparent inability to produce a child renders her a failure and so a more suitable companion must be found to fulfil all the conditions expected of a dutiful wife.

Ayesha's inability to fall pregnant is a matter of concern for her mother-in-law, who after a year of waiting in vain decides to begin searching for a second bride for her son who could give her a grandchild. Ayesha does not want her husband to take a second wife because it would invalidate all that she has been subjected to and all the violence she has endured. A second wife would render her worthless in her marital home and she has already sacrificed a great deal to ensure she fulfils the expectations demanded of her. Ayesha's objections to a second wife are overlooked and once again religion and tradition are used to justify the actions and decisions that Ahmed is undertaking:

When I expressed my shock to Ahmed about his mother's intentions, he clearly pointed out to me that under Islamic law he was entitled to have four wives. I accepted his reply with an angry disbelief [...] While Ahmed went out scouting for the bride who would satisfy his mother, I had to sit at home. When people enquired about me, he simply told them that I chose to stay in purdah. (1993, 163)

It is interesting that Mahomed chooses to use this reference to Islamic law as a way of illustrating not only how religion and religious beliefs are used to justify unjust practices but also how engrained patriarchal attitudes are. In her marital home, Ayesha has been the dutiful wife, performing all the roles expected of her (barring bearing a child), while Ahmed does not fulfil his duties as good husband. The prospect of Ayesha remarrying for her own wellbeing is taboo, but it is condoned for Ahmed because of engrained patriarchal beliefs aligned to religious law.

By this stage of her marriage, Ayesha has started making small decisions for herself and her liberation. Similarly, while Ahmed went wife-scouting, Ayesha made the most of the time alone. Ayesha regularly expresses how unfulfilling her love-life with her husband was; at one point she even states: "I quietly assumed that happily married lives were composed of sexually satisfied husbands and wives who only fantasized about orgasms" (1993, 161). Now that she has alone-time, Ayesha takes advantage of the solitude and "while Ahmed was away, I began to silently play a game of my own. I found escape in my fantasies. My youthful mind would conjure up romantic sexual liaisons with some of Ahmed's best friends" (1993, 163). Thus, Ayesha's rebellion in these small moments indicates her taking control of her life. Mahomed (2019) says of Ayesha:

I don't at all see her as a victim; and to this day, I don't think she is a victim at all. I saw her very much as a character who goes through a journey and conquers that journey.

The fact that she was a rebellious kid even in the face of discipline, the fact that she stood up and several times said “no no no” even when the aunt humiliated her; and the fact that she had an extramarital relationship out of her own choice, doesn’t make her a victim. She was a survivor through various difficult circumstances.

We soon learn that Ayesha’s sexual fantasies turn to reality with Ridwaan, one of Ahmed’s best friends. She has an extra-marital affair with him and Ayesha finally learns that sexual fulfilment is not impossible. Despite her contentment with Ridwaan, when Ahmed reveals his choice for a second bride to his mother, Ayesha decides she has had enough humiliation and kills him that night. Ahmed’s acceptance of a second wife was the final straw for Ayesha. She had tolerated his abuse and the taunts by her mother-in-law. Despite the challenges, she had continued to fulfil the role of a dutiful wife. However, her contributions were overlooked due to her apparent inability to conceive and now she was being replaced by someone who could meet that expectation. Killing Ahmed is an act of desperation to reclaim her individual power in a situation where she saw herself losing what little power she had. This is an unleashing of the fury she has contained for so long. Of this violent decision and its inclusion in the play, Mahomed (2019) says, “in some ways it is a violent play but the violence that the woman takes in killing her husband happens because she was denied all other choices. It is an unfortunate choice but it was a desperate choice.”

The final moments of the play juxtaposes the two conflicting mind-sets that are present in the main characters. First, we are reminded of the older generation; when news breaks of what Ayesha has done, the reaction amongst the elders in her family is unforgiving:

My father died from a heart attack when he heard what I had done. My mother, she was there when the police came to pick me up. My two uncles who represented me at my wedding forbid her seeing me or speaking to me. As the police took me away I turned to look at my mother. A tear silently rolled down her cheek. The elderly aunt who advised me to marry comforted my mother-in-law telling her that she knew that I was bewitched because as a little girl, I always played in the sunset with my hair untied. (1993, 164)

This is in stark contrast to the decisions that Ayesha makes following the murder of her husband. She does not regret her actions and is determined to speak her truth in court regardless of the consequences. Living her life according to personal needs and wishes has given Ayesha a great sense of freedom. She no longer feels weighed down by cultural and religious expectations and is not prepared to be stuck in the past, “my lawyer is my husband’s best friend. He posted bail for me and he got this apartment for me. He has also



helped me enrol at a correspondences college so that I may complete my matric" (1993, 164).

Brecht asked his audiences members to engage actively with what they were seeing on stage to bring about change in their lives. Similarly, by the end of *Purdah*, Mahomed's audiences are awakened to the possibility that one does not need to wait for change to be reflected in the community as a whole, change can be brought about by a single individual, as Ayesha took conscious steps to challenge her circumstances. Through the character of Ayesha, audiences members may be convinced to change what is wrong in their own lives by questioning and dismantling the power structures at play.

## **REPRESENTATIONS OF THE ISLAMIC COMMUNITY**

While the bulk of the text deals with the limitations experienced by a Muslim woman, it may be misinterpreted to be a criticism on the Islamic religion. Mahomed (1993, 164 – 165) clears up this misconceptions by reiterating through Ayesha that the restrictions imposed on Muslim women are man-made and are not divine rules:

I am a sinner but I believe in a God who looks upon me with eyes of mercy. My God doesn't shun sinners. My God knows that I am a victim of other people's injustices. In studying this book, I have discovered that in the eyes our creator, women are no less equal than men. My God has given my dignity back to me and yet when I look at other women and I sense the pain in their hearts, I pray that when their husbands read the same Quraan that I do, they would realise that our God frowns upon the way that they have brutalised their women.

Mahomed further explains that the play was never written to be a critique of Islam or the Muslim community. He is adamant the text is simply a perspective, a narrative of the violence that has the potential to exist in a community that does not acknowledge its existence. I agree with Mahomed's stance, which offers a fresh and interesting view of the world that can also exist. I am used to the representation of individuals in the Muslim community being limited and bound solely by their religion, traditions and culture. In *Purdah* (1993), Mahomed challenges those limitations, and questions them. While Ayesha exists in that space, he makes her a living, breathing character whose thought-processes transcend the communal expectations placed upon her. She is a breath of fresh air in my opinion and questions the very patriarchy that has kept her shackled. While I don't agree with all her choices, like killing her husband, I do think for the most part she is written to

show that not everyone can be boxed by cultural and traditional stereotypes. As Mahomed (2019) explains, the play is about a character and the context in which her life unfolds:

It's not just a play about the Muslim community. It's about a woman in a particular community that just happens to be Muslim. Every character you create has to have an affinity with where they belong. Any character comes from a family, a community, a religion and a particular ideology. It just happens that in this particular play the focus is on the cultural practices related to proposals and weddings in a conservative Muslim family and community.

In the play extract above, Ayesha articulates many powerful, forward-thinking, liberal sentiments. Through the character of Ayesha and the controversial decisions she makes, Mahomed forces the audience to ask whether or not they are judging her. If Ayesha is being judged, then why? And if her decisions are perceived as being right, then are the practices which brought her to that point being questioned? It is a means through which Mahomed can create a challenging of customs that have existed for generations without being questioned.

Mahomed's familiarity with the Muslim community made it easier for him to situate Ayesha within it as he could speak from a position of knowledge. I find Mahomed's open-mindedness about interrogating and challenging traditional practices thoroughly refreshing and empowering. As has already been discussed, Indian South African women were confined to being the agents of tradition and culture within the home environment and this has continued for many generations. Ayesha is no different. In his play, Mahomed has taken a strategically positioned character, Ayesha, burdened by these very patriarchal shackles in a domestic environment and has used his writing as the key to unlock these patriarchal confines and liberate her. When I spoke to Mahomed in 2019, I asked him whether he believed his text written in 1993 still has relevance today almost three decades later, and his response was a resounding yes:

Oh, without doubt. The fact that arranged marriages; the fact that social violence; gender violence is so much more visible in our country or we talk about it so much more transparently than what we may have done then.

I find Mahomed's articulation that his play is still relevant today to be extremely insightful. Despite the play being written more than two decades ago, Mahomed's awareness that gender-based violence (GBV) is still prevalent today and "more visible in our country" speaks volumes about how necessary texts like *Purdah* (1993) are to create social awareness

and to allow such practices that have been silently borne by women to be questioned and challenged.

I was curious to know though why he chose the medium of theatre to articulate these issues and what the audience reaction was when it was first staged. Mahomed is adamant that theatre is a powerful tool to raise awareness and pose questions to audiences that last well after the performance has ended:

When we did stage *Purdah*, it did create a lot of debate and discussion. My actress received several threats. I received threats but we continued presenting the play [...] I believe in the immense power of theatre not just to raise awareness but to move us into action. [...] The play stirred an enormous amount of controversy. I believe theatre is a catalyst for change. Theatre is a catalyst for dialogue. Theatre has got immense power to empower us to challenge and change our societies. We attempted to do that with the play. We know about abuse in our society but it's not talked about. The play removed the veil and broke the silence. (Ismail Mahomed interview 2019)

As has been discussed, the Indian South African community is extremely closed, and Mahomed has used his play as a means of putting the South African Muslim community in the spotlight. In doing so, he has metaphorically held a very focussed magnifying glass over the cultural practices of the community in order for them to be challenged in the public space of the theatre. That audiences were actively engaging with the play's contents, discussing it, perhaps critiquing it, and others lauding it, clearly shows that it managed to inspire a response from audience members, good and bad, and that *Purdah* had managed to live beyond the stage environment. As Mahomed states, theatre for him is a tool for change, and the questioning and debate is the first step towards confronting age-old traditions that do not serve the wellbeing of all. On the response of the audience, Mahomed (2019) knew the play was controversial but continued with the production despite some of the backlash because he believed in the message he was conveying. He also believed that it provided an opportunity for people to speak about real issues that are otherwise avoided.

Despite being written in 1993, *Purdah* still has the potential to resonate with audiences today as the subject matter of domestic abuse has not abated and continues to ravage South African society. Mahomed has specifically located his text within the South African Muslim community as a means to raise contentious issues such as the double standards between men and women as far as expectations in the home go. Through the character of

Ayesha he allows age-old cultural practices and traditions to be questioned. Ayesha is an exceptionally strong character who uses violence as a last resort to overcome not only the abuse she has faced in her marriage, but the constant erasure of agency over her own life through the actions of her husband and in-laws. That Ayesha often articulates her desire to be sexually fulfilled is an acknowledgment by Mahomed that women too have sexual needs and desires. In a community where discussions around sex, especially for a woman, are considered almost forbidden, this is a bold move for Mahomed. Ayesha's refusal to accept the situation in her marriage as is, is an attempt by Mahomed to show that even the smallest act of defiance is capable of bringing about change. By pushing the boundaries, Mahomed asks his audience to use the text as a starting point to confront the happenings in their own lives. He believes that theatre is a tool for social change and asks women to recognise the situation in which they find themselves, assert their power and challenge the status-quo. Both men and women need to recognise that the current status-quo is problematic, and in order for positive change to occur, the existing power structures need to be realigned so that power is equally shared between men and women. By focussing the spotlight on the South African Muslim community, Mahomed brings to light customs, values and beliefs that are otherwise hidden from the public glare and thus never discussed or confronted as they exist within the boundaries of a fiercely tight-knit community.

**SIBONGISENI GABADA:<sup>26</sup>**

## **6. A COOKIE IN THE KITCHEN – AN ANALYSIS**

Vivian Moodley's *A Cookie in the Kitchen* (2002) is the third and final South African play I will be analysing for the purposes of my research.

Like the other two plays, *A Cookie in the Kitchen* (2002) focuses on the physical abuse within a marriage. The victim (the wife Radha) narrates the story of her relationship from courtship to wedded 'bliss' and, whilst she does not overtly mention abuse, it is inferred as the play progresses. In this play, while bound by her marriage vows, the wife also believes that in submitting to the abuse, she is protecting her children from the more devastating trauma of facing the abuse themselves.

### **BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT**

Moodley's *A Cookie in the Kitchen* (2002) was written specifically to narrate the experience of an abusive relationship from the perspective of an average woman. By that I mean she is not from a wealthy family, she does not have any extraordinary talents, and nothing sets her apart from any other woman who is raising a family. She represents all women and their potential life experiences. Moodley (2019) articulates this further:

VM: The characters I create are quite fictitious but based in the truth. [...] This particular case was more to tell the story of a woman who is like you and I. On the face of it, everything seems to be fine, but she comes from somewhere. She has a history [...] it is to show that it can happen to anybody regardless of your religions, regardless of your political status, regardless of who you are as a person - be it rich, poor or any cultural group. Because, that story can be told through the eyes of a white woman or the eyes of a black woman in a rural area.

While Moodley states that the themes explored in his play may find resonance with any woman from any background, unobstructed by divisions such as class and race, in my analysis of this play, it is evident that his experience as part of the Indian diaspora in South Africa has contributed to the specific positioning of his characters within the Indian South African community. For example, the manner in which the central character Radha speaks, is a reflection of the community, as is the slang she uses and her belief systems. For

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<sup>26</sup> 36-year old Sibongiseni Gabada was allegedly killed by her boyfriend in 2020 in Khayelitsha, Cape Town (Naidoo, 2020).

example, when speaking to the man she regards as her brother, Michael, Radha says: “but you’ll be shining” (2002:01). Indian South Africans understand this to mean, you’ll be heavily intoxicated. While anyone can understand what is being conveyed, I believe the text acquires a deeper subtext when understood within the context of the Indian South African community. It is for these reasons that this play is a valuable addition to my research as there is a clear representation of domestic abuse located within the Indian South African community.

Furthermore, while Radha is the name of the main character, the text is titled: *A Cookie in the Kitchen*. In this instance, ‘cookie’ has multiple meanings; it is even used in the text as the name by which Radha is commonly known to others. The term was chosen very specifically by Moodley (2019):

VM: Cookie is an endearing name for a woman used in this community. A cookie is also a treat that you get in a cookie jar and it also has other implications, or other meanings to it, so I decided to call it ‘A Cookie in the Kitchen’. This ‘Cookie’ could be of any other cultural group, anywhere in the world, telling her story.

The “other implications or meanings” to which Moodley refers include the use of the term ‘cookie’ to describe a woman’s vagina. It is a polite way to refer to an organ that has heightened sexual connotations within the Indian South African community. Throughout the text, Cookie is Radha’s ‘calling-name,’ which is the name that others use to call you or by which they refer to you. Your actual name usually has no bearing on your calling-name, neither by abbreviation nor any variation. It is usually very un-Indian in origin and has no direct Indian reference to it. As discussed in Chapters One and Three, aspects of being Indian and the associations with it were seen to be shameful and embarrassing in the public sphere. In order to shed some of this embarrassment, and to be seen as more Western and forward-thinking, many Indians were given calling-names that were commonly known English-derived names, such as Tom, Tommy, Billy and Cookie. It also enabled easier pronunciation for non-Indian people. Everyone, including playwright Moodley, refers to Radha as Cookie throughout the text. However, I have consciously chosen to refer to her in my dissertation by her actual name: Radha. To me, it gives her the respect and honour she deserves and which she is denied by her loved ones. This allows me to acknowledge the type of woman she represents, a woman that like so many other victims who remain

nameless and who become simply statistics. I wanted to honour those women who fight every day to live and survive in their own households, who work as hard as any other but who will never be given the recognition or the respect they deserve because those who should see their value rarely do.

Traditionally, Indian women have been taught to bear all atrocities rather than causing embarrassment for their husbands, and shaming their homes. Meer (1972, 38) echoes this belief:

Indian societies in South Africa have not abandoned "the Sita myth" [...] Sita shared her husband's banishment into the forest for 14 years, retained her chastity though abducted by the king Ravana, and accepted her fate without complaint when Rama, on ascending the throne, banished her back to the forest at his people's instigation.

As Meer explains, Sita tolerated all the difficulties and injustices committed against her without complaining. Similarly, in an effort to emulate Sita, an Indian South African woman is expected to bear her husband's atrocities regardless of how much they hurt her. Her vulnerability is further enhanced if she is financially dependent on him, as is the case in this play.

It seems ridiculous that a woman facing an abusive situation on a fairly regular basis would not rather just leave the situation and save herself and her children from the abuse. When I posed this to Moodley (2019), he said:

Leaving a marriage situation, especially in the kind of cultures we come from both in Zulu culture and Indian culture, it's very very difficult because of the pressures of family, extended family, children and all of that. I think more often, it's women who also talk to other women and say: "No, please, you must try and make it work and so on" [...] My thing is, if a man raises his hand to a woman, that's it, he's going to do it again at some stage, unless he gets help. And no man, because of his ego, is going to say, "alright I will go to a psychiatrist or whatever and get help for my condition," they don't see it as that and the patriarchal society doesn't allow them to think like that.

His words very succinctly sum up the complexities and challenges faced by women who find themselves in this type of relationship. Leaving is not as easy as simply deciding you want out of the relationship, especially if, as in the case of Radha, you are entirely dependent on your husband mentally, financially and emotionally. Moodley further articulates that, in his view, other women also put pressure on a wife to make the marriage work, regardless of the cost. I agree with Moodley, in that I believe when an Indian woman sees another

struggling, her first response to the victimised woman is not to challenge the status-quo but to encourage her to try and 'make things work.' It is deemed the foremost duty of a wife and mother to endure all else because nothing could be worse for her children than a broken home. Meer (1972, 42) elaborates on the primary role of an Indian South African mother in a traditional household:

The wife/mother presents the husband/father to her children as the final authority, the remote god in whose eyes they should always appear pure and good. She operates as the protective shield between them, on the one hand sparing him the knowledge of their small misdeeds and projecting them favourably to him, and, on the other, keeping alive the myth of his inescapable authority. She herself remains unprotected, her emotions lying exposed to a thousand attacks from her husband, her mother, her grandmother, her mother-in-law, her grown-up sons, and, most terrible of all, her father.

As per Meer's assertions, there are clearly defined roles and responsibilities that the mother and father traditionally take. Traditionally, the mother's primary role is to raise her children in a home where the husband and father is the voice of authority. Leaving a marriage defies these gender expectations, and the mother then takes on the role of the father-figure as well for her children. I believe the community urges women to stay in their toxic marriages because of their familiarity with the terrain. A woman walking out of a destructive marriage shatters the structures of patriarchy where the man is in charge. A woman defying these power dynamics and choosing not to be dominated by a man, changes the traditional values with which she chooses to raise her children, challenging both the power structures and gender roles. The fear of what this could mean for the community in the long term is what compels community members to attempt to fix broken marriages.

## **CHARACTERS**

*A Cookie in the Kitchen* (2002) is a one-hander narrated entirely by the character of Radha. The entire play is set in the kitchen of her home and we learn of the other characters, her relationships with them and their interactions through the off-stage exchanges they share. The first character to whom we are introduced is a black man: Michael. Michael's family has a long history with Radha's family; his father used to work for her father and through the years that relationship grew and is a source of joy for Radha. Michael still lives on Radha's property. She considers him a member of her family and they portray a genuine, sibling-like relationship. Being introduced to this relationship first is a highly interesting choice by



Moodley as it is set up in contrast to the abusive nature of Radha's relationship with her husband, an Indian man, that we learn about later. It is Michael who brings Radha joy. He has looked after her wellbeing and protected her ever since she was a child: "he's like my second brother. Used to protect me... the boys in the district couldn't come near me... he'll go for them [...] he's like family... anyway we feel safe when he's around" (2002, 1). It is also a conscious choice for Moodley to introduce us to Michael first as Moodley often tries to confront racism-related issues that still exist within the Indian community and South African society at large. He articulates his efforts as such: "You find that you need to express your disgust at it, or that it contradicts the way you feel and think about being a black South African, that I've gone and written about these things" (Vivian Moodley interview 2019). It is an interesting choice because as we get to know the characters through the text, Michael is the only supportive person in Radha's life. None of the other characters we 'meet' offer her anything that serves her wellbeing in a positive way.

Radha's next – if brief – interaction is with her children, and as she scolds them into being quiet, she also inserts: "...You'll know how your father will shout" (2002: 2). This seems to be just a harmless statement that Radha uses to get her children to listen to her but as the play progresses, we realise that there is a lot more gravity to this statement as her husband Deva is abusive. It is interesting that Moodley consciously chooses to introduce us to the two positive aspects of Radha's life first, Michael and then her children, before we are introduced to Deva. I believe it is a way in which Moodley attempts to soften the blow before it is struck. I think Moodley creates a false sense of security by introducing us to Radha's sources of strength and happiness first. Thus, it is falsely assumed this is a woman who is happy, and has a wonderful support system. It is only when we learn of the abuse that we realise these two aspects are the places from where she draws her resilience. In writing it this way, we do not see the abuse that is to come, which makes it more difficult to tolerate when it does happen. We later learn that Radha is entirely alone in dealing with the abuse she faces; despite assuming she has people to turn to, we realise she faces and deals with the abuse by herself. This is a criticism of society by Moodley, who creates the façade that all is well with Radha and her family, but on closer inspection, things are very wrong and there is no solace or safe place for her because the community expects her to tolerate

the beatings in her marriage. This once again highlights the engrained power structures that are at play in the community which Moodley exposes on stage.

It is only at this point that Radha starts sharing some insights about her husband, Deva. One of our first assessments of Deva is that he is lazy. Radha does not hold back from criticising her husband and gives us inside information about the type of person he is:

[M]y husband Deva he doesn't help... too busy to help... he's a sportsman you see...plays from the settee [...] we just moved into this house...never finish packing yet...I must do everything myself here... (SARCASTICALLY) I have to...he's so busy...anyway how our family taught us...the husband is the king of the house...but my one is the king of everything. (2002: 2)

From the extract above we get a good idea of how the household responsibility seems to fall largely on Radha's shoulders. Through these actions, Moodley reinforces the traditional duties women are supposed to fulfill. He makes it very clear that the expectation of Radha is that she takes primary responsibility for ensuring her home is well-run; her husband who by contrast exhibits patriarchal attitudes, contributes nothing in this area. Deva expects Radha to fulfill her duties, and he fulfils his, there is no overlap as they both subscribe to the gendered roles and duties that have been handed to them. There is also an accusation in Radha's words above, where she mentions that her family and, in the larger sphere, the community is to blame for her husband having the attitude he does: "our family taught us... the husband is the king of the house" (2002, 2). To her, he is simply a product of what he has been taught, namely to behave like a 'king,' taking no personal responsibility but having everything done for him.

When Radha speaks of her husband, while she mentions his name, she often uses the term "my one" to refer to Deva, and while it could be misconstrued as affectionate or endearing, it actually references a traditional but outdated custom within the Indian South African community that indicates respect for the husband and his role of superiority in the home. In traditional Indian South African households, it was regarded as a sign of disrespect to refer to one's husband by their first name. Indian wives were socially conditioned rarely to address their husbands by their first names, and so they developed an indirect term by which they could refer to their husbands; in Radha's case, she chooses: "my one" (2002, 2). This belief is elaborated on by Geeta Pandey (2017) who says:

Millions of Indian women have never used their husband's name - it's a way of showing their respect for him. [...] That's because in traditional Indian society, the husband is equated with god and a woman is taught from a young age that she must respect him.

This illustrates that deep-seated level at which patriarchal attitudes are enabled by traditional customs and beliefs. Not only does Radha's reference to Deva by a different name set up the power structure between a husband and wife, where the husband is superior and the wife is inferior, it also indicates that these systems of power operate within traditional and cultural customs. As women are the gatekeepers of these customs, these patriarchal structures are reinforced by the very people these attitudes disempower.

It was important to Moodley that he created a character that was relatable, who represents real-life experiences, and so he builds the character of Radha with a rather detailed history. She reveals to us that she was romantically interested in another man while she was at school and it was mutual. However, life has dealt her many blows, including the loss of her sister which is why her parents decided on an arranged marriage for her. Radha's sister Kogie died as a result of having an abortion at a backstreet clinic. Despite knowing his reputation, Kogie fell in love with local womaniser Steven, as Radha describes it: "Steven was the local Rayban Charlie, good looking, smooth talking, won't work, who preyed on innocent maidens like my sister Kogie! He was seeing quite a few of the girls in the district" (2002, 5). Based on his reputation, it is clear that when Kogie fell pregnant with his child, Steven was not going to accept responsibility and he took her to abortion clinic where she died as a result of the poor and dangerous treatment she received.

Kogie was so scared of what would happen should she reveal that she's pregnant, that she chose what appeared to her as the less frightening option and put her life in jeopardy by having an abortion at a dubious facility. It is a criticism of Indian South African society who invest the honour of a woman, and by extension her family, in a girl's virginity (as elaborated on in Chapters One and Four). Girls who are sexually active out of wedlock are deemed by the community to be promiscuous and to have low moral values. To escape this judgement by her family and the community, Kogie goes to a questionable abortion clinic. It is a commentary of sorts that feeds in to the age-old Indian belief system that girls must go straight from their father's house into that of their husbands. They should not be given

independence for fear of such consequences. I find this to be just another example reinforcing an already prevalent patriarchal mindset. There is no judgement placed on Steven who emerges entirely unscathed. Kogie's death causes Radha's parents to be overly protective of Radha. They do not want to take any chances where she is concerned to the extent that their care stifles and limits her potential. Instead of realising their daughter's death was a result of her fear that her parents would discover her pregnancy, Radha's parents decide the best solution to prevent such an incident taking place again is to get Radha married.

Radha does not hold any grudge against her parents for their decision and feels that given the situation, she understands why they made the decision to get her married. Radha's understanding of her parents' situation and the reasons for their actions shows a certain amount of maturity in that she understands what it means for Indian South African parents to see their daughters married; however, it also indicates a level of resignation. Radha understands that getting her married, is almost an unburdening for her parents, as explained by Yamini P. Bhalerao (2019):

Patriarchy has always made parents see their daughters as a burden. They must get rid of her as soon as possible. They must also ensure that she tries her level best to adjust and adapt in her new family, which is only possible if you cut her cord and make it clear that her matrimonial family is all that she has now. That she is only welcome as a guest at her parents' home, occasionally.

Radha's acceptance of the situation gives us insight into her character traits – just as she accepts the marriage without complaining, she accepts her husband's abuse. For me, it points to how entrenched patriarchal structures are that women are simply expected to tolerate what happens in their lives because they are not given a choice. Men are given the freedom to make their own decisions and live life on their own terms, but women are limited to the traditional role society has handed them, confined to their home environment and bound by the expectations they are expected to fulfil. Thus their lives have already been decided for them, just as Radha's life decisions have been made for her by her parents, without her as an active participant in that process. She may have dreams and desires but the reality of achieving them is slim in relation to the power structures that dictate how her life unfolds. She accepts decisions unquestioningly because she does not believe she has a

choice. To her, decisions are made by her father and she is expected to obey, highlighting how entrenched patriarchal systems operate in the home environment.

Deva was the choice of her family, and in particular, her father. Deva managed to convince Radha's father that he had nothing to fear where he, Deva, was concerned. I believe this reassurance stems from both men's mutual belief and subscription to patriarchal attitudes where their families are concerned. Both men believed in the dominance and superiority of the man of the home, thus reinforcing the subservience and engrained gender roles where their wives and daughters are concerned. This unrestrained patriarchy also enabled the perpetuation of domestic abuse in the home environment, regardless of whether that was in Radha's family home or her marital home. I do not mean to imply that Radha's father simply handed Radha over to an abuser. Rather, I believe that Radha's father did not regard his actions as amounting to abuse; in his mind, he perceived it as Deva disciplining or punishing or venting his anger and frustrations, which he was entitled to do as man of the house. For Radha's father, hitting your wife and children is part of a husband's rights as authority figure, and thus Deva was allowed to do so.

While Radha had dreams of pursuing a relationship with someone she fancied, her father is believes that it is his right to make the decision about who his daughters weds, in another example of entrenched patriarchal systems being used to disempower women. Radha has no say in the matter, the decision ultimately rests with her father and is taken as the final word. Any objection to his decision will be regarded as challenging his power and authority in his household, thus reinforcing beliefs of male superiority.

Deva, like Radha's father, would continue to see that Radha conducted herself in the same way that she was raised, upholding the expectations of her as a woman, as Radha explains below:

He convinced Appa that we was the man for me...no Varsity styles and all for this girl. "No you right uncle...my father was just like you...my sisters couldn't step out of the house...their place was in the kitchen...me, I take after my father" [...] Anyway my parents were very happy...for them they saw it as security for their daughter...shame they went through real hard times... I am sure they meant well. (2002: 2)

As Radha reveals above, Deva has very patriarchal views about what women should be allowed to do. The way in which Deva refers to Radha as “this girl” shows how he perceives her. He does not see her as his better half or as someone who is his equal. Radha’s narration illustrates how Deva regards her as a commodity, an object whose personal wants and needs are subsumed by her roles and duties as a woman and wife, which is to serve his needs. That Deva states his father was the same way as Radha’s father, reveals how entrenched this system of patriarchy is. Deva does not think twice about assuming his position of power where Radha is concerned. It is a critique on larger society that such attitudes have been passed down from generation to generation without anyone questioning their validity. Because women were relegated to the private domain, and were tasked with upholding cultural values in the community, they mistook patriarchal practices as being culturally-bound, and so reinforced them in their homes. Thus, questioning the engrained imbalanced power dynamics was not an option.

We learn from Radha that her father was a very jealous man and enforced his patriarchal views by physically abusing the women of his home. Radha’s mother used to be very fond of a man that the community referred to as ‘Nuts Uncle’ as he used to earn his living by selling nuts. Radha’s mother would call him by his real name Gan (short for Ganas), which would drive Radha’s father into a jealous rage, so much so that he believed his wife was unfaithful to him, since, as a result of stereotyping and social conditioning, married women who are on good terms with men who are not their spouses are immediately assumed to be unfaithful (see Chapter Four). Similarly, Radha’s father’s jealousy is as a result of a deep-seated fear that his wife has been unfaithful to him, which once again highlights how patriarchal structures have enabled men to believe that their marriage vows equate to ownership of their wives.

It is only when Ganas passed away and she was nearly on her death bed, that Radha’s mother revealed that he was her illegitimate brother:

You know nobody knows why amma took nuts uncle’s death so badly...appa was so angry...he told her to go and stay with her mother...aya...only years later when amma got very sick she told us the story...Nuts Uncle was really her illegitimate brother...and in those days it was taboo to have such relatives...so it was a big family secret...so much so that she didn’t even tell appa...finally appa was in peace comfortable that amma was not unfaithful to him. (2002, 4)

I believe Moodley's insertion of Ganas's story in the text is two-fold. Firstly, it adds another layer to Radha's character in that the family dynamic in which she was raised is well established. Secondly, it is a harsh criticism on Indian society which stigmatised the relationship between Radha's mother and Ganas, since, as illegitimate step-siblings, the matter was considered taboo. No one would acknowledge the relationship existed for fear that acknowledging a relationship like that would bring dishonour to their family. As discussed in Chapter One, while the caste system was done away with by indentured labourers when crossing the *kala pani*,<sup>27</sup> there were aspects of it that remained deeply entrenched. So when an illegitimate child is born or when a woman falls pregnant out of wedlock, these are perceived as shameful acts worthy of stripping a family of their societal respect. This is why Radha's mother would never have been able to acknowledge her step-sibling, even to her husband. It is interesting that Moodley includes this experience in a text written in 2002, well over a century after the arrival of the Indian indentured labourers to South Africa. One hundred years later and Indian South Africans are still grappling with the issues, as well as the mental and societal boundaries that were derived from the Motherland.

Radha's father embodies the patriarchal attitudes that have been engrained in his culture and community. It is this attitude of male superiority that allows him to believe that physically abusing the women of his home is justifiable. He is a strict man who has very clear rules for how males and females should behave and is diligent about maintaining these rules. These culturally defined gender roles which determined 'appropriate' behaviour, were themselves derived from patriarchal perspectives. The imbalanced amount of freedom given to a son as opposed to a daughter illustrates this. While Radha's father would allow his son to do as he pleased, the same exceptions were not allowed for the girls. This is evidenced by Radha below:

[A]ppa was very strict...one step out of line...we used to get it...He knew how to bring up a girl child...my brother used to get away... he mustn't do any work around the house...he was the prince...one day my mother nearly get her teeth broken...when she told my brother it was raining and he must help me fetch the clothes from the line...my

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<sup>27</sup> 'Kala' means black and 'pani' means water, the term 'kala pani' thus translates to black/ dark water. It refers to the expanse of ocean that had to be crossed by indentured labourers before reaching their destination. Associations of the ocean being dark carried negative connotations of fear and foreboding into the unknown.

father went ballistic...“You think he’s a sissy? ...that’s the girls’ job...what you trying to turn him into? A skirt? ...you will get such a hiding”. (2002, 4)

In this single extract, Radha twice mentions physical abuse and the very biased way in which she and her brother were raised. Against the might of the engrained patriarchal system that dominated the household, the women had no option but to endure the abuse to which they were subjected, since such treatment was perceived as normal to her parents, her siblings and by extension, the community. Coming from a home where physical abuse, violence and aggression are the standard methods used to discipline women according to patriarchal norms, Radha is used to abuse, having watched her mother being abused, and thus probably does not expect anything different from her husband.

### **MANCHESTER UNITED**

One of the first pieces of information Radha reveals about Deva, is that he is an ardent Manchester United<sup>28</sup> supporter. Within the South African Indian community, to say English football is tremendously popular would be an understatement. Supporters of teams follow the sport as ardently as a religion, keeping track of the movements of key players, salary increases of managers and players, as well as the successes and failures of rival teams. This is primarily done to have bragging rights over other team supporters whose teams have not been successful at significant tournaments in any given year. The more wins, the more chances to attain trophies or ‘silverware’ colloquially, and the greater the chances to brag that Team X is better than Team Y. Allegiance to a team is so important that its respective losses or victories are considered personal losses or victories for the supporter. Any insult, criticism or defeat to the team being supported is taken very personally. The two most popular teams in the community are fierce rivals Liverpool and Manchester United. Through the character of Radha, we get a glimpse of what life is like for a wife of a passionate Manchester United supporter.

Before moving, Radha’s house was decorated with Manchester United memorabilia as though the house itself was a shrine to the team, a decision over which Radha seems to

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<sup>28</sup> Manchester United is a highly successful and popular English football club from Manchester, England. The team is nicknamed ‘The Red Devils’, while the full team name is Manchester United Football Club (Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English).



have no say. Indian South African society has relegated women to the private domain (see Chapters One and Four) and, as per the community's engrained gender roles, interior décor is usually assigned to the wife. However, even in Radha's home, she does not have ultimate control as her husband again enforces his decisions:

You should see our old house...Manchester United museum...Everything in the house had Manchester United logo...pillow cases...towels...as if that was not enough...Manchester United's greatest disciple...came home with a Manchester United toilet seat...and fitted it...in the ensuite...I tell you our world has to stop when that Manchester United are playing...My one would make God wait until the match was over. (2002, 4)

In the above extract Radha makes clear the level of obsession with Manchester United that she has to endure from her husband. He reveres the team to such a degree that it consumes him, and their home.

I believe that Moodley writes Deva's obsession this way as a means of locating the text in a context which is relatable to his audience. As indicated above, English football is hugely popular in the Indian South African community. Deva's actions related to the team seem nonsensical and absurd, which may be a device Moodley has employed to criticise men in the community who devote their time and energy to their hobbies whilst neglecting their families. Deva reveres the team as though they are his loved ones, while paying no heed to the challenges his family is facing. The effort that Deva dedicates to Manchester United is starkly contrasted with the time he gives his family. It is a commentary by Moodley to highlight how some Indian South African men have prioritised the wrong things in their lives at the expense of their families and how engrained gender roles remain firmly in place. Deva's patriarchal stance and clearly defined gender role dictates that seeing to his family is not a male duty, it is his wife's duty to ensure the family is taken care of.

While it may appear to be humorous that the play deals with an adult man as obsessed with a team as a child is with a new toy, it is a critique on men within the Indian South African society. This is a technique Brecht would have used to achieve *verfremdung* or distancing in Epic Theatre. While at the surface what is being portrayed appears to be humorous, on closer inspection the laughter conceals a criticism which Brecht hoped audiences would recognise. Similarly, Moodley is forcing men to acknowledge how pitiful it is that a sports

team is perceived as being superior to living beings in a home environment. While Moodley uses the humour to his advantage in that it disarms an audience to feel relaxed and at ease when discussing a sensitive subject like domestic abuse, it becomes uncomfortable when we realise the very real consequences catalysed by defeat for Radha and her children.

Radha articulates that she regularly plays hostess for Deva and his friends whenever Manchester United are playing, illustrating how entrenched gender roles operate in the home environment. Neither Deva nor Radha question that it is Radha's duty to provide for Deva and cater to his dietary needs. This enforces her relegation to not just the home environment, but specifically the kitchen. In the kitchen Radha should have absolute power and freedom to determine what she wants to prepare for her family. However, this mental freedom is threatened when Manchester United are playing as Radha attempts to use food as a way to pacify Deva. It shows how much mental trauma she is enduring, and the fear under which she operates in the kitchen before the match has even begun. Furthermore, Radha knows that if she does not meet Deva's expectations, she faces the potential of being beaten, which is why she is so attentive to his needs.

I also believe that the kitchen, where the play is set, is Radha's safe-space. In that space she speaks her mind freely, and is generally seen to be in control. Moodley does not allow Deva to enter that space and contaminate it, neither with his negativity nor with his dominating male attitude. It is a choice which again highlights patriarchal norms, where strictly defined gender roles determine which spaces are traditionally reserved for men and women.

Traditionally, the kitchen is regarded as the woman's domain, and generally it is not a space that Indian South African men will choose to inhabit.

Even in the home environment Radha has no power of her own as Deva makes all the decisions and she remains subservient to him. She sees to his every need and desire and even in the face of abuse that she knows is coming, she plays the role of the dutiful wife to perfection, never embarrassing her husband in front of his guests, never raising her voice to him, never confronting the abuse. She keeps silent about all that she has to endure like a *good* Indian wife who will never betray her family's secrets even if it is causing her harm. I imagine that the same is true in many Indian households where, despite the suffering and

pain they go through, traditionally Indian wives portray an image of a happy family in public as they have been taught to believe that an unsuccessful marriage is a failure on their part.

Meer (1972, 43) states:

For a woman, [...] divorce a disgrace. Because of her incapacity to cope with the world, and her great obligation to maintain the good name of the family, she will cling to the marriage, no matter how unsatisfactory and how severe its provocations.

Meer's articulation that divorce is a "disgrace" for an Indian South African woman, highlights how gender roles have been constructed in the community. Meer does not say that men too face such censure in the community, she specifically singles out women. Most Indian women would rather avoid such scrutiny by their community and so for the benefit of the public, they maintain the façade of a happy marriage even though the reality may be something completely different; "Rather, let the girl die a painful death in her marital home, then bear the social shame of her return to them [her parents]. What will the society say?" Bhalerao (2019).

The play unfolds on a night that Manchester United is playing a rival team. We witness Radha being a good hostess to her husband and his friends as they are entertained by the on-field antics of Manchester United. We learn, through the course of the play, that Deva's moods are largely dependent on the successes or losses of Manchester United:

You children know when Man United are playing there must be no noise from you children...it might cause them to lose...the game...Please play nicely.

*(To the audience)*

Man United...is a big influence...in this house...If they lose...even the food I cook tastes like shit...

"Call this food?...even the dog won't eat this shit". (2002, 6)

Radha gives us a brief insight into Deva's attitude when Manchester United lose – nothing pleases him. Everything is perceived with negative connotations when the team loses, even the food she cooks. Thus, it is evident that Deva's commitment to Manchester United stems from him using the team as an outlet through which his violent behaviour can be excused. His violence is not so much about the team, as it is about giving him a reason, an excuse to justify his abuse. As elaborated on in Chapter Four, once married a wife is deemed the property of her husband. Deva believes that he has ownership of his wife, and is thus entitled to control and abuse her, "men don't abuse women because society tells them it's

OK. Men abuse women because society tells them they are entitled to be in control” (Hill 2020). Manchester United’s loss does not equate to a loss of Deva’s personal power, rather he uses the loss of the team to disempower his wife, to remind her who is in control and thus keep her subjugated.

It is clear from Radha’s words above that Deva has little to no time for his children in comparison with the team. Radha, being a woman, is expected to fulfill the roles and duties of being a wife and mother. It is why the primary responsibility of seeing to her children lies with her. Deva, who is a product of the cultural and social power dynamics in his community believes that raising children is a feminine duty, and it would thus compromise his masculinity should he get involved, unless it is a matter of discipline, when he, as head of the family, is expected to enforce his authority. Adherence to clearly defined gender roles, especially where patriarchy is entrenched, enhances the likelihood of violence by men. This notion has been articulated by Jennifer Shore (2019): “It has been consistently demonstrated that men who accept very patriarchal beliefs about gender roles have a higher likelihood of engaging in violence against women.” Deva is a typical example of this; he fulfils the roles which enhance and solidify his masculinity, including abusing his wife. Anything which may compromise this image of masculinity, such as entering the domain of the kitchen, cooking and seeing to the children, he refuses to do.

Deva’s sense of control over the people in his life is crucial to him, he uses Manchester United’s loss as a way to enforce his control over his wife, similarly, the loss of Manchester United to a rival team which is supported by his close friend, affects his potential to exert power over his friend and dominate the relationship, thus he cuts ties with his friend. The entrenched system of patriarchy he embodies teaches him that control is a vital aspect of male identity. In reference to men, Hill (2020) states:

[S]ociety says that if they are not in control, they won’t succeed [...] and they will be vulnerable to the violence and control of other men. [...] “[H]aving power over” is valued within patriarchy – much more for men than it is for women – but nevertheless, it is regarded generally as a sign of strength to claim power over others.

It is for these reasons that Deva feels the need to have absolute control over the individuals in his life: it is central to him maintaining his masculinity within his assigned gender role.

Deva's obsession with Manchester United is a means through which Moodley gives us insight into Deva's personality. He is unable to tolerate not having absolute control over every aspect of his life. I believe Deva does not regard his wife and children as anything more than objects to do his bidding and to make his life easier, so his abuse of them is a way of reinforcing that discipline. Manchester United's loss thus becomes the mechanism through which he can reinforce his power, control and authority over his family. It becomes a convenient excuse to not only justify his abuse of them but to reinforce their disempowerment through his dominance. Manchester United's loss provides an opportunity to reaffirm his power in the home environment.

As the play continues, we learn that Deva's abusive tendencies are linked to the defeat of his team. As the game continues, Radha gets more and more anxious over how the team is doing because she fears the repercussions that will follow if the outcome is negative. She even ushers her children to bed early in an attempt to shield them from witnessing their mother being physically abused by their father, and to protect them from being soft targets for the abuse:

*(Shouts to the wings)*

"That's it, you children are going to get the hiding of your lives...I'm fed up"

I'd rather give them their bath and an early supper because once the game is over and the result is not positive, I don't know whose turn its going to be. Let me narrow the options. (2002, 9)

It is clear that Radha is on tenterhooks while the match is underway. She hopes for a win, but knows enough to keep her children out of harm's way should the result be a loss. It also shows the level of emotional battering to which she has become accustomed. From the time she was a young girl, abuse has been a part of her life; now, it is not a new phenomenon. She accepts it without questioning and does whatever she can to shield her children.

Knowing what is to come, we get a sense of Radha's mounting fear, if indications are that Manchester United will lose. While Radha is not a Manchester United supporter, she pays very close attention to what is happening when the match is on in order to determine what her husband's mood will be once the game is over. Moodley does well to build up the heightened sense of anxiety she feels as the game unfolds. Initially, Radha is quite at ease, just keeping an eye on the game from a distance. "I wonder how the first half of the game

went...things seem to be quite calm. *Takes the tray to the wings.* No score in the first half ... According to them the referee is playing for the other team” (2002, 10 – 11).

Then, through the use of words and stage directions, Moodley builds up the tension and Radha’s escalating fear of a match that may be lost.

Shit...shit...shit..the other team scored... and only fifteen minutes left...we need some divine intervention tonight.  
*Continues packing but she anxiously looks towards the wing.*  
Come on Manchester do something...  
*She hears a noise and jumps up and runs to the wing and listens. Comes back dejectedly.*  
That referee gave the other team a penalty... damn this is the last straw...Please I hope they don’t score the penalty.  
*Gets up and listens again.*  
Oh God no they scored it...no hope now... (2002, 11 – 12)

From the extract above we can gauge how fearful Radha is, although she does not hesitate to fulfill the demands of Deva and his friends as she knows that the consequences of not doing so will be terrible. Moodley builds to the climax in this way.

## THE ABUSE

Throughout the text, we never directly witness Deva physically abusing Radha. It is inferred throughout the course of the action but never actually happens on stage. Radha conveys the fear with which she lives but beyond that we never actually see her being abused. I believe this is done to heighten the tension and anxiety for an audience. By placing the tension in an area that is off-stage, our senses are heightened and our imaginations can create any number of possibilities for what is taking place. Moodley does not spell it out for us; rather, he allows us to create an infinite number of potential violent encounters that Radha is experiencing in our minds. The nature of those imagined scenarios then causes an emotional response which increases our anxiety for her.

When Manchester United loses the match, we witness what Radha deals with whenever this situation arises:

*She takes a plate of food to the wings.*  
(Off stage) There you are love...your favourite...But there’s nothing different..its just the way you like it.  
*Suddenly a plate is flung from the wings. It lands with a clutter on to stage. Cookie is shoved onto stage.*  
Oh no Deva, don’t do this. Why are you like this? Please I’m begging you.  
*Fade out.*

Oh my God, you hurting me. I love you Deva. Please think about the children... (2002, 12)

For the first time, we hear what it is that Radha goes through. This whole incident takes place with the stage lights down and so the unseen imagined violence becomes far more terrifying than witnessing it on stage. We do not witness the abuse but we hear the agony that Radha is enduring and that amplifies the tension.

When the stage lights come up, we are faced with this heart breaking scene:

*She sobs as the stage lights up and she is getting up off the floor. She wipes the blood with a dish cloth as she speaks to her children.*

No you'll go to bed...no daddy is sleeping in the lounge...the blood...oh I fell...slipped on the floor...there was water...yes Manchester lost...now please go to bed. (2002, 12)

In this instance the children's reference to Manchester United becomes a metaphor for their father's abuse of their mother. Manchester United's loss references a loss for their mother through the beatings she endures. Their concern about the blood and then the question about the team losing, indicates they know that there is a link between the two. The children are aware their mother gets beaten up by their father whenever Manchester United loses a match. Despite her efforts to protect her children from the violence, they are aware of what is happening and these incidences of violence has an effect on them (as will discussed later in this chapter).

From the excerpt above, it is evident that Radha has been badly beaten at the hands of her husband. The team's loss means their lack of control over the outcome of the game. To Deva, lack of control equates to compromised masculinity and so he uses the team's loss to reinforce his masculinity in his home environment. This sentiment related to masculinity has been expanded on by Michael Flood (2019) who says:

Longstanding ideals about manhood include ideas that men should be strong, forceful, and dominant in relationships and households. Men who conform to these ideals are more likely to hit, abuse, coerce, and sexually harass women than men who see women as their equals. [...] [S]exist masculinity not only causes the direct perpetration of violence against women, but also its perpetuation.

Thus, Deva's abuse of Radha reinforces his control of her and his dominance in their home. He knows his wife will never challenge his authority or confront him due to her socially

conditioned subservience. Her powerlessness makes him feel empowered. Manchester United's loss is a means through which his dominance can be re-asserted.

Deva has abused Radha so badly that she is now on the floor bleeding, and she does everything in her power to try to hide what has happened from her children and even Michael. She covers up for her husband's actions by claiming to have fallen. She does not criticise her husband to her children and does not put them between her and her husband. She takes full responsibility for what has happened, despite not doing anything wrong. In this way, Moodley highlights the situation that many women who are abused find themselves in and the choices they make. Like Radha, their silence in protecting their abusers allows the cycle of abuse to be perpetuated. She believes that she is powerless to challenge Deva as she is financially dependent on him, so she endures instead to ensure her survival. What she does not realise is that Deva takes her silence for granted, and if she never confronts him, the abuse will never stop as it has become a routine for him to abuse her. She also does not realise that in allowing Deva to beat her up, she is teaching her daughter to accept the same status-quo in her marriage one day. Her children are learning that abuse is acceptable and it is one of those occurrences that happen in a household. They too may grow up and continue the cycle of abuse in their own homes as it is what they have been taught.

Her children are not the only ones who are concerned about Radha. Michael also comes to check on her, and she replies: "Yes Michael...no no problem.. fighting..no I think the TV was loud..me I'm fine Michael..don't worry" (2002, 13). Even to Michael, a man she considers her brother, Radha protects her husband because she has learnt that is what a good wife does; her mother did it before her and she continues to do it too. She does not even give him a hint that anything is the matter or that she has been beaten up badly.

While the entire script revolves around the story of Radha and her experience of abuse, it is interesting to note that Moodley does not isolate the effect of the trauma upon Radha alone. Radha does all she can to protect her children from the physical blows, but the mental and emotional scars are very real and Moodley makes a point of bringing it to our attention. Radha receives a letter from her eldest child's school stating they want to have a



meeting with her. Deva, as expected, is his usual callous self, inferring that hitting his child is the way to solve the problem: “there’s only one way to sort it out...take the belt...what they trying to do? Disgrace me?...” (2002, 9). He takes no responsibility for his actions and instead sees a school meeting as tarnishing his respectable reputation. Radha being the devoted wife and mother makes the appointment with the school and has the meeting, only to be told that her daughter has withdrawn completely.

She said that this child was so good...and now she sits quietly and doesn’t respond and even in the playground, she sits alone and doesn’t play with the other children. I got a shock when she asked if there was any trouble at home. I said no, there’s no trouble. What trouble they talking about? (2002, 10)

Despite being a devoted mother, Radha fails to see that the actions of her husband are also affecting her children in a very negative way. We never find out whether Radha addresses the issue, but in this extract she seems to be completely oblivious to what the root cause of her daughter’s changed behaviour may be. She is more concerned about upholding and protecting her family’s perceived image than acknowledging that there is a problem which needs to be addressed. As long as Radha does not acknowledge this, the problem and abuse will continue to have its long-lasting effects not only on herself, but upon her children too.

Radha is so deeply entrenched in the system of patriarchy, where she plays the subservient role, that she does not realise the abuse is not normal – she perceives it merely as a part of marriage. This points to not only the normalisation and expectation of domestic abuse in Indian South African homes (as elaborated on in Chapter Four), but also how the façade of wellbeing takes priority over actually ensuring the wellbeing of the children. It highlights how the Indian South African community projects a certain image for the public to appear as though there are no problems and all is well. However, within its fold there are complex issues like domestic abuse that are hidden and rarely exposed at a surface level. It also speaks to how Indian South African women will do all they can to maintain the respect and dignity of their family to onlookers. A wife will rarely speak against her husband or her family as that would be a matter of great shame, and tarnish his reputation and honour in the community. She has been tasked with upholding the family name and she does so, even at her own expense.

*A Cookie in the Kitchen* (2002) is written to be a harsh criticism of the Indian South African community. Through the central characters of Radha and Deva, Moodley is scathing in his criticism of patriarchal practices that exist and are expected to be followed unhesitatingly by women. Moodley gives us deep insight into Radha's life experiences from when she was a youngster observing her mother being abused by her father and her brother getting away with whatever he wanted because he was male. This situation is then replicated in her marital home where she is expected to fulfil all the duties of a wife, home-maker and mother without getting any assistance from her husband; all her efforts are wasted in his eyes. Radha appears to be a good Indian wife who obeys her husband's commands and sees to his needs while still looking after her children and their home, while Deva is allowed not to do anything and not be judged for it. Deva's obsession with Manchester United allows him to disregard all other relationships including his wife and children. The team's defeats are used as outlets through which he can vent his frustration about feeling powerless in a situation that matters to him. This manifests in the form of domestic abuse where not even his children are spared his blows. Moodley has painted a distressing picture of what victims of abuse endure in the Indian South African Indian community and how despite their pain and suffering they will neither leave the situation nor confront it as the community would judge them for doing so. This is exactly why theatre becomes a powerful tool through which awareness and social change can emerge.

## **7. COMPARATIVE DISCUSSION**

No is a necessary magic.

No draws a circle around you with chalk and says I have given enough.

(Robbin 2016)

As I have discussed in previous chapters, I believe the Indian South African community is often silent about sensitive issues like domestic abuse, which are mostly not raised in public spaces, instead being hidden from public view. While domestic abuse takes place in the home environment, it is also where it is confined, never rearing its head beyond the private space of the home. This silent acceptance has been engrained in women of the Indian South African community who have been taught historically to accept and endure all their husbands' actions ranging from infidelity to abuse. For me, their silence about abuse has contributed to its continuance. Over generations, Indian South African men and women have allowed patriarchal practices and abusive patterns to be perpetuated. I contend that through the medium of theatre, these power dynamics can be confronted. It is why I chose these three plays for my discussion. Three Indian South African male playwrights have taken the very uncomfortable subject of domestic abuse out of the home environment and put it under the stark public spotlight of the stage.

In this chapter, I will discuss some of the differences and similarities between the plays to argue that raising sensitive issues like domestic abuse allows enforced power structures like patriarchy to be confronted in the Indian South African theatre space. Like Brecht, I too believe that theatre is a medium through which awareness can be raised and social transformation can take place. As Philip Glahn (2014, 1) elaborates:

At its core, Brecht's approach constitutes an attempt to show the viewer the relations of power and the mechanisms of reality, to lay bare the device. His method aims to situate both artist and viewer within and in conscious relation to the historical present in order to illuminate a position of active, critical involvement in the knowing and making of the world. Exposing social norms and 'truths' as historically determined and culturally produced shows them to be malleable and thus sheds an emancipatory light on the viewer's own agency.

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<sup>29</sup> 25-year old, mother of three Naledi Phangindawo was allegedly murdered by her boyfriend in Cape Town in 2020 (IOL Reporter 2020).

Through the medium of theatre, the playwrights are confronting the silences around the subject by forcing audiences to acknowledge the stark power imbalance in their homes. They ask audiences to question why the abuse happens, what systems enable it to be perpetuated, and why is it unquestioningly accepted? These male playwrights use the public arena of theatre to question what has rarely been challenged in the Indian South African community: entrenched power structures.

## THE PLAYWRIGHTS

The play texts each depict domestic abuse within the Indian South African community in a unique way. These texts represent the voices of victims within the community as perceived by Indian South African authors, who are also positioned within that community. I asked each of the writers why they chose to shine the spotlight on abuse. It was important for me to know why this particular subject was the focus of their plays and for each of them, their experiences with those who have been abused was key to their motivation.

Talking about *Purdah* (Mahomed 1993), Ismail Mahomed (2019) says that he never wanted to give his audience the easy Bollywood<sup>30</sup> fantasy of happily-ever-after. He wanted to force them into a state of discomfort that would get them talking about the subject matter:

I think to some extent it also tries to kill the 'Bollywood myth' that we are unable to ever deal with sensitive issues in our theatres. I was not going to give my audience a Bollywood story. I wanted to provoke them to ask many more difficult questions about our communities.

It is telling that Mahomed acknowledges that the 'Bollywood Myth' or the happily-ever-after fantasy is what is expected by Indian South African theatre-going audiences, an expectation he tried to challenge. I believe he has been largely successful in this endeavour. In his play, Mahomed has managed to take the stereotypical expectations of an Indian South African audience and upend them. Instead of being a damsel in distress who dreams of her wedding day and her Prince Charming, the central protagonist Ayesha is an independent thinker who searches for meaning from life that is not determined by her marital status. This is extremely unconventional given the perceived importance of marriage in the Indian community.

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<sup>30</sup> 'Bollywood' is the term given to India's Hindi film industry. The term references America's filmmaking industry referred to as Hollywood, and the location of the Hindi filmmaking industry in India, Mumbai, formerly Bombay (Moktan, P. 2016).

Equating success with marriageability is a product of the generational cultural values inculcated in young girls, a sentiment that is echoed by Meer (1972, 43), who says, "Marriage is the ultimate and the "natural" career for Indian women in South Africa, and it is toward this end that the life of an Indian girl is geared." It is in stark contrast to the expectations with which sons are raised, Meer (1972, 40) elaborates on this:

Sons moved out of the homes and into the streets early in their lives, for they were expected to familiarize themselves with the market from which they would draw economic support for the family. It was taken for granted that some of its dust would rub off onto them, that they would become influenced by alien ways and would even accommodate to them. This behaviour that was quite unacceptable in daughters was not only tolerated but even expected in sons.

Such attitudes highlight the glaring contrast of expectations with which girls and boys are raised in the Indian South African community. While boys are encouraged to be independent and learn the ways of the world – and are even expected to be tainted by it – for a girl, this is not permitted. She is expected to learn how to manage a household, how to cook and clean, and serve her husband. She is not allowed to be tainted by the world beyond her home environment. It also indicates how clearly defined the gender roles are in which boys and girls are raised. These sentiments tie in with the expectation that a girl remain chaste, since her honour is determined by her (lack of) sexual experience. It also reinforces how entrenched the patriarchal systems in the community are. A boy is given the freedom to explore and experience the world, at the expense of his female counterpart who has to learn how to take care of him. In his crafting of Ayesha, Mahomed forces young women to ask whether the stereotypical myth of marriage is really all moonshine and roses or whether there is more to life than having a husband. I will further discuss the confronting of the Bollywood myth in *Purdah* (Mahomed 1993) later in this chapter.

Singh (2018) said he wrote *Till Death do us Part* (1993) to assist the non-profit NGO: Advice Desk for the Abused. His interactions with that organisation led him to write a play based on instances the NGO encountered on a daily basis. As he describes:

I was working with these folks from this Advice Desk and they asked if I could do something, by way of dramatisation, which they could take around to show people, communities and things like that. So people would understand that this is going on not just in their own closed lives but other people face this as well and hopefully that would prompt them to open up. So that's how it started up. (Robin Singh interview 2018)

In writing a play based on the subject of abuse, Singh's intention was the same as Mahomed's, namely to spur conversation and dialogue amongst those being abused in seeming isolation and raise the consciousness of the community where performances would take place.

Moodley had a similar objective for writing *A Cookie in the Kitchen* (2002):

I've witnessed it myself throughout my life as to how domestic violence plays out. And I was a member of the Advice Desk for Abused Women and Children for years where I did programmes educating both victims and abusers. ... So I was pretty 'close to the action', as it were. I think I had enough background material to put into a text. (Vivian Moodley interview 2019)

Thus, Moodley's intentions appear similar to the other two playwrights, namely, to raise awareness and stimulate conversation about the material and the issue being raised therein - domestic abuse. In his own words, Moodley (2019) says, "[M]y intention was initially, to stimulate debate, to get people talking about not only the product as to how good or bad it was, but the subject matter that I'm putting out there."

I believe watching the stories of abuse being depicted on stage is a powerful experience, especially if one resonates personally with the material; however, I think the most poignant questions being raised are not directed at abusers or their victims but to members of the general community who are disturbed by what transpires in the plays. I believe this mental discomfort is a powerful tool which can be used to interrogate the nature of abuse in the community. Beyond the immediate reaction of wanting to stop the abuse, it also forces audiences to ask multiple questions such as: why is abuse allowed to continue? What about the situations depicted in the plays enables men to behave that way with their spouses? How is the silence in the community allowing the cycle of abuse to be perpetuated? What needs to be changed for the abuse to stop? How does one ensure that entrenched patriarchal systems in the community are dismantled so that women do not fall victim to internal male power struggles? While the plays do not seek to answer these questions, they are posed in the material, and in a Brechtian way, give the power to the audience asking them to make the changes they want to see in the real world. As Glahn (2014) observes of Brecht:

Rather than tell his audience what to think, he asked them to sing, and speak and act along with and against the conventions of making histories and identities. For Brecht,

the public sphere [...] was a space of class contestation, a site where instead of preserving social values and communal ideals, coalitions were to be formed. Brecht took pleasure in finding ways to intervene in, turn around and use as weapons the images, languages and gestures [...] to cleverly pit expectations and customs against one another in order to show the limits of communicative and experiential structure and to subsequently articulate the possibilities of their transformation.

Similarly, the playwrights' depiction of domestic abuse on stage, puts the power in the hands of the audience to question what has for generations gone unquestioned, and in doing so to challenge the inequalities, thus encouraging social change.

Some of the other Brechtian devices employed by the playwrights in each of their texts is the breaking of the fourth wall by the characters, Ayesha in *Purdah* (Mahomed 1993), Logan and Sandy in *Till Death do us Part* (Singh 1993) and Radha in *A Cookie in the Kitchen* (Moodley 2002) address the audience directly and break the fourth wall. This was a device employed by Brecht to highlight the artificiality of theatre, so that at no point does the audience mistake what is transpiring on stage as reality. Instead, due to its artificiality, the audience recognises that aspects and components on-stage can change or be altered and amended but action must be taken in real-life in order for change to be brought about on-stage.

In *Purdah* (1993), Mahomed uses minimal props for the entirety of his play, which also highlights the artificiality of what is being depicted on stage. He does not attempt to make the audience believe in the reality of what is being shown on stage, instead he asks them to question what is being depicted so that change can be brought about – like Brecht, his play is political in nature – it confronts existing power structures. Mahomed is forcing audiences to ask who (her family, her husband, the community) is doing what to whom (Ayesha)?

In *A Cookie in the Kitchen* (2002), Moodley uses humour to highlight how serious the manifestations of his obsession with Manchester United is; and he creates off-stage tension between Radha and Deva – both these instances are Brechtian as they employ a technique of distancing. This method discourages emotional investment by the audience in the characters and forces them to reflect on the real-life implications of what they are witnessing. Moodley is forcing his audience to recognise the strong criticism beneath the humour, and reflect on the critical decisions that need to be made in order for the on-stage manifestation of this obsession to be different.

Similarly, both Singh and Mahomed employ Brecht's Epic technique in breaking the free-flowing linear sequence of their plays. Both playwrights have written their characters to narrate their stories in a series of flashbacks, thus disrupting an audience's ability to fully connect with a character emotionally. Just when an audience member is comfortable with the progression of the play, they are jarred into experiencing a different moment or memory by the character – thus causing them to be fully engaged mentally, and forcing them to think and reflect on what is being depicted on stage.

I believe the intention behind each of the plays was to allow people potentially to speak about – and out against – domestic abuse. This was particularly true in the case of *Purdah* (Mahomed 1993), since every performance had a post-performance discussion where audience members could voice their thoughts and opinions. Mahomed says that while many chose not to speak in those discussions, others made it a point of speaking with the actress who portrayed Ayesha and stated that the play resonated with their own lives. Through the plays, abusers can witness the horrifying extent of their actions, while their victims can identify with either Ayesha, Radha or Sandy and begin to realise they do not have to face the abuse alone. Audience members can begin to understand that even though they might not actively contribute to domestic abuse, their silence and turning a blind eye to the uncomfortable truth unfolding in homes, as David does, does not make it go away, it makes them equally complicit.

Although it is clear that each of the playwrights had noble intentions, I do not believe their plays had a significant impact beyond their performances. I do not mean that their plays did not stir controversy; responses to *Purdah* (Mahomed 1993) included, for example,

The play provoked praise from liberal Muslims but insults and death threats as well as condemnation by imams in the Johannesburg-area Muslim hierarchy. Despite this response, several conservative clerics who saw the play after denouncing it came to acknowledge the justice of its indictment of domestic abuse in the community, although they were ambivalent about its public display. (Kruger 1999, 192)

The threats received by both Mahomed and his lead actress seem to be widely acknowledged, as echoed by Mara Matta (2016, 115): "*Purdah* 'has elicited condemnations and threats'. However, [...] even among those 'conservative or fundamentalist Muslims' who, in a first moment, had attacked the play as offensive to Islam, there were many that –



upon having seen it on stage – found its arguments legitimate.” While I do not believe a single play has the capacity to change the mindset of the community, I do believe it is possible that a single mindset can be changed. Thus, I think these plays constitute a first step in challenging the patriarchal structures that exist in the Indian South African community. As Matta (2016, 127) further observes,

More plays like *Purdah* may be necessary, more theatrical performances are needed to engage the audiences in a critical debate over the role of Islam – and religion in general – in a modern and secular society. [...] Briefly, we need to be ‘partakers’ and not just spectators of the events in order to engage with them in an effective and durable way.

Matta, like Brecht, suggests that for transformation to occur in real life, audiences need to move beyond being passive spectators, and become active participants in addressing the subject matter presented on stage. The plays’ subject matter forces audiences to ask uncomfortable questions, and that is the starting point for bigger questions related to domestic abuse to be asked, such as, how does one ensure no one else falls victim? If such conversations are ongoing and such conscientisation is a regular occurrence, then I believe it is only a matter of time before victims and communities alike feel empowered enough to take a stand, and this is why such theatrical pieces have social value.

## THE PLAYWRIGHTS ON PATRIARCHY AND ABUSE

During our respective interviews, the playwrights also revealed very clear perspectives on patriarchy and its influence not only within the Indian South African community, but society at large, which, they claim, influenced their writing of the central characters.

Singh’s articulation of the husband’s ownership of the wife is particularly disturbing and his observation is evident in the creation of the character of Logan in *Till Death do us Part* (1993). Singh recounted examples of domestic abuse that he had read about that were so entrenched in the community that they became accepted as normal. So much so, that not being beaten by your husband was regarded as being abnormal:

In his book, V.S. Naipaul’s ‘A House for Mr. Biswas,’<sup>31</sup> I think it’s there, that all the sisters-in-law, sisters, the whole lot, always gathered together, they’re cooking in the kitchen, they’re cleaning but the new wives that have arrived into the family will

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<sup>31</sup> Written in 1961, *A House for Mr. Biswas* by V.S. Naipaul is a story of a man who claws his way out of abject poverty, fighting his in-laws every step of the way (Cole 2016).

show them when they've received their first beatings from their husbands. It was a kind of mark-of-honour and acceptance into the family. (Robin Singh interview 2018)

Naipul's book was written in the 1960s, and while many women may no longer have that expectation of their husbands (though in more traditional, conservative homes that mindset may still prevail), being beaten by one's husband is something that continues to happen more than six decades later, as evidenced by the texts I am analysing. Unfortunately, domestic abuse is not a new phenomenon, nor is patriarchy, which is why the two stand side-by-side and have co-existed for centuries. As noted in Chapter Four, Singh discussed the traditional expectation placed on the shoulders of women once they are married, observing how the bonds of marriage mean all ties with the bride's own family appear to be erased, regardless of the circumstance or situation that the daughter has to endure after marriage. He goes on to reflect, "I don't know about that today, whether that practice is as common" (Robin Singh interview 2018). In questioning whether it is "as common" Singh (2018) indicates that the practice still exists, even if it is limited to small pockets of society.

As per Singh's play, as well as my conversation with him, there is a belief that once married, often a wife has no one to turn to when she had had enough, as even her family – her own parents – could send her back to her husband's home. Through marriage, she is rendered her husband's property, giving him the right to do with her whatever he wants. While Singh states that this occurred in the past and may no longer be the case today, his text written in 1993 continues to reflect some of those ideologies. The character of Sandy bears all the violence and terror from her husband alone. She never goes to her family for help and never leaves Logan no matter how hard it gets, as she is bound by both her love for Logan and her absolute life-threatening fear of him.

While women of today may have more of a voice and more avenues through which they can fight for justice, it is tragic to know that the sentiment of patriarchy has continued, as has domestic abuse with women falling victim to their husbands. Moodley (2019) accurately sums up this sentiment by stating: "Well it's obvious we live in a patriarchal society where a male is brought up to be 'the boss' as it were." In this instance, Moodley is not speaking of the past, he is speaking of the situation as he perceives it currently. To him, society is

governed by patriarchal principles that elevate the wants and needs of the male, which is again evidenced in *A Cookie in the Kitchen* (Moodley 2002) through the character of Deva. According to Moodley's analogy of the man as 'the boss,' it is men who make the decisions according to their desires and demands. Men have put themselves at the top of the social hierarchy pyramid which grants them unlimited access to privilege and power. Such an attitude also implies that they are not answerable to anyone.

Ahmed manifests this belief and patriarchal attitude in the way he behaves with his wife. He believes that she will allow him to dominate and he expects her to be subservient to him regardless of how that domination manifests. Like Ahmed, Deva too believes his nearest and dearest are merely subjects for his control. As a result of the entrenched patriarchal systems in his community, which has always valued Deva for being a male, he regards it as his right to disempower the women in his life by making decisions on their behalf (including his sisters), and treating them as inferiors. The frightening aspect of this text is the realisation that these characters do not exist independently from the broader culture and community, and the toxicity of their relationship is not an anomaly. Their attitudes, beliefs and actions stem from their upbringing; they simply manifest what they have learnt from their elders and other community members.

Speaking specifically of the Indian South African community, Mahomed (2019) states categorically that the community is unwilling to broach such sensitive issues. These sentiments find resonance in his text *Purdah* (Mahomed 1993), where, regardless of what Ayesha endures, the community remains silent. As Mahomed (2019) notes:

Well, in the Indian community we often see how things are pushed under the carpet. We know of people who are being abused. We see people at weddings and at funerals with a black eye but we don't talk about it. We pretend as if we haven't noticed it. With this play I brought that conversation out into the open.

Mahomed makes it clear that he is not referring to a historic situation; rather, he is referencing his own lived experiences within the community. He knows that such matters will never be brought out into the open for discussion, even though the consequences of abuse such as bruises, are visible to everyone. He attempted to challenge this status-quo through his text *Purdah* (Mahomed 1993).

Mahomed knew that his play contained themes and issues that are highly contentious for a conservative community and expected a backlash. That he received one, for me, highlights the success of his attempts to raise difficult issues within the theatre space of the community. That said, I believe individuals took more offence to the criticism of Islam, than they did to witnessing a woman enduring abuse in her home, especially as the criticism was written by a man who is part of the Islamic community. I believe this is as a result of the patriarchal structures embedded in the Muslim community which manifest through cultural practices. As a result of those cultural and traditional practices being aligned to religion, it became hugely offensive for the Muslim community. They interpreted it as a criticism of Islam, as opposed to a criticism of the power structures which privilege men over women. That domestic abuse is something the community expects and accepts is not new; however, witnessing that situation in a conservative Islamic community is new, and is for me, what created the uproar. There was more debate and controversy around the patriarchal themes and criticism of Muslim men than there was about the content of domestic abuse. This illustrates to me Mahomed's sense of writing about domestic abuse was accurate as the subject is not addressed. Even when staging his play, the focus became religious criticism as opposed to what a female victim of abuse was enduring in her home environment. Because he chose to locate his play in such a specific context, it stimulated criticism and debate and by extension, also brought the subject of domestic abuse into the spotlight.

I think one of the greatest successes of the play was that private viewings of the play were requested and booked by women's organisations so that women could view the play independent of their husbands and have honest, open discussions about the themes and characters without feeling stifled by the expectations of their partners. As Mahomed (2019) shares, "the play was an hour long but they had 90-minute post-performance discussions"; this speaks volumes for me about the amount of discussion and acknowledgement that needs to happen in the community around such sensitivities. It also is concerning for me that wives do not feel comfortable to have such discussions in the presence of their husbands. What is being allowed to take place in homes, that discussions about issues like domestic abuse and a woman's sexuality cannot be expressed in front of the man with whom she shares her life? I believe women should feel empowered and safe enough to raise such issues within their community, and men and women should acknowledge that

behaviours which reinforce patriarchal practices have contributed to women largely being denied power and agency, particularly in relationships like marriage.

### **CONFRONTING THE BOLLYWOOD MYTH IN *PURDAH***

As a diasporic community, one of the ways in which Indian South Africans attempt to hold on to nostalgic longings and reimaginings of the Motherland is through the medium of cinema, and more specifically, Bollywood. Bollywood movies offer an intoxicating link through which Indian South African audiences still see themselves connected to authentic Indian culture and traditions. In commenting on this issue, Sardar (1998, 22) observes:

Firstly, as a prime cultural referent, Indian films reflected the diversity and density of life 'back home' and provided a direct emotional link with the subcontinent. Secondly, it furnished a subconscious agenda for the future – problems to be avoided, social issues to be addressed, cultural goals to be sought, ideological possibilities to be explored [...] Indian films were thus much more than entertainment – they were a source of contemplation, as well as a reservoir of aesthetic and cultural values.

Thus, Bollywood movies are about more than just entertainment; they maintain a connection between India and South Africa. Thus, the medium has impacted the construction of communal identity and how the community views itself. The Bollywood myth references a cinema genre that perpetuates stereotypical and culturally constructed gender roles for example: the strong, handsome hero who would risk his life to save his heroine, the damsel in distress who embodies all the aspects of tradition and culture. This is further elaborated on by Ziauddin Sardar (1998, 53) who says, "women in these films have no function except to be sought by men and to dance and sing for delectation. Their only aspiration is to be married, and once married to keep hold of their men." In this cinematic genre women are not given the same status as men, are superficially valued by their aesthetic appeal and are seen as embodiments of culture and tradition.

As a character, Ayesha is extremely sexually aware from the night she is wed, evidenced in the way Mahomed has written her. This, more than any other subject in the play, probably raised the most eyebrows given that sex is usually a hidden subject (as noted in Chapter Five) in the Islamic community. The play is set in a very traditional, conservative Muslim family, where speaking about sexual pleasure is unheard of amongst women. Sex itself is not a subject that is spoken about openly about amongst girls and women, and if it is, it is

portrayed to a woman in a negative light, as Ayesha's aunt conveys to Ayesha. Consequently, the thought of a woman having sexual needs is an entirely foreign concept. Mahomed brings this into the spotlight through Ayesha who desires a sexually fulfilling relationship with her husband but is always left disappointed. This is a commentary of sorts by Mahomed who uses Ayesha's lack of sexual gratification by Ahmed to highlight how Ahmed does not consider it necessary for his wife to be sexually fulfilled. His only concern is that he enjoys the experience and is sexually gratified. It is another way in which Mahomed articulates Ayesha's disempowerment as a result of her husband's mindset of male superiority. She is denied sexual gratification because her husband does not recognise that she too has sexual needs, since the patriarchal attitude with which Ahmed has been raised has taught him that only his needs and desires are valid. Through constructing this situation Mahomed is forcing audiences to confront multiple issues. First, women too have sexual needs and just because they are not spoken about does not mean they do not exist. Second, patriarchal attitudes does not serve to benefit anyone but the men in a household. Third, daughters-in-law are humans too and deserve to be treated with the same respect as the sons of a home. These are matters that are relevant for men and women, parents and children alike.

There are many scenarios in the play that do not abide by the Bollywood fantasy, and through each of those scenarios Mahomed is asking audiences what about those instances makes them uncomfortable, what is it that offends them. Through the unrelenting sequence of events, he seeks to force the audience members to probe their discomfort to generate a deeper understanding of the burden of expectations that are placed on a woman's shoulders.

While Mahomed has truly forced some difficult questions upon his audiences, there are however, elements of the Bollywood myth that make their way into the play. That Ayesha's mother-in-law treats Ayesha as badly as Ahmed, plays in to the stock character stereotype of a villainous mother-in-law. The Bollywood myth has long expanded on the relationship between a noble daughter-in-law whose plans are often thwarted by her evil mother-in-law.

A second aspect of the Bollywood fantasy making its appearance is the ending of the play where all the characters are accounted for and the main questions related to their lives are largely answered. While it is through an affair and a murder (!), it just so happens that Ayesha's lover is also her lawyer defending her in court. It seems she will get the happily-ever-after she has long sought in a loving, sexually fulfilling relationship. She also has been given her independence back in that she now has her own home and will be continuing her educational pursuits. Her family has cut ties with her after Ahmed's murder (which she does not seem to lament at all) and she seems to be accountable to no one but the law in her upcoming trial, having overthrown the expectations society has forced her to endure all this while. It just seems too convenient that all the pieces fit together so well after such a harrowing journey. Given what she went through, I feel as though the conclusion should not have been so well-arranged. Not knowing what Ayesha's life would be after the murder would have left a deeper imprint in my mind than knowing all the puzzle pieces happened to fall in place so well thereafter.

It is never revealed to us what the outcome of Ayesha's trial is and I believe Mahomed purposely wrote it that way to highlight that the legal outcome is inconsequential. It can be assumed though that she would be convicted for murder and would enter a physical prison. Thus, while she is liberated mentally and emotionally, she will now be imprisoned and confined physically. Despite being condemned by her family, Ayesha feels more liberated and unshackled than ever. It points to the hypocrisy of the community in some way, while Ayesha has endured a great deal of trauma, those bouts of violence are not considered a crime and there is no judgement nor legal ramification for Ahmed's actions. Yes, what Ayesha did was wrong, taking a life can never be condoned, but her single action brings her so swiftly to the courts of law that it is deeply concerning that the extended abuse she has endured was overlooked by all due to entrenched systems of patriarchy. This points to how insidiously structures of male dominance operate within the community.

That Ayesha believes the only way to escape the situation is to kill Ahmed, illustrates her level of desperation. Murdering Ahmed was an extreme step, but she felt she had no alternative as she was completely trapped. I do not see Ayesha's situation ending positively through mediation and counselling as all indications are that no one in her circle is prepared

to help her. The success of mediation is entirely dependent on all parties actively trying to change the situation for the better; Ahmed's personality makes it clear that he does not recognise Ayesha as equal to him, which would be in conflict with any attempts to resolve the situation peacefully. Ahmed's attitude of male dominance is so entrenched that he would never see his actions as being wrong, since in his eyes Ayesha is wrong for not obeying him. For me, the only way this play could end peacefully and without the violent murder is if Ayesha ran away with her lover. In that way Ayesha would still be condemned by her family for leaving her marital home and bringing shame to her family, but there would be no more violence and no murder.

In the end, the price Ayesha pays for her happiness is very heavy and that is a critique on the community in which she lived. Also, was it worth it? Was her freedom worth killing her husband? Was it worth the subsequent death of her father or the consequent isolation from her mother forever? Was it worth the potential imprisonment? While Ayesha declares that she is finally happy at the end of the play and would make the same decisions all over again, I have my doubts that those consequences had no impact on her whatsoever, even emotionally.

## THE WIVES

*Purdah* (Mahomed 1993) and *A Cookie in the Kitchen* (Moodley 2002) are written as one-handers, and the story in both texts is narrated from the perspective of the victimised woman. While *Till Death Do Us Part* (Singh 1993) is a two-hander, the bulk of the story is also narrated by the female character. The three women are wives, of varying ages, thus representing the perspectives of different generations' attitudes to marriage and the abuse that may occur within that union. While each of the women experienced a different path to marriage, all of them suffer domestic abuse at the hands of their husbands.

In *Purdah* (Mahomed 1993), Ayesha has no choice in who her husband is; her father makes the choice for her and through an arranged marriage, she is wed to a stranger. She says, "my father informed me that he had already decided I was to get married [...] I could neither love nor hate you. I hardly knew you at all!" (Mahomed 1993, 159), making it clear that she



had no choice in the matter. This points to two key aspects related to diasporic identity construction within the Indian South African community, firstly, that marriage is the primary objective for a girl. That Ayesha's father agrees to get Ayesha wed based on pressure from an extended family member, depicts the anxieties Indian South African parents have about their daughters being wed (see Chapter Six). It is inconsequential whether or not Ayesha is mentally and emotionally ready for marriage; because the community deems her old enough to be married, she must be wed as soon as possible. As Meer (1972, 43) articulates: "there is no such thing as a bachelor girl in Indian society. There is simply the girl who has been looked over and rejected--not only by prospective husbands but by prospective families-in-law." Not being married represents a breakdown of the traditional family structure which is so embedded in the Indian South African community and must be adhered to at all costs because no family wants to endure criticism and judgement for their failings from the broader community.

The second aspect it highlights is that the husband or man of the home is given absolute authority in the marriage. He has the final say and his word is ultimate, there is no negotiation beyond that. All other opinions, concerns and discontent are subverted by his decisions. This points to how rigidly enforced patriarchal structures are in the home environment. Once her husband has made up his mind about Ayesha's wedding, Ayesha's mother has no say in the matter, she is not even consulted. She and Ayesha have no option but to accept what has been decided for Ayesha, even if it causes them unhappiness. It is why when Ayesha faces the abuse, she understands that Ahmed is the decision-maker in her marital home. Thus, confronting and questioning him will not yield anything because, despite being married to him, she is powerless in the face of his superiority in his home. These are the enforced power structures at play and it is how they are reinforced over generations.

As the play is a one-hander narrated entirely from Ayesha's perspective, we witness all the characters filtered through Ayesha's view of the world. As a result, we never observe any character growth in any of them for the duration of the play. It is presumed that at the end of the play Ayesha's mother succumbs to the pressure of her community and distances herself from Ayesha after the murder, never once trying to find out what went wrong. While

I am disappointed that once again Ayesha finds herself largely isolated from her loved ones, it is yet another commentary by Mahomed on how the community allows false beliefs and perceptions about a situation to be perpetuated rather than challenged. Had Ayesha's mother reached out to Ayesha to try and understand her daughter, perhaps Ayesha would have had more support. It is a harsh criticism of how the community is ready to ostracise individuals who defy their traditional expectations because the community's judgement is seen to be beyond reproach and Ayesha's parents know they will be shunned if they support their daughter (even though Ayesha's actions were not determined by her parents).

Mahomed asks the viewer to question the issues that exist in the community by recognising that Ahmed too is at fault, thus acknowledging the validity of Ayesha's decisions. In a community where men are considered superior and domestic abuse by a husband is not regarded as surprising, acknowledgement that Ahmed is also to blame is a significant step in changing attitudes around patriarchy. I believe that Mahomed wrote Ahmed as an out-and-out villain to force audiences to question his actions. If Ahmed had any redeeming qualities, audiences would have made excuses for his behaviour and never questioned it. Writing Ahmed as a completely heinous person, forces audiences to question male dominance because there is no justification for Ahmed's actions, except that these are the expectations he has learned from the community. If the community acknowledges he is at fault, it also acknowledges that their patriarchal systems are at fault. The circumstances Ayesha was forced to endure are brought into question by Mahomed. Similarly, in his Epic Theatre, Brecht (1964, 9) critiqued, not the individual character but the system in which that character is found:

What men experience among themselves they think of as 'the' human experience. [...] If anyone is bold enough to want something further, he only wants to have it as an exception. Even if he realizes that the arrangements made for him by 'Providence' are only what has been provided by society he is bound to see society, that vast collection of beings like himself, as a whole that is greater than the sum of its parts and therefore not in any way to be influenced. Moreover, he would be used to things that could not be influenced; and who mistrusts what he is used to? To transform himself from general passive acceptance to a corresponding state of suspicious inquiry he would need to develop that detached eye with which the great Galileo observed a swinging chandelier. [...] Here is the outlook, disconcerting but fruitful, which the theatre must provoke with its representations of human social life.

Thus, like Brecht, Mahomed wants to force his audience into a state of discomfort so that they begin to question the system that has enabled the perpetuation of a social ill like domestic abuse.

Ayesha's decision to murder Ahmed was not impulsive, it was calculated. The final straw for Ayesha was not the abuse, nor fulfilling the expectations of a dutiful wife, but the humiliation of being replaced by another woman. In this action, Ahmed invalidates Ayesha's experience of being a wife to him; she is no longer good enough to fulfil her role (i.e. procreation), and must thus be replaced. It points to the biased expectations of women in the community and fulfilling their duties as wives. Ahmed is a terrible husband, but it occurs to no one but Ayesha that he should be replaced. It speaks volumes of the hypocrisy of the gendered expectations of a husband and wife. Ayesha is only valued as an individual based on her ability to procreate and take care of her family, beyond that she is easily replaced. Ahmed, who treats his wife appallingly and behaves with her as though she is his possession, is never questioned by anyone. This situation illustrates the double standards evident in the Indian South African community where gender roles are clearly constructed to uphold male superiority.

Nearly a decade after Mahomed wrote *Purdah* (1993), Moodley wrote of the arranged marriage system in 2002. The character of Radha in *A Cookie in the Kitchen* (Moodley 2002) also had an arranged marriage. It is concerning that the practice of arranged marriages continues to operate within the Indian South African community even among the younger generation. While there may be many reasons this, from my perspective, the overriding purpose is to maintain the patriarchal system of male superiority, ensuring men remain in charge and women remain disempowered. However, one hopes that the mindset and attitudes of the individuals involved are changing so that women are no longer disenfranchised in their marriages.

Ayesha and Radha's stance towards their respective marriages are vastly different. Ayesha makes it clear that she feels robbed of the opportunity to make decisions for her life. In *A Cookie in the Kitchen* (Moodley 2002), Radha fully understands her parents' reasons for arranging her marriage. I believe that Ayesha's refusal to accept the expectations from her

family about being a married woman stems from the significant age difference and consequent maturity levels between the two women. Ayesha speaks of a situation that is still relatively new. She has only been married for roughly two years and much has transpired in that time, from the physical and sexual abuse to the finding of a second wife by her husband, at the encouragement of his mother. She also feels that she has been cheated out of life's opportunities because she was forced into marriage and is bitter and resentful of the situation. Radha, on the other hand, has been married for many years. She has accepted the atrocities her husband commits against her as a part of life, given that she was raised in a household where similar occurrences took place. I also believe that Radha's understanding is a consequence of her belief that she had no other option. Questioning her father's decision would have been regarded as being defiant and questioning his authority, two things that are unacceptable, especially by a daughter. Neither Ayesha nor Radha had a choice in who their respective grooms were and both decisions related to their marriages were made by their fathers, indicating that father-figures are regarded as the sole voice of authority and power in the home. No one is permitted to go against his rules. This highlights the elevated status of the male in the home, since everyone else is answerable to him, while he is answerable to no one. Meer (1972, 42) elaborates on the situation in which wives find themselves in relation to their husbands:

She will not make any major decisions on her own and often leans on her husband for relatively small ones. The husband, on the other hand, is not obliged to consult her, and will often keep his business affairs secret from her. He may move in and out of the house at will, and if he brings guests to dinner without prior warning, it will be her duty to serve them and show him deference. It is his prerogative to be angry, hers to anticipate his anger and assuage it.

This quotation shows how disempowered and subservient wives are required to be in their respective relationships with their husbands. Marriages are not arrangements of two equal partners, rather the husband is given the dominant role, with the wife expected to submit to his will. In this sense, it becomes clear that when the wife has little to no power in her home, daughters have even less agency over their own lives. It is why when the fathers of Ayesha and Radha decide to get their daughters married, there is no objection. Radha and Ayesha are expected to obey. While Ayesha laments the decisions and mourns for her innocence, Radha accepts unquestioningly because she knows there is no alternative, she has no choice in the matter.

It is interesting to note that despite their protagonists being very different in their approach to the abuse they face, both Moodley and Mahomed speak of their characters as survivors regardless of what they endure. Mahomed says that he regards Ayesha as a survivor. Similarly, Moodley says that Radha is a survivor, who is as successful at not being a helpless victim to the circumstances in which she finds herself; noting that he wrote the character as a way to showcase her resilience, he states, “this was one way of showing that she is still able to put up with the abuse and run her family” (Vivian Moodley interview, 2019). I do not, however, agree with Moodley’s sentiments that Radha is a survivor. In Moodley’s assessment, Radha is not a victim because she can transcend her pain and still successfully manage her household. I find this version of success to be extremely narrow minded, because it reinforces patriarchal structures of power. Why should Radha’s success be determined by her ability to tolerate the abuse? Why is there no criticism of Deva who does the abusing, and whose measure of success is not determined by him having to endure any abuse? In fact, Deva appears to do very little to contribute to the smooth running of the home; it seems as though the entire household responsibility (barring finances) lies with Radha. While Radha does manage her household, I do not perceive that as necessarily being successful, she is merely fulfilling the expectations society has handed her. By binding notions of success with her ability to tolerate the abuse, Moodley is reinforcing power dynamics that privilege the man at the woman’s expense. I see Radha as a victim of circumstance, utterly dependent on her abusive husband to survive. I believe that Moodley’s perspective as a male, himself being privileged by patriarchal structures, has influenced his ability to recognise Radha as a victim, that the abuse she endures and tolerates is not something to be celebrated, it should be challenged. It is the questioning of these entrenched structures that such plays bring to the fore and ask the social and cultural attitudes that prevail in the Indian South African community to be confronted.

For me, Radha is a passive witness to her own life rather than being an active participant. I see Ayesha as being far more active in trying to alter the situation she is faced with, she goes against the norm and fights for her own wellbeing. It frustrates me tremendously that Radha does not see a way out of the situation. She is so bound by the duties and

responsibilities that have been embedded in her psyche by the structures and expectations of the community that she never thinks of her wellbeing.

In contrast to Radha and Ayesha, Sandy in *Till Death do us Part* (Singh 1993) had the good fortune of being able to fall in love and choose her life-partner. It is unfortunate though that despite having chosen her husband, he is as abusive as the husbands in the other two texts, something she only discovers after the honeymoon period in their marriage. This is a significant comment on the nature of domestic abuse. It does not discriminate between different types of marriages. Domestic abuse can rear its head in the relationship between individuals who have fallen in love and then wed, just as it can exist between individuals who were married through an arranged setup.

I find Sandy's character to be lacking depth, in that we know and understand who she is based on the moments of her life revealed to us through the play, but those are rather superficial. In contrast to Logan's vulnerability in his monologue, Sandy is not given the same emotional scope. Logan and Sandy's relationship exhibits traits of patriarchal superiority which is typical of the Indian South African community. Sandy may not like the orders that Logan gives her, like leaving work and playing the perfect hostess despite being embarrassed, but she obeys his instructions like a dutiful wife. She does not challenge him and any attempts to confront the issues are overruled by his physical strength which manifests as abuse.

It is interesting to note how each of the victims respond to the abuse that they face. By the end of both *Till Death do us Part* (Singh 1993) and *Purdah* (Mahomed 1993), Sandy and Ayesha have decided they will no longer accept the blows rained upon them by their husbands. Both make conscious decisions to take matters into their own hands and make decisions for themselves instead of simply tolerating the abuse. *Purdah* (Mahomed 1993) ends with Ayesha choosing to defy convention and live life on her own terms: having an affair with her husband's best friend and killing her husband.

It is only at the very end of *Till Death do us Part* (Singh 1993) that we are given any indication that Sandy's character has grown. The fact that she has gotten to the stage where

she feels she needs to arm herself indicates that she has reached her tolerance limit and will no longer accept the abuse without fighting back. It is also an interesting commentary showing how enmeshed in violence Sandy has become. She chooses violence as a means of retaliation without realising how much she has been destroyed by violence, that this is the only option she believes is left to her.

It is interesting that out of three plays, one ends with a murder while the second infers a violent death for someone. It is significant that Ayesha and Sandy choose to challenge the status-quo in their lives; it shows character growth and understanding that simply because a system has endured for generations, does not make it right. Only Radha remains in her situation, there is no challenge or defiance in her character against her husband or the system. I believe that Singh and Mahomed choose to end their plays violently because they do not see the situation changing peacefully for their protagonists. The husbands in each of their plays (and Moodley's) have been written with such entrenched beliefs and attitudes about their limitless rights as men, especially in relation to their wives, that a peaceful solution seems impossible. These men have been raised believing in their superiority by virtue of their gender; this mindset is entrenched and changing it would require an entire overhaul of not just their attitude but the community which has supported and perpetuated it for so long. Thus, making audiences realise that it is only through changing the community's attitude towards constructed gender roles, can the unravelling of patriarchal structures begin. However, that will take time, and a few generations at least, in which case, victims like Ayesha and Sandy will remain confined to their abusive situations, as Radha is. I think the only possible way to have avoided such extreme violence in either of the plays, is to have the wives walk out of their marriages, to not seek retribution for what they had endured and leave their homes to seek an independent life. They would have faced the disapproval of their community and would have potentially been ostracised, but the deaths of any one of their husbands could have been avoided. Although, if Sandy's abuse continued on the same trajectory, it was only a matter of time before Logan killed her. This is why Sandy's attempt to escape becomes so significant – she wants out of her marriage in a way that is not harmful, but because her attempt fails and she is so desperate, she feels like the pistol is the last resort to ensure her safety. If Ayesha decided to leave her marriage, she would have faced condemnation from her community but even in staying, her choice to kill

Ahmed condemns her anyway. It appears as though the only option available to these women without resorting to killing their husbands, is to stay, as Radha does, and tolerate the abuse.

## THE HUSBANDS

Of the husbands presented, the least is known about Ayesha's husband Ahmed, beyond his domestic situation, in *Purdah* (Mahomed 1993). He never makes an appearance in the text beyond Ayesha's narration and we hear from her about his character and the way he treats and abuses her. It is my belief that this is done because at no point does Mahomed want the audience to be distracted from the sole focus which is Ayesha. *Purdah* (Mahomed 1993) is Ayesha's play, it is her life and her story and to introduce the physical presence of another character may detract from the central protagonist's narrative.

This is unlike the other two texts where both husbands are active characters even though we do not ever actually see Deva from *A Cookie in the Kitchen* (Moodley 2002). While we never see or hear him, Deva makes his presence known by the way Radha interacts with him offstage. Her moods change based on her interactions with him. This gives us great insight into Deva's character, and we learn about him and his behaviour towards her through these exchanges. The only text in which the husband is actually physically present is *Till Death do us Part* (Singh 1993). In this text, Logan is present throughout and the audience witnesses his interactions with Sandy. While Sandy shares insight about their relationship and how she feels about Logan, it is the only text of the three where the husband, Logan gives a first-hand account of information related to his background and how he feels, with the audience. It is the only play where there is any attempt to humanise an otherwise villainous husband. It adds depth to Logan's character as, while he is tremendously flawed which is what we see in the abuse, he also has a very fragile side. This vulnerable side of him reveals that he has endured his own trauma and pain and, is so broken that his abuse is a way of ensuring he never allows anyone to break his spirit again. Rather than let that happen, he retaliates before he allows himself to be that vulnerable again with anyone, including his wife. For the first time we witness a human being beyond the monster and while we empathise with the pain he carries, his battering of his wife is unjustifiable and unforgivable.



There are similarities between the three men that extend beyond the abuse that they inflict on their wives. The most striking of these is the insecurity and jealousy the husbands feel when their wives interact with other men. Regardless of whether these interactions are innocent or playful in nature, the husbands find ways to blame their wives for drawing such attention and they then take their frustrations out about the situation on their respective wives, not the men who have either directly or indirectly created the problem.

In *A Cookie in the Kitchen* (Moodley 2002), Radha laments when Deva's friends flirt with her. While she doesn't remain docile, and responds to the flirting with equal condemnation, in Deva's eyes, it is her who is at fault for drawing such attention to begin with.

That Arvin was a snake... he used to make my one drunk and then try his tricks with me.  
ARVIN: Why don't you and I create some excitement and get together sometimes... well he's drunk and asleep... what you say?  
RADHA: I say if you don't leave my house, I'll pour this boiling oil on you!!!  
And when I told my one he had the cheek to say it was my fault.  
DEVA: Arvin is my best friend... he will never do something like that...you must have tempted him. (Moodley 2002, 6)

This excerpt shows how blind Deva is to his wife's needs and feelings. He never once questions the motives of his friend and puts the sole blame on his wife's shoulders for such an exchange even taking place, even insinuating that she is promiscuous. And it is not the first time.

Such incidents also show the extent of Radha's loneliness in that she has no one else to turn to but her husband in times of need, and even he ostracises and blames her for whatever takes place, even though it is through no fault of hers. Further, as discussed in Chapters One and Five, in the Indian South African community, an Indian woman's honour is inextricably linked with her chastity, as celebrated Indian feminist Kamla Bhasin<sup>32</sup> (in Estrella 2016) once famously said: "If I'm raped, people will say that she's lost her honor. How did I lose my honor? Who put my honour in my vagina?" As Bhasin expresses, a woman's virginity is considered almost sacred. Any violation of that, by force or willful choice, renders her

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<sup>32</sup> Kamla Bhasin is an Indian developmental feminist and advocates for Indian and South Asian Women's rights to equality. She is also an activist, poet, author, and social scientist (Taiwan WCWS 2019).

impure, tainted and dishonourable. This dishonouring of a married woman, through infidelity, is considered a most heinous sin; thus, to insult a woman's virtue by insinuating she is promiscuous is highly insulting and extremely hurtful. Questioning their wives fidelity only highlights how little consideration each of the husbands have for their wives. It is ludicrous that well into the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the Indian South African community holds on to outdated beliefs that regard a woman's virginity as the measure by which to determine her worth and respectability. It once again highlights how the community has allowed the emancipation of men from cultural dictates, yet shackles a women within those prescripts and judges her on her ability to uphold those belief systems, so much so that to be sexually liberated is deemed taboo.

In *Till Death do us Part* (Singh 1993), Logan behaves with Sandy in the same insecure, jealous way when it comes to other men. Logan very steadily isolated Sandy from her friends and colleagues and intimidated them into leaving Sandy alone. He never gives her a suitable reason for not wanting her to work and it is only when Sandy falls pregnant do we realise the extent of Logan's insecurities related to her working, as he questions the paternity of their child:

You want to go out and fucking work again. Meet up with all those whores you call friends, don't you? (*Kicks her*) You want to go and join all those bitches at the office so all of you can fuck the boss. You'd like that, won't you? All those office parties, fucking orgies if you ask me. Where do you do it eh? (*Slaps her*) Oh his desk? (*Slap*) How many? (*Slap*) Twosome, threesome, (*slap*) or maybe you like doing it to the other cunts in the office too? Fucking bitch (*punches her*) (Singh 1993, 333 – 334)

Here, for the first time we witness the real reason and Logan's true insecurities related to Sandy working. It was never a matter of finances, but a way to ensure that his wife remains faithful to him, as he does not want her interacting with anyone else, in case that interaction leads to a sexual encounter.

For me, these men find it easier to vent their frustrations and insecurities on the women in their lives, rather than addressing their insecurities with their friends directly. They are also bound by cultural and social conventions, where to be seen as weak or threatened is not acceptable. It would compromise their relationships with their friends if they were to call them out on their actions and their flirting. Amongst their friends and for the public they

appear to be confident and in control; with their wives and within the safety of their home environment, they are allowed to be unspeakably cruel and abusive, with no one passing comment or judgement. The husbands are aware of the safety net their homes provide and that within its walls, their authority cannot be questioned. It speaks volumes about the way in which insidious patriarchal attitudes continue to be perpetuated. Having their friends potentially flirt with their wives is an uncomfortable situation for each of the husbands. So, instead of calling their friends out for their behaviour, where there is potential for a fallout, the husbands vent their jealousies and insecurities about not being able to enforce control over those interactions, on the women in their lives, over whom they have complete control. This allows for the victimisation of women to continue as men shield each other from their actions, and do not hold each other accountable meaning there is no need to take personal responsibility.

These instances of striking similarity in *Till Death do us Part* (Singh 1993) and *A Cookie in the Kitchen* (Moodley 2002), written almost a decade apart, show the persistent unchanging techniques of abusers, and how they manage to victimise their wives because of their own fragile egos and fears stemming from their own insecurities. For me, this is evidence of their tremendous cowardice. The only text that strays from this is *Purdah* (Mahomed 1993), but it is also the only text where the husband, Ahmed, actively seeks another wife to bear him a child.

## **THE ABUSE**

While we can make assumptions as to why each of the husbands abuse their wives, it is only in *Till Death do us Part* (Singh 1993) that we are given any reason why Logan is the way he is. Logan's account of the abuse he endured in his childhood makes us pity the man he has become. He carries with him the pain of his childhood even today, and has not dealt with the trauma. Lashing out at Sandy is the manifestation of his unhealed brokenness. In order for that cycle to be broken, he has to come to terms with what his father's abuse did to him physically, how it affected him mentally and how much emotional trauma he still carries. That he has not done so, speaks volumes about how the community equates manhood with invincibility. Logan believes he cannot show pain, weakness or vulnerability as it makes him

less of a man. Regardless of how many times Sandy has tried to find out more about his family and background, Logan has not yet confided in Sandy about his childhood trauma. This illustrates how ashamed and embarrassed he is by what he endured, even though he was on the receiving end of the pain. These enforced notions of masculine identity keep men bound in their destructive patterns because they have been taught that to show any form of weakness, undermines their value as a man. Childhood traumas have to be recognised and healed in order to break the cycles of abuse, because “Coming to terms with the mistreatment suffered as a child – whether physical, sexual or emotional – is the only way to break the cycle of abuse” (Bierma 2019). Similarly, Logan has to reflect on what he has endured as a child if he has any hope of breaking the cycle of abuse to which he was subjected.

There are no concrete reasons given as to why *Purdah's* (Mahomed 1993) Ahmed and Deva in *A Cookie in the Kitchen* (Moodley 2002) are abusive. It can be speculated that their abusive nature is a product of the patriarchal attitudes with which they have been engrained and the belief that their wives are regarded as theirs once she is married, thus enabling a husband to treat his wife as he chooses to. Men are seemingly allowed to hit and abuse their wives, without any of the characters in the plays (with the exception of David in Singh's *Till Death do us Part* (1993)) questioning why.

I believe that the non-acknowledgement of the abuse by the secondary characters in each of the plays, is an issue of contention for audience members. That no one else acknowledges the abuse in the plays, except David, points to the tremendous silence around the issue. It forces audiences to recognise that just as the characters who have kept quiet about the abuse taking place under their watch makes them complicit in the violence - like Ayesha's mother-in-law and Sandy's colleagues – so, too are audience members complicit in the continuation of abuse in their community, by holding their tongues and never confronting the issue. The texts force audiences to acknowledge the reality of the issue and recognise that everyone who is silent about domestic abuse, is also at fault.

While all three texts may not contain emotional, physical abuse and sexual abuse, each of the forms of abuse make appearances within the range of the three texts. Emotional abuse

in the form of insults, belittling, criticism and name-calling is most clear in *A Cookie in the Kitchen* (Moodley 2002) and *Till Death do us Part* (Singh 1993) though it is evident in *Purdah* (Mahomed 1993). Radha is used to facing emotional abuse from her husband Deva, especially when Manchester United lose the game to a competing team. Then, his abuse begins with emotional abuse:

eh what love?... why you swearing...? Stop it please... (*She takes a plate of food to the wings*). (*Off stage*) There you are love... your favourite... But there's nothing different... it's just the way you like it. (*Suddenly a plate is flung from the wings, it lands with a clutter on to stage*). (Moodley 2002, 12)

It is clear from this extract, and what is not being said, that Radha is facing some form of emotional abuse. It appears as though Deva is using vulgar language in the form of swearing aimed at her. Deva's response to her after the game makes her feel valueless thus reinforcing his importance.

Similarly, Sandy in *Till Death do us Part* (Singh 1993), is on the receiving end of Logan's emotional abuse. Here it is much more destructive as we witness directly what he says to her. Logan speaks down to her and addresses her as though he owns her: "Hey girl, you're forgetting yourself" (Singh 1993, 317). Words like "bitch," "fucking bitch," are often used when Logan is angry or irritable with Sandy. Sandy even attempts to use dialogue to address the abuse and even then Logan responds by throwing her attempts back at her and blaming her:

SANDY: Can you identify what it is that triggers the abuse?  
LOGAN: Oh yes. That's very easy. It's my wife. She triggers it. She doesn't understand our relationship. Next question. (Singh 1993, 329)

This exchange shows that Logan manipulates the situation so that he always appears to be the victim. He knows he abuses his wife, but never accepts any responsibility for it, once again, Sandy is defeated, this time by his perspective on how their relationship functions.

Even Ayesha, is not spared emotional abuse. She tries to find ways to gain little aspects of power and control of her life from her husband, but his emotional abuse of her defeats her and she gives in to him:

No matter how hard I tried to conjure excuses, I always gave in at the end. This little exercise would only result in Ahmed becoming more vulgar and abusive towards me. (Mahomed 1993, 161)

Physical abuse in the form of hitting, kicking, slapping and physical assault is apparent in all three texts. All three wives are used to being on the receiving end of their husband's violence. Ayesha (Mahomed 1993), realises that being beaten up by one's husband is one of the many aspects of marriage that the community accepts and that physical abuse is very normal and common amongst couples, it is simply how things are. Unable to change the system, she grows used to being on the receiving end of her husband's fists. Radha too, I believe, views abuse as simply one of things that happens as she's watched it happen to her mother since she was a child. Now it is simply a part of her life that she accepts unquestioningly. This normalisation of abuse speaks volumes of what the Indian South African community has allowed to be perpetuated over generations. That neither Ayesha nor Radha question the abuse they face shows the degree to which, in their homes, it is simply a product of marriage. That Ayesha learns being beaten up is normal, and that Radha has grown up believing so, shows how warped the community's view is of what constitutes a healthy marriage. The community asks these women to be dutiful wives, fulfill the expectations of marriage, to uphold the family's honour and preserve the cultural and traditional values they have been entrusted with. What does this same community ask of its men? Who holds the men accountable for their actions? Why are they beyond reproach? Why are their violent acts of abuse allowed to continue without anyone challenging them? Why have men been put on a pedestal that they have not earned, nor are they worthy of. The hypocrisy between the expectations of men and women, husbands and wives, girls and boys becomes glaring. Men have been allowed to enforce their dominance at the expense of women. What angers me most in this situation, is that it is the very same duty-bound mothers who teach their sons and daughters these imbalanced gender dynamics. It is the women of the home who have been tasked with raising their children, and inculcating into them the values that the community prescribes. It is these women who teach their sons that they are superior to their sisters; it is these women who teach their daughters that their role is to be subservient to their husbands. Only when these attitudes and mindsets are confronted can we begin to break the cycle of patriarchy.

It is only in *Till Death do us Part* (Singh 1993) that we see the physical abuse actually take place. Singh wants the audience to witness the graphic reality of the abuse. As abuse is a subject that is rarely spoken about or confronted in the community, witnessing the horrors of the abuse presents the stark reality of what it actually is when it is being witnessed on stage. While the subject may remain hidden in homes, there is no hiding from or denying the horrifying nature of abuse when it is being put on stage in front of an audience. They are being forced to watch something to which they would otherwise turn a blind eye. The audience is privy to what the beatings entail between Logan and Sandy. The stage directions often indicate what violence Sandy is facing, from slapping, to being hit with the newspaper, to being kicked and punched and even having her hair pulled. It is the text where we see the violence most acutely. Even here, Sandy gets accustomed to facing physical abuse on a regular basis, "By the time David moved in next door [...] getting slapped, kicked and punched around was quite normal for me" (Singh 1993, 327). For a community that largely ignores domestic abuse, by witnessing it on stage, Singh forces audiences to acknowledge that it takes place. It is a powerful method to make audiences realise what it is they are allowing to continue by being silent and looking the other way. It is easy for community members to pretend as though they do not know what is happening in the private spaces of a home. It is easy for them to claim they do not know the abuse is so bad, that he beats her so frequently, that she has no one to turn to because they do not want to face the uncomfortable truth. In this way, Singh challenges the audience by depicting the ugly truth of the abuse on stage. Now, there is nowhere for audience members to hide (as David does in his home), no possibility of them feigning ignorance, as the abuse has taken place in front of their very eyes. Now, I believe, his question is, 'I have shown you what happens behind closed doors, what are you going to do about it? Are you still going to remain silent, or will you take a stand?' This, for me, is the motive for depicting the abuse on stage.

These women find themselves at the mercy of their husbands as they have been systematically isolated from anyone else. Ayesha learns the hard way that her mother-in-law offers her no sympathy or support, she also learns through interactions with family members that she is not alone in being beaten by her husband and that it is normal for married couples. This implies that others in her extended family know what she is enduring. Sandy also has no family support nor any friends as a result of Logan's dominating

behaviour. Radha is also expected to remain silent about the abuse as she has no one to turn to for support. It is deeply concerning that as a result of the patriarchal structures the community enforces, all three women find themselves alone and vulnerable in marriages dominated by abusive men.

The final form of abuse that we are exposed to is sexual abuse. *A Cookie in the Kitchen* (Moodley 2002) makes no reference to sexual abuse, so at the very least we hope Radha is spared that trauma. But Sandy and Ayesha are victims to their husband's sexual desires, whether or not it is consensual. Ayesha is very unhappy with the way her body is used by her husband for his sexual gratification alone:

Ahmed had a tremendous appetite for sex. Our nights were spent with him exercising his prowess at sexual acrobatics and then dozing off to sleep. [...] After a fortnight since our wedding, I first began to enjoy menstruation. During this time, Ahmed would avoid sex and I was able to give my exhausted body a moment of rest. (Mahomed 1993, 161)

Here, Ayesha makes it clear that her husband puts his sexual needs first, never considering hers. Whether she wants to or not, or whether she feels like it or not, her husband determines what her body is used for and how he uses it is determined by him alone. This can certainly be regarded as rape, although I do not believe that Ayesha views it that way. I believe that just as cultural dictates rendered her husband's property when they were wed, similarly, her body became his commodity. To Ahmed, Ayesha was never viewed as an individual with her own needs and wants, rather she was there to fulfill the role and expectations of a dutiful wife. She was treated as a malleable object who had to yield to what her husband wanted, even if that meant being sexually exploited. In fact, *Purdah* (Mahomed 1993) was written the same year South Africa made it illegal for husbands to rape their wives, when "in 1993, legislators removed an existing legal provision that exempted husbands from rape charges [...] the new law also stated that 'a husband may be convicted of the rape of his wife'" (Look 2013). Up until that point, the concept of husbands being prosecuted for forcing themselves on their wives was foreign, and it is likely the reason why Ayesha believes it is her husband's right to exploit her body.

In *Till Death do us Part* (Singh 1993) the sexual abuse does amount to rape, as Logan forces himself on Sandy. The audience witnesses that neither Sandy's attempts to plead with Logan, nor her repeatedly saying no to him, have any impact. He does not acknowledge any



of it and forces her into having sex with him. The stage direction to go to a blackout is powerful, especially since when the lights come back up, Sandy is curled up alone on the stage. We are clearly meant to infer Logan has raped her, and that it is not the first time.

Of all the husbands, the only husband to show remorse at his actions, albeit temporarily, is Logan in *Till Death do us Part* (Singh 1993). When he beats Sandy for the first time, he is very apologetic about it thereafter. And she, naively, believes the sincerity of what he's saying. Neither Ahmed (Mahomed 1993) nor Deva (Moodley 2002) attempt to apologise for their behaviour with their wives, even insincerely. They believe that they do no wrong and it is their birthright and right by marriage to use and abuse their wives as they see fit, without reproach from anyone. I believe that for Moodley and Mahomed, this highlights the degree of patriarchy that operates in the domestic environment. Neither Deva nor Ahmed view their wives as anything more than mediums through which they can have their needs met. In contrast, I'd like to believe that Logan's attempt at apologising to Sandy stems from the same place as his broken vulnerability. Within him there is a capacity to recognise right and wrong, but it is only a fleeting recognition. He associates apologising with letting his guard down and being vulnerable; when Sandy challenges him about his actions, he gets defensive again and all sense of rationality is lost. It shows that Logan is not a complete monster; he has the capacity to change, but it would take a long time to fix what is broken within him. The different attitudes by the husbands towards their wives are interesting when one considers that of the three marriages, only Logan's is a love-marriage. Logan chose to marry Sandy because he regarded her as an independent individual, a companion with whom he could share his life. Deva and Ahmed did not feel the same way about their wives when getting married because their marriages were arranged. They never had the opportunity to view their wives as independent individuals and equal partners because their community made marriage a cultural norm that they were obliged to fulfill. Each of them simply fulfilled their role in the social construct of marriage according to the cultural dictates with which they had been raised.

## THE FAÇADE

One of the most interesting aspects that exists in all the texts and is evident in each of the main characters is the need to uphold the façade (for outsiders) that all is well with them. Each of the characters wears a mask for the benefit of their community or peers. As discussed in Chapter One, Indian males attempted to portray their social standing and upward mobility by appearing as though they espoused the norms of the white community, while Indian women complied with the expectations of their community. It was regarded as imperative for the honour of the man of the house that his woman was always subservient him, never questioning or challenging his authority, least of all in front of outsiders. Breaching that expectation defiled the sanctity of a marriage, the home and the secrets held therein.

Similarly, despite the horrors the wives endure in each of the plays, to others, they seem happy and well. Radha never lets the truth of her husband be discovered by even their children, let alone his friends. She takes the abuse silently. Sandy confides in David, but only to a degree. He suspects what is happening in Sandy and Logan's home, but instead of confronting Logan or even asking for help from authorities, he drowns out her pleas with his music and turns a blind eye. Sandy never says to him that she needs help or that she is being sexually abused. She keeps those things to herself. Ayesha too only confides in her mother-in-law: that it backfires is a sad consequence, but beyond that she makes no attempt to reach out for help to stop what is being done to her and what she has to endure. Similarly, all the husbands wear a mask of upstanding respectability for their peers and the community. They all keep their faces of abuse hidden from public view and reveal them only to their wives in the private, secure domain of their homes. This, for me, shows the unspoken but powerful influence the community at large plays in a home. The potential shame and judgement that would be imposed upon individuals keeps them silent about the goings-on in their home, regardless of how toxic those situations are. We catch a glimpse of this judgement in *Purdah* (Mahomed 1993), when Ayesha is shunned from her community and is handed sole blame of the murder she committed. Not a single individual tries to understand what went wrong and how many people were complicit in the desperation she felt that murder became the only avenue that she believed was an option for her.

The Indian South African community has kept abused women trapped in the false belief that the patriarchal structure of a traditional family cannot be challenged. Until abuse victims perceive the community as a safe space, wherein they are empowered to seek protection and get help, they will remain silent. It is interesting to point out that despite the varying age differences between the three protagonists, the mindset of the needs of woman being subverted to that of the man continues to be perpetuated among all three generations. The men perpetuate these beliefs through engrained patriarchal systems. The women are so disempowered in their own homes that they cannot challenge the authority of their husbands, and thus their silent tolerance perpetuates the patriarchy and their husbands' abusive natures, none of the wives consider divorce as an option. The biggest culprit for me, is society, represented by Ayesha's parents and her mother-in-law in *Purdah* (Mahomed 1993), by David and Sandy's work colleagues in *Till Death do us Part* (Singh 1993) , and by Michael and the individuals Radha interacts with on a daily basis to fulfill her duties in *A Cookie in the Kitchen* (Moodley 2002). Their silence is deafening, and it allows perpetrators to continue their abuse as their communities have taught them that they are beyond reproach.

These three texts put the experiences of victimised women on the public arena of the stage, an action that is historically foreign to Indian South African theatre. In doing so, they disturb the engrained power structure in the Indian South African community. While all three plays have the ability to ask audiences uncomfortable questions, the texts, written over a period with nearly a decade between them, point to the persistent glaring problem of domestic abuse. Taking into account the recent official statistics related to domestic abuse and GBV, it is evident that these issues continue to be a scourge in society, and I believe it is only through confronting and challenging them that the status-quo can begin to shift. Open and honest discussions in communities can be stimulated using the medium of theatre which has the potential to question patriarchal power dynamics so that they can begin to be dismantled.

**NOMCEBO MAGUDULELA:<sup>33</sup>**

## **CONCLUSION - SHATTERING THE SILENCE**

Growing up within the Indian South African community has exposed me to many of the internal tensions that are evident as a result of several factors such as caste, language and religion. However, when it comes to matters such as domestic abuse, the community remains shockingly silent – it seems to me that there is little to no support offered for women who face abuse at the hands of their husbands, in the very homes that are meant to be their sanctuary. In that regard, the community largely turns a blind eye thus allowing the abuse to continue.

In my dissertation, I have analysed three plays written by Indian South African playwrights. I have interrogated their theatrical depictions of domestic abuse to make inferences about how domestic abuse is experienced in the Indian South African community. I have focussed primarily on how systems of patriarchy operate in each of the plays. Secondly, I have analysed whether or not the power structures which enable domestic abuse to continue in a home, are challenged by any of the abused victims. These questions have allowed me to draw conclusions about how engrained systems of patriarchy operate in the community and how theatre can be used as medium through which victims' silence may be challenged.

It is evident that the Indian South African community is a diasporic community, with links to India while still remaining rooted in South Africa – Indian South Africans must constantly negotiate this duality as they struggle with the complexities of their lived experiences. Nostalgic reimaginings of the Motherland have influenced the community to continue cultural and traditional practices as a way of holding on to what was left behind in India during the period of indenture. However, as generations have passed and the community has become firmly rooted in South African soil, exposure to western culture and behaviour has influenced the claiming of those traditional practices in the public sphere, which has

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<sup>33</sup> Nomcebo Magudulela was allegedly stabbed to death by her boyfriend in Stanger, Kwazulu-Natal in 2020 (Kubheka 2021).

resulted in these cultural and traditional expressions being predominantly confined within the community.

The influence of the West upon such cultural expressions and their (lack of ) acknowledgement in the public domain stems from South Africa's history of colonialism and thereafter, apartheid. In both these instances, where being white-skinned equated to authority and power, some members of the Indian South African community strove to be accepted within these circles. This desire for recognition, equality and assimilation within 'white' South Africa caused a fracturing of sorts within the Indian community. While some strove to be recognised as equal to whites, others closed ranks, withdrawing into the community where language and culture could be preserved and celebrated. One consequence was that women - traditionally seen as the guardians of culture and heritage within the community – were increasingly ensconced within, and constrained by, the boundaries of those traditions. This has had several effects on how Indian South African diasporic identity has been negotiated both in the public sphere and private domain. While men were determined to be recognised as 'successful', they relegated their wives to ensuring that religious and cultural practices were maintained within the community. There was a double-life being led by such men; they created the façade of assimilation with western standards for the benefit of those from whom they sought recognition, while within the private domain of their homes, they tasked their wives with the responsibility of being the moral and cultural gatekeepers of traditional and linguistic practices. Indian South African women took up this cause admirably, while simultaneously perpetuating entrenched patriarchal structures evident in some of those traditions. Husbands were to be revered as Prince Ram was, and a wife's duty was to be as dutiful and faithful as Goddess Sita. Indian wives understood that no matter what their husbands put them through it was their duty to be loyal, faithful and serve him. In this way, women too became participants in perpetuating the cycle of patriarchy and attitude of superiority in their relationships with the men in their lives, regardless of whether those men were their fathers, husbands or sons.

As has been raised in my research, there are homes where violence is very prevalent. While men may be the biggest contributors to the violence being experienced, I believe that the failure to challenge patriarchal systems by women has enabled the cycle of domestic abuse

to be perpetuated. Their deafening silence on the matter enforces the mindset of inferiority and subservience to men, attitudes which do not serve the interests of women. Patriarchal structures have disempowered Indian South African women to the degree that they believe they have little to no choice in the decisions made for them and the expectations the community has of them. These women believe it is their duty to fulfil the expectations of the traditional role that has been assigned to them and questioning that would amount to challenging the traditional systems. Thus, it is in the interests of men in the Indian South African community to keep women within the confines of these belief structures as the reins of power in a relationship are, by default, held by the man.

It is precisely this notion of silence, and its role in perpetuating the cycle of abuse within the Indian South African community, which interested me and which I wanted to challenge in my dissertation. I analysed three South African plays to determine whether the established social, cultural and gendered power structures in the community were reflected in dramatisations of the experience of domestic abuse. In recognising how cultural patterns and power structures evident in the community overlapped with how they were presented on stage, I could make inferences about how domestic abuse operates in the private domain. This allowed me to see the potential for theatre, as a medium in the public arena, to generate insights about a subject that is generally confined to the private space of the home. By exposing the nature of domestic abuse on stage, the plays encourage audiences to challenge the entrenched structures of patriarchy which allow the violence to continue unabated. This references Brecht's notion of making theatre politically in that the playwrights are shifting their power from the performers to the audience. Audience members are made aware that in recognising their personal power, they have the capacity to break these cycles of abuse.

My research questions in analysing these plays were firstly, to determine whether patriarchal attitudes are evident within the dynamics of each couple and how this impacts the depictions of domestic abuse? In each of the plays, it is clear that in the dynamics of their respective marriages, it is the husband who wields the power. In all of the plays, the women accept the role of dutiful wives and fulfil the expectations of their husbands according to his needs and desires, whether that is through meeting his basic dietary needs

as Radha does in *A Cookie in the Kitchen* (2002), or fulfilling his sexual needs, as Ayesha does in *Purdah* (1993), or even giving up her job to allay her husband's insecurities, which Sandy does in *Till Death do us Part* (1993). Each of the wives believe it is their duty to obey their husbands, even if it compromises their wellbeing. These actions echo the patriarchal attitude which exists in the Indian South African community. I have established that in their interactions with their wives, all three husbands manifest notions of patriarchy. Their attitudes of superiority are not determined by the duration of their respective marriages. While Ayesha and Ahmed have only been married for a short period, Radha and Deva have been married many years, but the patriarchal mindset exhibited by both men is similar, which infers that it is a belief system they hold prior to being wed. All three husbands believe they are entitled to behave and treat their wives the way they do, regardless of the pain and trauma their wives endure at their hands. When the abuse unfolds, these women have been conditioned to believe that there is little scope for them to escape their situations.

The second question was to establish how the victims, in each of the plays, respond to the abuse? While the husbands exhibit similarities in how they ill-treat their wives, the women evidence different responses to their abuse. Ayesha responds by going to extreme lengths to challenge the system that keeps her battered and confined. Sandy understands the toxicity of her marriage and is so desperate for a way out that she resorts to buying a gun. Radha chooses to stay in her abusive marriage, she never challenges her husband's dominance and instead fulfils what is expected of her. Her lack of rebellion stems from her belief that there is no alternative and challenging the system is not an option for her, thus she is complicit in perpetuating the cycle of abuse. While the other two wives try to liberate themselves from the abusive bonds that keep them shackled, they too become complicit in perpetuating violence. Sandy's decision to buy a gun indicates the potential destruction she is prepared to unleash to save herself from being abused. While Ayesha resorts to not only aborting her child, but murdering her husband as well. It is ironic that the liberation of both these women from violence is through violence and it is a tragic commentary of how destructive abuse is. These women are so shattered from within, that what their husbands have conditioned them to accept becomes the very medium through which they believe they can escape. Yet their freedom will never be fully realised as Ayesha faces conviction,

and Sandy will either kill herself and be liberated through death, or kill Logan, in which case she too faces imprisonment.

Finally, do theatrical representations of domestic abuse facilitate engagements around the issue which may otherwise not be addressed in the private domain? Through these dramatisations, what interpretative assessments can be made about how the issue unfolds in the Indian South African community, in order to challenge it and confront engrained structures like patriarchy which enable domestic abuse to be perpetuated. I believe I have illustrated that Indian South African theatre is a vibrant space wherein the dramatisations of domestic abuse enable audiences to confront a subject that is usually confined to the private domain, thus shattering the silence around the issue. By witnessing the acts of violence on stage, audiences are forced to confront its very real, painful and tragic effects upon its victims. In recognising that these theatrical performances are reflections of reality, audience members are triggered to question the social structures that allow domestic abuse to continue. Questioning these power dynamics is the first step in challenging in reality, what has unfolded on stage. Thus the medium of theatre becomes a vehicle through which engrained social structures like patriarchy can begin to be dismantled.

Theatre has had a long history with the Indian community in South Africa. It was first used as a means to create and strengthen communal ties between the indentured labourers, later it transformed its purpose under the apartheid government and became a medium to fight the system of oppression. Theatre in the Indian South African community has adapted to suit the needs and demands of its audiences. However, it has also been driven by male agendas as it is considered a public space, a domain for men, while Indian women have been relegated to the private spaces of their homes. I believe that the three plays I researched illustrate that theatre is a non-discriminatory medium, not limited to nor bound by the belief systems of a single community. These plays have illustrated that there is scope for women's stories and experiences to be told in the Indian South African community, the public platform of theatre allows them to claim their voices and articulate their issues.

Based on my interactions with the playwrights, and the responses generated to their play performances, I believe that the theatre space has the capacity to challenge issues that are



not addressed in the community. Mahomed's *Purdah* (1993) generated a fair amount of controversy. The conversations about *Purdah*'s content would not have taken place ordinarily; the play was the catalyst which stimulated conversation and debate. Mahomed had feedback sessions after every performance where women engaged with what they had seen, he also had women request private performances in the comfort of their homes. This, in itself, shows that theatre has the capacity to create awareness. Singh received a request from a group to perform *Till Death do us Part* (1993) in Namibia. This illustrates that the messages explored in the play resonated with individuals so strongly that they felt the need for others to witness those themes. Had this offer been taken up, the potential reach and impact of the play could have been even greater. The responses to these plays and their performances speak volumes about the power theatre has to confront and challenge what is otherwise taken for granted and accepted unquestioningly.

All three plays were written to turn the spotlight on the rarely acknowledged issue of domestic abuse in the community. The playwrights used theatre as a medium to challenge the existing status-quo of silence in the community and to force audiences to question the gendered power dynamics around domestic abuse. Their motivations for writing these plays echo the objectives of Brecht's Epic Theatre, where theatre is more than a passive experience, it is active and transformative in nature. All three plays employ aspects of Brecht's *verfremdungseffekt* or distancing techniques. By depicting Deva's obsession with Manchester United, Moodley uses comedy as a way of drawing attention to how serious the manifestations of that obsession are; Mahomed employs the use of minimal props in the staging of his play, while Singh's play uses a non-linear narrative. All of these are Brechtian devices. All three playwrights have also used monologues as a way of conveying information to the audience. For Brecht, this breaking of the fourth wall to address the audience directly, highlights that the theatre experience is not an impenetrable box, it is an artificial construction, and if it is artificial, it is malleable. It can be changed, reconstructed and reconfigured to reflect, in this instance, changing attitudes around engrained patriarchal structures. However, for that attitude to be reflected, change must be initiated by audience members who themselves reflect society.

My research is limited in that I have not attempted to measure the impact these plays have had in the Indian South African community. By impact, I refer to determining whether someone walked away from an abusive situation, or whether honest conversations happened between husbands and wives about their expectations from each other thereafter. I did not attempt to quantify or measure any of these aspects. My dissertation sought to understand how the dramatisation of domestic abuse in these three plays confronts and challenges a taboo issue in a community. Through the depictions of engrained power imbalances on stage, audiences can begin to question the very structures that keep social ills like domestic abuse in operation. I believe that it is possible to use the medium of theatre to challenge the silences around sensitive issues like domestic abuse within the Indian South African community. In confronting the silences, questions can begin to be asked about patriarchal structures in the hopes that questioning will lead to the unravelling of these entrenched power systems.

Based on my discussions with the playwrights, the theme of patriarchy emerged the loudest and strongest. However, both Moodley and Singh pointed out that abuse is not limited to female victims alone. There are many men that fall victim to abusive situations; however, due to the dominance of patriarchy, women face the highest instances of abusive circumstances. It was most interesting for me that all the playwrights were men who wrote powerful stories about male dominance in a domestic environment and did not sugar coat how ugly the abuse can get. They were all motivated by real-life scenarios and took inspiration from the narratives they had heard from women in uncomfortably similar situations.

Based on my research it is clear the issue of domestic abuse raised in each of the plays finds resonance in real life. While the subject may not often be spoken about, the medium of theatre is a way through which conversations about domestic abuse may take place. Through each of the plays I analysed, audiences are forced to ask uncomfortable questions about the power dynamics at play between men and women, husbands and wives. The three plays challenge communal notions of patriarchy by highlighting how patriarchal attitudes reinforce the silence around domestic abuse. The wives in each of the plays respond to the abuse differently, while some challenge their husbands, others accept

unquestioningly. However, all the wives feel isolated and alone in dealing with their pain and trauma – which may be a contributing factor for the deafening silence around the issue. There is little to no support for the women who object to the violence and who choose to challenge the patriarchal status-quo that has been engrained in the community. All three playwrights have reflected this harsh criticism of the community the wives represent.

By tracing the history of the Indian community in South Africa, from the period of indenture, I have illustrated that Indian South African women have been denied agency in their own lives. They have been subjected to male dominance not only by the political structures of the country, but by the engrained gender roles in the community, which privileges men over women. While it has empowered men to forge ahead socially and economically, the community has kept women bound in cultural and traditional expectations. Three primary aspects related to this has been established - firstly, a woman's honour is intrinsically linked with her chastity; secondly, she has traditionally been groomed to believe that her position in her home is subservient to that of a man, regardless of whether that is her father, brother or husband; thirdly, her culturally defined role is limited to the private domain. To that end, the public space of theatre in the community has historically excluded the voices and participation of Indian South African women. In writing these plays, these playwrights have turned the spotlight on how domestic abuse is experienced by three different women. As all three plays illustrate, domestic abuse rears its head within the Indian South African community and its perpetuation has been at least partially enabled by the very women who are its victims. Through entrenched social structures, the community has, for generations, allowed patriarchy to continue unheeded. Through the acceptance of these imbalanced power dynamics, in instances where domestic abuse take place, women are expected to tolerate the violence in silence, so as to not challenge traditionally defined gender roles. The community feigning ignorance about the matter makes them equally complicit in these crimes. The statistics related to the prevalence of domestic abuse within the country, point to urgency with which the subject needs to be addressed.

Thus, I have shown how the medium of theatre offers a public platform in which social issues like domestic abuse may be raised. The plays offer a male lens through which to view constructions of the experience of domestic abuse in the private domain. Through these

depictions, the nature of how domestic abuse operates within the home environment and society's attitude towards it, is revealed. These depictions thus shatter the silences around the subject and empower audiences to ask difficult questions around engrained social structures like patriarchy, which have enabled the continuation of domestic abuse for generations.

It would be idealistic to believe that one play, or even all three plays, would bring about a dramatic change in society, where overnight domestic abuse stops in its tracks and there are no more victims to succumb to it, no more names of victims with which to label chapters in a dissertation. Both *Purdah* and *Till Death do us Part* were written in 1993, more than two decades later, their subject matter of domestic abuse is still as relevant today as it was then. Based on official statistics it is evident that domestic abuse and violence against women at the hands of their loved ones continues unceasingly. I know that awareness about women's rights continues to grow and women are empowered more today than ever before to speak out against abuse. However, I also believe that as long as patriarchy remains in place in the Indian South African community, where the needs and desires of men are elevated at the expense of women, whether it be their mother, their sister or their wives, domestic abuse will continue to be perpetuated. *Purdah* (1993), *Till Death do us Part* (1993) and *A Cookie in the Kitchen* (2002) are examples of plays where such practices can be questioned, and through engagement, challenging of the accepted status-quo can begin. These plays attempt to do just that; while they may be just puddles in the pool of domestic abuse, their ripples may be felt beyond their performances through questioning by audiences. I believe (and hope) that change can (and must) be brought about as an urgent matter of justice, equality and necessity.

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## **APPENDIX A: PLAYWRIGHTS' INTERVIEW QUESTIONS:**

1. What is your understanding or interpretation of the term Indian South African?
2. Do you believe that being part of the Indian Diaspora in South Africa contributes to Indian South African's longing/desire to hold on to their roots/traditions from 'The Motherland'?
3. Are the characters in your text written to be reflections of people in their community i.e. the Indian South African Diaspora?  
If yes, to what degree?  
If no, who do the characters in your text represent/ reflect?
4. From your experience, what would you say are the taboo issues which exist within the Indian South African community, but are never discussed?
5. What was the motivation for incorporating themes of domestic abuse in your text?
6. Why does the issue of domestic abuse appear so pivotally in your text?
7. What is your reason for depicting the female character/s in your text as the victim, suffering at the hands of a male loved-one?
8. Why did you choose to focus on this form of abuse specifically?
9. Why have you chosen the medium of theatre to be appropriate for you to confront and raise a subject such as domestic abuse?
10. Do you believe that theatre has the ability to bring about change in the audience and society at large?

## **APPENDIX B:**

### **A COOKIE IN THE KITCHEN**

**By**

**Vivian Moodley**

SET: Kitchen. Stove, refrigerator, kitchen table, Boxes etc.

Scene: Indian women of thirty, Pot of Dhall boiling on a four plate stove. Another pot ready for the preparation of mutton curry. Refrigerator and other kitchen furniture. As lights fade up she is talking to Michael through half doorway in the Middle of the set.

COOKIE: (LAUGHING) You lie...Go on...and what did you say...? Voetsak...you know you Michael...So where you going now... to see her?...Football what football...You lying ...you going to drink and then go to see her...then why you don't watch here...Deva and his friends are settling down to watch Manchester...oh Bafana are playing...No they are going to watch Manchester...I don't think they know Bafana play for South Africa...they support Manchester...and you?...shut up I know you are a South African...they to...sometimes...I'm making Roti i'll keep some for you...what time you going to come back...but you'll be shining...all right I'll see you later...

(TO THE AUDIENCE) Michael...got new girlfriend...one of the many...he's a player that one...he's part of this family...his father Bongani used to work for my father...hawking business...they stayed in our backyard in Northdene...Michael took over after his father died...my fathers assistant...always irritated my father with his questions...

"Uncle why you walk with a limp...?"

"Umfaan shut up and load the potatoes"

" You was in the war uncle?"

"Umfaan shut up and load the potatoes"

Michael with an indian accent...But him and I we used to play together...he's like my second brother. Used to protect me...the boys in the district couldn't come near me...he'll go for them...The boys when he was not around will ask me

"Hey Cookie where's your Kaapri Unna?..."

Now he still stays with us in the new outbuilding...he works for parks and gardens now...what lovely plants he brings for us...he still does our garden...we told him not to but he will insist...shame he wanted to pay rent and stay here...how can we charge him...he's like family...anyway we feel safe when he's around... This Doll is took so long...must buy oil dhall...and this stove...so slow

(SHOUTS TO OUT STAGE LEFT) When I come there you'll going to get it....You'll know how your father will shout...Didn't I say you'll must play quietly...One clout.. (TO THE AUDIENCE) Devils man...They finish me...I can't believe it you'll never say they are my children...well if you saw the



father... then you'll know. We were never that naughty...always taught to be well behaved...my parents would have killed us...they don't listen...my husband Deva he doesn't help...to busy to help...He's a sportsman you see...plays from the settee...hey he's an expert on soccer, cricket, boxing any sports.

BUSIES HERSELF WITH THE COOKING AND OTHER CHORES-WORKSHOP THIS PART

I'm making roti...goes nice with mutton curry...my one, Deva likes it...everybody tells me that I make the best Roti and even paratha...the secret is the butter ...must use pure butter...We just moved into this house...never finish packing yet....I must do everything myself here...(SARCASTICALLY) I have to...he's so busy...you know how it is with professionals man...anyway how our family taught us...the husband is the king of the house...but my one he's the king of everything. Yah I married a king (HAS A NAUGHTY LAUGH) you know when I was in school I used to like Daniel. He liked me too. He used to call me Petal. I never worked out why he called me that...petals are beautiful when they are allowed to bloom...and then they wither and die....maybe he knew something that I don't... Hey I thought one - day him and I will get married. I used to dream about it. He was so kind and helpful...and good looking. His family sent him to study medicine overseas. He was made to be a doctor that one. My one is in marketing...a real Mr knowledgeable. You know I don't tell people but they arranged him for me to get married to him. I wanted to study further. No they wouldn't let me...I don't blame them...after my sister went...

Hey I remember the first time they brought him for me...he must have drowned himself in Jade East after shave and he had a mouthful of Chicks. Hey what a turn on. But he could talk...

"Don't I know you from somewhere?"

"Who me? I don't think so"

He convinced Appa that he was the man for me...no Varsity styles and all for this girl.

"No you right uncle...my father was just like you...my sisters couldn't step out of the house...their place was in the kitchen...me I take after my father"

He knew everything there was to know about anything... except on our honeymoon...(LAUGHS) I don't know who was more nervous him or me... I suppose some things take a long time...shame I think his friends gave him too much to drink...You know my married cousins used to say to me Cookie on your wedding night my girl you'll see magic...stars...yah that night I saw stars...when I looked out of the window...anyway my parents were very happy...for them they saw it as security for their daughter...shame they went through real hard times...I am sure they meant well...

I told him to pack all the cutlery in one box....

GOES THROUGH ONE OF THE BOXES AND UNWRAPS NEWSPAPER PARCEL THAT HAS SPOONS ETC. LOOKS INTO THE BOX AND FINDS OLD FAMILY PHOTOS IN AN ENVELOPE.

Just look at this....all the old photos...I told him to put in the new album,,,,,my father collected these from his time...

CALLS OUT TO HER DAUGHTER

Kanthi put this on top of the wardrobe...(HANDS IT OVER ) Don't worry about what it is just put it on the wardrobe...no don't open ...you'll are going to tear...those are memories...

SITS DOWN AND UNWRAPS A NEWSPAPER PARCEL CONTAINING SPOONS. A PICTURE CATCHES HER ATTENTION

Who is this...Burt Reynolds...looks like Nuts Uncle....see that moustache and sideburns...(LAUGHS) my father was so jealous of Nuts Uncle hey...he thought that my mother had something to do with nuts uncle...because whenever he arrived my mother would rush off and make him a lovely cup of tea and he would take his time as he savoured the taste and he would describe his days journey which was interrupted by the slurp of his tea

"Apple's wife Gonum is so sick ma...she got stones"...Yah...Yah kidney" What other stones you get?

When my mother used to buy nuts from him he'll give her extra...sometimes he won't charge. He'll always say to amma...

"Nemine you take it Savy...my mothers name that...you take it Savy...

"No you mustn't say take it...uncle you doing business...I can't take just like that..."

"Don't call me uncle man...my name is Ganas...you can call me Gan"

So amma used to call him Gan. Everybody will call him nuts uncle. That made father very angry ...

"What you calling him Gan...next time he comes by this house I'll take his nuts and push it up his ...

"What's wrong with you gone mad or what...what you got against that poor man...he's only selling nuts...and such lovely nuts he got...

"Lovely nuts ..lovely nuts...I know what I like to do with his lovely nuts..."

Shame suddenly nuts uncle was no more...he just died...amma cried for many days...

CALLS OUT TO STAGE LEFT

'nother Castle...(GOES TO THE REFRIDGERATOR)...Boss is thirsty...(HANDS CAN OF BEER)...Thirsty work coaching Manchester United...You should see our old house...Manchester United museum...Everything in the house had Manchester United logo...pillow cases...towels...as if that was not enough...Manchester United"s greatest disciple...I don't know where he bought it...he came home with a Manchester United toilet seat...and fitted it...in the ensuite...doesn't match anything else in the bathroom...but it gives me a lot of pleasure...I ask you how many women

get a chance to sit on Beckhams face... and shit...I tell you our world has to stop when that Manchester United are playing...My one would make God wait until the match was over...  
GOES BACK TO THE BOX

You know nobody knows why amma took nuts uncle's death so badly...appa was was so angry...he told her to go and stay with her mother...aya...only years later when amma got very sick she told us the story...Nuts Uncle was really her illegitimate brother...and in those days it was taboo to have such relatives...so it was a big family secret...so much so that she didn't even tell appa...finally appa was in peace comfortable that amma was not unfaithful to him...appa was very strict... one step out of line...we used to get it...He knew how to bring up a girl child...my brother used to get away...he mustn't do any work around the house...he was the prince...one day my mother nearly get her teeth broken...when she told my brother it was raining and he must help me fetch the clothes from the line...my father went ballistic...

"You think he's a sissy?...that's the girls job...what you trying to turn him into a skirt...you will get such a hiding"

Yah my father knew who was the king and who was going to take over when he retires.

GOES TO THE WING

Sev and nuts?...yah there's another two packets left...okay...

OPENS A PACKET AND EMPTIES IT INTO A BOWL AND TAKES IT TO THE WINGS SPEAKING ALL THE WHILE.

Bites...must have bites with beer...something spicy...finished with chips...moving to the hot stuff...he'll stop the beer just now...when the game starts...the bladder will disturb them...bring on the brandy and coke...I must run with the ice...and that's when the order will come for the braised giblets...extra hot...Kogie my sister was the expert ...making giblets...can't beat her...my granny taught her...she overtook my granny...even thatha...used to say..."Panjalay...let my baby make it for me...I know you taught her...but she made it perfect...she got lucky hands..." I think that's what killed him...no... no... not the giblets...he died of a broken heart...after Kogie passed away...I miss her...my Ucca...I heard her on the telephone ...umma and appa went to town...she phoned...

ENACTS KOGIES STORY

*ALLO! ALLO! WHO THAT? RADHA? YOU THAT? HEY WHAT YOU TALKING LIKE A WHITE HEY? HOW YOU? WHAT? NO MAN I WENT TOWN MAN! AMMA SENT ME TO PAY COUNTS! YAH TOWN TAKES WHOLE DAY MAN! HEY RADHA YOU ALONE? YOU CAN TALK? YAH YOU KNOW WHY I TOOK SO LONG? I WAS WAITING BY THE BUS STOP RIGHT? HEY THE BUS WAS TAKING SO LONG MAN! THEN YOU KNOW WHO CAME AND STOPPED WITH HIS CAR! THAT STEVEN! YOU DON'T KNOW STEVEN? YAH THE ONE WITH THE RAYBINS! YAH THE SAME ONE! YOU ALWAYS SAY HE'S HANDSOME! SAME ONE*

*HE SAID THE BUS WAS BROKEN BY THE RANK! THEN HE SAID HE'S GOING TOWN HE'LL GIVE ME A LIFT! OF COURSE I WENT WHAT I MUST DO NO BUS! YAH WE WAS TALKING! THEN HE SAID THAT IF I TOOK THE BUS IT WILL TAKE ME ONE HOUR TO GET TO TOWN SO WE SAVED THAT TIME WITH THE CAR SO WE CAN GO SOMEWHERE! HE WENT ISIPINGO BEACH! YAH WE WAS TALKING! ANYBODY CAN HEAR? NO? HE SAID HE LIKE ME! NOTHING WE NEVER DO NOTHING MAN WHAT YOU? OKAY WE WAS ROMANCING! HEY YOU KNOW HE'S SO BAD HEY HE WAS PUTTING HIS HAND BY MY BREAST EVERYTHING! NOT TO SAY NO BUT I LIKE HIM TOO*

And so began the greatest moment in a woman's life, love! My Acca Kogie was hopelessly in love!

Steven was the local Rayban Charlie, good looking, smooth talking won't work who preyed on innocent maidens like my sister Kogie! He was seeing a quite a few of the girls in the district. One can only imagine the conversations between his dagga rooking friends and himself!

*HEY WHAT KIND STEVEN I SEE YOU GOT A NEW KIMBA THERE!  
YAH YOU JAMMING BY THAT KOGIE!*

*YAH ME BRA YOU KNOW HOW IT'S VIAING! THAT KOGIE IS DIZZY FOR ME LIGHTY! HOWS IT MAKE A SKYF THERE!*

Yes Kogie was dizzy with love everything was Steven! She even substituted the names Steven into every song she sang!

SINGS

Until one day she went to Steven with a problem

*S I WANT TO TELL YOU SOMETHING!  
WHAT?  
YOU MUSTN'T SHOUT RIGHT?  
WHAT?  
TWO MONTHS NOW I NEVER GET IT!  
DON'T TALK SHIT MAN ONLY LAST WEEK WE DID IT!  
NOT THAT MAN...  
THEN WHAT?  
PERIOD MAN PERIOD!  
HEY WHAT YOU SAYING YOU? YOU TRYING TO TRAP ME YOU?  
EH? WHAT YOU SAYING STEVEN? I LOVE YOU STEVEN! I NEVER GET IT WHAT I MUST DO?  
I DON'T CARE YOU MUST HAVE A ABORTION!  
ABORTION STEVEN ABORTION!  
YES ABORTION!*

He took her to some alley way in town. What is that they pump into you? Blue soap? I was too numb to cry even at her funeral! I miss my Acca

SHOUTS TO THE OPPOSITE WING

Now what? Why are you'll carrying on like this today?...what you pulled her hair for? You children know when Man United are playing there must be no noise from you children...it might cause them to lose...the game...Please play nicely...food will be ready just now...

TO THE AUDIENCE

MAN United...is a big influence...in this house...If they lose...even the food I cook tastes like shit...

"Call this food...even the dog won't eat this shit"

You know his friend Arvin and him don't even talk...Arvin is a Liverpool supporter...ever since they beat Man United...they don't talk. Before that they were closer than two gay guys...you can't say anything bad about Arvin. That Arvin was a snake...he used to make my one drunk and then try his tricks with me

" Why don't you and I create some excitement and get together sometimes...well he's drunk and asleep...what you say...?"

"I say if you don't leave my house I'll pour this boiling oil on you!!!"

And when I told my one he had the cheek to say it was my fault

"Arvin is my best friend...he will never do something like that...you must have tempted him"

But now they don't talk...because my one's heart is broken...Arvin's team beat Man United.

PICKS UP SOMETHING THAT REMINDS HER OF HER YOUNGER BROTHER.

Hmn...Joey...he was born three years after me...my fathers pride and joy...my job look after Joey...and that hair...grows so fast...every month I must go and sit in the barbershop with him...for hours...I didn't mind...I heard the best stories there...Mr Sundhir, the barber...he had the most untidy hair and coupled with his Gandhi glasses he looked like something from a comic book...but he would advise patrons on what cut would suit them.

"You see because you have a long nose this cut would suit you...you take little off the top and more from the sides and that will lengthen your face this way! And you must see how nice you look...it will enhance your nose heh what you say Daya...I'm not right?..."

Now Daya was a permanent feature at the barber shop. His job was to agree with everything old man Sundhir had to say. Only the agreement took a long time to come because he had a stutter...in fact he would never quite complete what he wanted to say...because Sundhir would move on and answer his own question.

" You see that's what I'm saying" While Daya would have that perplexed look on his face as to say "but I never say anything yet". It was at Sundhir barber shop that I first heard the story of Rasool's passing.

#### RELATES RASOOL'S STORY

Rasool owned a tailor shop but he was a part time fortune teller! His glasses used to sit on his hawk like nose! He was a con artist of note! Very observant was he! One of his victims was Kamala! She was conducting an extramarital affair with Taxi Joe! She worked at a clothing factory and before going into work she would be seen in Taxi Joe's taxi. Now This carryings on didn't not pass Rasool. One day Kamala entered his shop!

*UNCLE YOU CAN FIX WATCH?*

*WHAT THE SIGN SAYS OUTSIDE? RASSOOLS TAILOR SHOP AND WATCH REPAIRS! LET ME SEE WHATS WRONG WITH THE WATCH?*

*THE STRAP IS BROKEN*

*NO MA WHAT'S YOUR NAME? KAMALA....YOU SEE KAMALA...THE STRAP NEVER BREAK ON ITS OWN? SOMEONE BROKE IT? NOT RIGHT? YOU WAS FIGHTING?*

*EH NO! MY HUSBAND PULLED IT!*

*RIGHT MUST ALWAYS TELL THE TRUTH! COME BACK TOMORROW I'LL HAVE IT READ FOR YOU! ALSO EH WHAT YOUR NAME? KAMALA RIGHT KAMALA ME I TELL FORTUNE....I'M FROM SAUDI ARABIA!*

*OH TRUE UNCLE YOU TELL FORTUNE?*

*YAH I'M FROM SAUDIA ARABIA! I DON'T WANT TO ADVERTISE YOU KNOW HOME AFFAIRS WILL SEND ME BACK TO SAUDI ARABIA! I ONLY TELL FOR SPECIAL PEOPLE!*

*YOU'LL SEE FOR ME UNCLE HOW MUCH YOU'LL CHARGE?*

*WHAT YOU NAME IS EH? KAMAL! DO I LOOK LIKE I'M GREEDY FOR MONEY ? YOU GOT A PROBLEM I MUST HELP YOU THEN AFTER THAT WE CAN TALK ABOUT MONEY!*

Kamala was hooked! She made an arrangement to come back on payday Friday. In the meantime he made all the enquiries on her from her work colleagues and so on! And when she arrived he was fully armed.

*KAMALA KAMALA! MY DEAR! OUT OF ALL MY CUSTOMERS YOU ARE SUFFERING SO MUCH! I HAVE TO HELP YOU!*

*YES UNCLE RIGHT THAT!*

*YOUR HUSBAND IS A DRINKER AND HE FIGHTS WITH YOU LOT!*

*TRUE THT UNCLE HOW YOU KNOW?*

*KAMALA KAMALA I'M A FORTUNE TELLER..I'M FROM? WHERE? THAT'S RIGHT SAUDI ARABIA! I KNOW ALL THIS GOOD GIVES POWER!*

*OH SO GOOD YOU ARE!*

*NOW I SEE ANOTHER MAN IN YOUR LIFE!*

*NO UNCLE I DON'T HAVE ANOTHER MAN!*

*KAMALA I CAN'T SEE FOR YOU IF YOU LIE! WHEN I SEE ANOTHER MAN THEN THERE IS ANOTHER MAN! YOU WANT I MUST GO AND SEE YOUR HUSBAND?*

*NO NO UNCLE I'LL PAY YOU ANYTHING DON'T TELL! MY HUSBAND DRINKS AND HE ONLY FIGHTS AND HE SLEEPS HE DON'T SLEEP WITH ME WHAT I MUST DO SO GOT THIS FRIEND HE GOT A TAXI!*

WITH KAMALA SECURELY HOOKED AND MAKING REGULARY PAYMENT TO HIM RASSOOL GOT GREEDY AND HE TRIED HIS LUCK WITH TAXI JOE!

ON A MONDAY MORNING HE WAS FOUND AT THE BACK OF HIS SHOP WITH HIS THROAT SLIT FROM EAR TO EAR! THE DRIVERS AT THE TAXI RANK SAID THEY NEVER HEARD OR SAW ANYTHING!

SHOUTS TO THE WINGS

"That's it you children are going to get the hiding of you lives...I'm fed up"

I'd rather give them their bath and a early supper because once the game is over and the result is not positive I don't know whose turn its going to be. Let me narrow the options.

GOES OFF

## **INTERVAL**

LIGHTS UP ON STAGE AS MUSIC FADES

COOKIE: (OFF STAGE) No that was the last story...I am not reading another one...goodnight...I love you too...(ENTERS)...I hope they sleep...I hate doing this to them on a Saturday night...they just want to have fun...The big one Kanthi used to be so good in school...three weeks ago they sent a letter...wanting to see us...I told this one lets go and see the teacher...

"For what...for what?...If she's not performing...there's only one way to sort it out...take the belt...what shit is this...? I must go to school and what they trying to do disgrace me. These children got it too soft here?"

I went on my own and spoke to the teacher...she said that this child was so good...and now she sits quietly and doesn't respond and even in the playground she sits alone and doesn't play with the other children. I got a shock when she asked if there was any trouble at home. I said no there's no trouble. What trouble they talking about.

CALLS OUT TO THE OPPOSITE WING

"Okay...How many?...

STARTS PUTTING GLASSES ON A TRAY

I wonder who came...why they want another glass

PLACES A BOTTLE OF BRANDY AND COKE ON THE TRAY. GOES TO THE FRIDGE TAKES OUT THE ICE AND FILLS A ICE BUCKET

Cannot forget the ice. Things get very hot in there...oh yes the lemon...must have lemon

SLICES A LEMON

I wonder how the first half of the game went...Things seem to be quite calm.

TAKES THE LOADED TRAY TO THE WINGS

No score in the first half. But the referee is an arsehole...he should have given Manchester a penalty...I believe he has his whistle in his backside. There is a newcomer to my house, my one introduced me.

"Cooks this is Dennis...he just started in our company on Monday"

COOKIE: I'm happy to meet you

"I'm pleased to meet you Cooks....Hey DEVA you didn't tell me you had such a lovely wife"

I don't think Dennis will be very welcome here in future. God please let Manchester be the winners. My one is very jealous no man must look at me...he gets very angry. But he wont ask the man...he'll blame me.

"Why you must act like a loose one....you want another man?"

"But...but Deva he greeted me...what you want me do turn my back and be rude? You told me I mustn't be rude to your friends"

"That's different...you just stay out of sight"

Yah stay out of sight. Then start calling



"Another Castle Cooks...some more bites Cooks...meet my friend Cooks"

Today he brought one Dennis and that thing couldn't shut his mouth and keep his admiration to himself.

STARTS UNPACKING THE BOXES.

Might as well get this unpacking finished. This house never seems complete. I ordered the new curtains for the bedrooms. I don't know how long that will take to get put up.

HEARS MICHAEL SINGING

Michael is back...you can hear him singing...(LAUGHS AND GOES TO THE DOOR) Hey very happy Michael...Bafana must have won...no they drew?...what...? that's why you half happy?...If this is half happy I wonder what you'll do if they win...You didn't see your new lady?...What happen she chased you away...Oh you didn't go. So what you going to do now...sleep?. Who Deva? Him and friends are watching the second half. No according to them the referee is playing for the other team...I kept you some food like I promised...here

HANDS HIM A PARCEL

ANSWERS TOWARD THE WING

I'm talking to Michael...What you want the other bottle? Okay...(TO THE AUDIENCE) Oh my its going to be a long night.

HANDS THE BOTTLE OVER

Shit...shit...shit...the other team scored and according to them it was clearly offside...and only fifteen minutes left. We need some divine intervention tonight.

CONTINUES UNPACKING BUT SHE ANXIOUSLY LOOKS TOWARD THE WING.

Come on Manchester do something...

SHE HEARS A NOISE AND JUMPS UP AND RUNS TO THE WING AND LISTENS COMES BACK DEJECTEDLY

That referee gave the other team a penalty...damn this is the last straw...hear the swearing...the ref's poor mother must be turning in a grave...right now she's better off dead. Please I hope they don't score the penalty.

GETS UP AND LISTENS AGAIN

Oh god no they scored it...no hope now...listen to the swearing...now they will drink away their sorrows and then his friends will do wheel spins as they leave...and then its Deva and I for dinner...I think...

SFX; LIGHTS FLICKER AS SHE RUNS BACK AND FORTH TO THE WINGS.

"Bites coming up"

"Ice yes"

"Lemon"

"More giblets you got it"

SHE LEANS ON THE TABLE EXHAUSTED. FADE AS SHE GOES TOWARD THE WING.

(OFF STAGE) Bye bye...no problem it was a pleasure...

SHE ENTERS WITH TRAY

Are you ready for supper now Deva...eh what love?...why you swearing...? Stop it please...must I dish and bring to the lounge? Okay...

SHE STARTS DISHING

I hope he eats and goes to bed...

SHE TAKES A PLATE OF FOOD TO THE WINGS

(OFF STAGE) There you are love...your favourite...But there's nothing different...its just the way you like it.

SUDDENLY A PLATE IS FLUNG FROM THE WINGS IT LANDS WITH A CLUTTER ON TO STAGE.  
COOKIE IS SHOVED ONTO STAGE.

"Oh no Deva don't do this. Why are you like this? Please I'm begging you

FADE OUT

Oh my God you hurting me. I love you Deva. Please think about the children...

SHE SOBS AS THE STAGE LIGHTS UP AND SHE IS GETTING UP OFF THE FLOOR.SHE WIPES THE BLOOD WITH A DISH CLOTH AS SHE SPEAKS TO HER CHILDREN

No you'll go to bed...no daddy is sleeping in the lounge...the blood...on I fell ...slipped on the floor...there was water...yes Manchester lost...now please go to bed...

SHE LOOKS TOWARD THE DOOR.

Yes Michael...no no problem...fighting ...no I think the tv was loud...me I'm fine Michael...don't worry...the game...Oh the game...its over...we lost...goodnight Michael

**BLACKOUT – END**

**Permission by Vivian Moodley to include his unpublished play in this dissertation:**

You have my permission to use my play A COOKIE IN THE KITCHEN as reference as per our discussion and your mail.

Vivian Moodley

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## APPENDIX C: ROBIN SINGH INTERVIEW

SP: What is your understanding or interpretation of the term Indian South African?

RS: Look if I have to answer the question for myself only, I would say I'm South African, but I have some of my roots in not even India but in the tradition of the Indian people. I think, I might be the exception on that one, but I think it's kind of a given that Indians do cling on to their background, their culture, and everything else. It's a self-preservation thing anyway.

SP: Do you believe that being part of the Indian diaspora in South Africa contributes to Indian South African's longing/ desire to hold on to their roots/ traditions from "The Motherland"? If so, in your opinion, how is this experienced and expressed?

RS: Alright, I always have a problem when people go on about the Motherland because I don't feel any great affinity. I mean, I've been to India, I've seen the people, yeah you know it's good to see a lot of Indians around for a change but I don't necessarily identify with them. I'm not a practising Hindu – that may make a difference, nobody in my family has been actually, they all kind-of follow a mixture of Western and Indian culture, practices and things as they go along. I would think that at any stage if there's a community that becomes sort-of isolated from where they might have originally come, there's always a desire to hold on to their roots. It gives them some sort of character and it's not common to Indians anywhere, it's the same thing if you come across people of Greek or Jewish; Italian backgrounds; they're very family orientated, they're very concerned about everybody else, they take care of one another by and large, and it's the same I would say with Indians who live in South Africa.

SP: Now, let's speak about your play. Are the characters in your text written to be reflections of people in their community, more specifically, the Indian South African Diaspora? If yes, to what degree? If no, who do the characters in your text represent or reflect?

RS: Okay. It's an interesting one because I was actually mulling over that today thinking how I arrived at the names of the characters and I think at that stage when I was doing the play, I didn't want it to be any specific race or culture, I was trying to avoid that. But what I couldn't avoid was getting actors of different backgrounds, different cultures, because I didn't want to necessarily introduce another source of conflict. So both of them look Indian but they don't have names that would suggest that they ...

SP: Are Indian?

RS: Indian or whatever. So in a way they're meant to represent any young couple in a relationship like that where abuse is prevalent. And that was also part of, well that was, that actually came from this Advice Desk for Abused Women because they wanted me to do the play and I sat and chatted with them for quite a bit and they spoke a lot about this, that it's not specific to any culture, class of people, you know there's always the thought yes, it's common amongst the working class people, they have a rougher life, and there is perhaps alcoholism involved, drugs, whatever it is. But even in the, in the more affluent classes, it's

quite prevalent, I mean, the abuser may not necessarily take a chopper and kill the person but there are other forms of abuse.

SP: So from your experience, would you say there are taboo issues that exist within the Indian South African community but are never discussed? If so, why do you think this is the case? Especially focused on the Indian community.

RS: Alright, you're saying taboo issues?

SP: Yeah, like abuse.

RS: There are certain, look go back to the old cultural thing, traditionally when a woman marries a man, she then is part of that relationship and generally her parents, this is practiced in the past, would send her back when she'd been abused or come to complain: "No that's your husband you've got to go back to your house". Even knowing that she may have arrived there with a blue eye or whatever it is, but it's like a, like a tradition that's evolved. I don't know about that today, whether that practice is as common. So, I don't think it's evolved into any kind of taboo or hasn't continued as a taboo. I think people are far more open about this now. Perhaps this new thinking about abuse of women and sex scandals and things have been going on has liberated a lot of people but on the same tone you've got to be very careful that every time something happens you don't cry, you don't shout wolf. But being a very conservative community, people would like to try and keep this to themselves and won't want to actually discuss this openly with people. I remember them talking about, this Advice Desk, abused women who came to them for help, from wealthy families and would always wear long-sleeved outfits and things, neck-stuff covering them here because when it was opened up, it was revealed, all the big bruises and things all over the place but they were not happy but they were accepting of the fact that, yes, this is part of this thing and I can't show this to anybody. I seem to remember, I think it was V.S. Nepaul; Husmista Viswas I think it was. Yeah, in his book, V.S. Nepaul's and Husmista Viswas, I think it's there, that all the sisters-in-law, sisters, the whole lot, always gathered together, they're cooking in the kitchen, they're cleaning but the new wives that have arrived into the family will show them when they've received their first beatings from their husbands. It was a kind of mark-of-honour and acceptance into the family.

SP: What was the motivation for incorporating themes of domestic abuse in your text?

RS: It actually was about domestic abuse first before it became a text. Because as I said, I was working with these folks from this Advice Desk and they asked if I could do something. By way of dramatisation, which they could take around to show people, communities and things like that. So people would understand that this is going on not just in their own closed lives but other people face this as well and hopefully that would prompt them to open up. So that's how it started up. I didn't set out saying you know: "it's terrible that there's abuse all over the place and let me write a play about it". It came about simply because I was associated with the Advice Desk.

SP: Okay, so then I think it makes question six a little bit redundant: why does the issue of domestic abuse appear so pivotally in your text?

RS: Yeah. That's right. It becomes the focus of the whole thing. Yeah. When we performed this at the Asoka Theatre at Durban-Westville, people came you know, husbands and wives; boyfriends and people like that. Not just women that were there and they were quite vocal about it, about the whole thing when it was over.

SP: What were some of the responses when it was performed?

RS: It's very difficult to recall that now but some people poo-poo'd the idea saying: you know, ahh no this doesn't happen. Other people who perhaps, know incidents like this in their own families or experience it for themselves. Obviously their reactions were far different. People did talk about it, yes. And in fact, we did the show at Grahamstown, at the festival. There was a group that came in from Namibia and they'd seen it and they were very impressed and they asked us if we could do the production with them in Namibia? Unfortunately they were a small group, they didn't have any funding or anything. And it was impossible for us to go there, but they were very taken up by this whole idea that, you know, this does exist, people are aware of it and we wanted to expose this sort of thing to our people as well.

SP: I have to ask, what is your reason, because of dealing with the women at the Advice Desk for the Abused, what is your reason for depicting a female character in your text as the victim, suffering at the hands of a male loved one? Obviously, working with those women had an influence then on the characters and is that particularly why you wrote a female suffering at the hands of a male abuser?

RS: Yeah, I would think you know, there was a predominance of women being the sufferers in these relationships although I discovered later in my discussions with these people that a lot of men are abused as well. You know when they're involved with very strong, domineering women and so these men also become abused in a way but the focus was, essentially about the abuse in a relationship where a woman was the victim because it was the most common thing at the time. And since it was under the auspices of the Advice Desk for Abused Women, you know I, it,

SP: Almost followed suit

RS: Obviously, yeah.

RS: I know that if I still had the passion to do this thing, I would write it without such extreme violence.

SP: Okay. Why? Why's that?

RS: Well, because at the point where we did this play, the violence sort of hits you in the face immediately and today we've become so used to violence around us all the time, that I think we kind of need for people to understand that this abuse can happen in very subtle ways. And I think it could actually make a better dramatic piece. Look, we living now in such a violent age, we see it all around us. It's nothing for somebody to come home and say ugh, my car was stolen. "Oh shame", yes hug hug whatever: insurance. Or somebody's been

killed: "Oh how dreadful". And yet if this happened for instance if you watched Sky News or something, somebody's killed and it becomes the focus of the news. We've become immune to the whole thing. And it's as easy as someone picking up a gun and shooting someone else and saying, "oh, there we go, bang, finished". I don't know what the, sort of, mental attitude is now. It's so easy to do.

SP: Why did you choose to focus on this form of abuse specifically? I know you said, you've raised the matter of it being so violent in extremities, but it is domestic abuse. Why domestic abuse?

RS: Because the domestic relationship is, is a very small and closed one. Just about anything can happen within it. And unless one of them talks about it outside, it generally sort of stays there, which is what this girl faces. She's kind of isolated in that flat, I think, they live in. She doesn't have anybody else and he won't allow her out of there. So. You talked about the, there was something else to that question you asked me, why did you focus on domestic violence?

SP: The domestic aspect? And the violence, we spoke about the violence being prevalent in it, why specifically domestic abuse? I mean there's, like you've mentioned, there's so many other forms of abuse, why domestic?

RS: Well, okay, the, you know somebody gets shot in a hijacking or something, the motivation for that actually happening is totally different. Whereas a domestic one, I think gives us the opportunity to see the characters a bit more clearly. Cos he's extremely violent, we know that, but he has moments of tenderness. You know, he's schizophrenic. And she doesn't know how to deal with him; she's got to tread carefully. They would probably have had a honeymoon period in their marriage, everything was beautiful and then suddenly this other side comes out. It's too late and she's caught in this trap.

SP: Did you find that your experiences with the Advice Desk for the Abused, this sort of theme was recurring, with those women? Which largely influenced your story?

RS: Yes, because just about every case of abuse, the woman would confess by saying: "Oh it's my fault", "No I shouldn't have done that, I shouldn't have said that, he still loves me." And he played the role after that: "Oh, he's so sorry, he's so sorry, dah dah dah dah" and then we back to square one again.

SP: So why have you chosen the medium of theatre to be appropriate for you to confront and raise a subject such as domestic abuse?

RS: Well look it's a fairly flexible thing. For one thing, you can take the production out. It's a two-hander, which means you only need two people and do it in any venue where you can get people to interact after the play or perhaps, and we didn't have this happen, but sometimes people are expected to interact during the play and interrupt the action and say: "What are you doing?," You know, it could happen. So in terms of the medium that would've been the most convenient one. Making a documentary is too cold and clinical.

Doing a film of this sort-of thing, you're kind of left detached from what you see, whereas here you see two live people in front of you.

SP: Do you think that that has an effect, like you said, watching two live people go through these actions, do you think it has an effect on the audience differently?

RS: I would think so, I certainly hope so. People begin to understand that we might have a happy relationship in our family but gosh there are people out there who shouldn't be experiencing this.

SP: Which brings me to my last question: do you believe that theatre has the ability to bring about change? In an audience and society at large?

RS: Yes of course but the thing, the problem has been that theatre has lost its ground over the last couple of decades. There are very few productions of worth being done anymore. There is very little new work. I would say for instance during our bad days of apartheid, theatre was very instrumental in making conditions in this country known abroad. The plays with, what's-his-name? John Kani; Mbongeni Ngema; all these people, they got standing ovations when they performed these things. And the arts boycott that's emanated from Britain mainly was actually a result of a lot of this sort of work being done there.

SP: The characters in your play, do they represent one individual story/ life, since you were based at the Advice Desk for Abused Women? Does it represent one person, one specific individual or does it speak across the board of many experiences collectively, both men and women, in those respective characters. So the woman character representing many women and the male character representing many men?

RS: Look, some of the incidents we included, or I included in the text were based on stories that the Advice Desk people told me about. This is how some of the spouses behave, this is what they do etc. So what I finally presented may have been quite extreme because it was a collection of a lot of these experiences put together. As for whether they represent, I think they're just themselves. It's a question of seeing it and saying: "that's just like my aunty", you know?

SP: And then, the last question I'm going to ask you, do you think that there is a need for subjects like domestic abuse; domestic violence to be raised within the theatre sphere today?

RS: Yeah, I think so, but there might be, it might be limited in that people finally say: "look, I don't want to go see somebody being abused" and all that sort of thing. I think one of the things that could solve some of the problem, or could go some way towards solving the problem, is that I think they should teach people morality. It could address so many issues in this country. Somebody gets held up, people get their homes broken into, these guys don't think twice about shooting you, you know, there's no sense of what is right and what is wrong. So, once we can do something about that, this is what I don't understand though, because you know, in older times, most cultures would've brought their kids up in such a way that they understood what it meant to be a moral person. What is right; what is wrong,



I mean all religions have basically the same things, they teach you the same things. I mean no one specific religion says, "hey you got to go out and kill people". Although there have been people who've interpreted it that way. So, I think, there should be some moral regeneration that we had a few years back, I dunno where that went, but it certainly didn't go far enough. But that's the sort of thing that needs to be reintroduced.

## APPENDIX D: ISMAIL MAHOMED INTERVIEW

SP: What is your understanding or interpretation of the term Indian South African?

IM: Well, it's complex. For me, it's about South Africans who have aspects of heritage and legacy that's been brought down through generations of families who may have come from India. While we may share some common histories and cultures with populations in India our national identity, loyalty, commitment and patriotism remains with South Africa. I'm a fifth generation South African, yes, I have all the features of what one would classify as Indian, I certainly locate myself completely within South Africa in terms of experience, in terms of identity. I would be completely dislocated in India.

SP: Alright, so do you believe that being part of the Indian diaspora in South Africa contributes to an Indian South African's longing/ desire to hold on to their roots/ traditions from the "Motherland"? If so, in your opinion, how is this experienced and expressed?

IM: I don't think it's so much a case of holding on to experiences that come from the Motherland, I think it's holding onto possibly experiences that have evolved in South Africa. And those experiences are always dynamic. They change. The way we hand down to the next generation that comes after us is going to be a lot more different from the way we experience being Indian in South Africa. So for me it's got nothing to do with, being a fifth generation Indian South African, it's got nothing to do with what came from India, it's got a lot more to do with what has happened in South Africa and how have our forefathers adapted to change in South Africa, and handed down particular traditions and values and cultural practices that have been uniquely evolved in South Africa.

SP: Alright, now are the characters in your text written to be reflections of people in their community, i.e. the Indian South African diaspora, or more specifically in your text, the Muslim community in South Africa. If yes, to what degree? If no, who do the characters in your text represent or reflect?

IM: The play was inspired, not even by a South African character, the play was inspired by the incident of Ameena Bikti. A young woman from India, who was on a plane, being taken out, to be married to an Arab sheikh and the plane had been stopped – intercepted, and she was removed from the plane because of the intervention of an air hostess. That for me was the catalyst for the play. The play however is not her biography. The very first actress to do my work: Asifah Omar came from a very Malay background, so you know, as we worked and created and developed the play there were different influences. There was the influence from the broader community, the media; my own students from the community that I lived in which was very much a conservative-type community. But also, the communities like, Asifah Omar's, the very first actress for the play, who brought her own experiences to my writing and also to the directing and the way in which we produced the play.

SP: Alright, there was something you said there, that I wanted to pick-up on. Like you said, it's been inspired by or there was a person that wasn't necessarily South African from which you took inspiration to write the play, but did you find inspiration for some of the other, like the context of it, from the South African Indian community, that you were familiar with or that you had experienced?

IM: Yes, I think very much. You know, for example, the caricature of the aunt is very much a South African character, one that we'd find in almost every Indian community. The practices that existed at that particular time, still exist to some extent for example the wedding proposals in the play were very much South African experiences from various Indian communities. So yes there has been a local influence in the development of the plot but also in terms of the characters.

SP: Alright, so would you say then that an audience in South Africa watching it, whilst there are universal themes explored, but an audience watching it, especially based in the Indian community, would identify with what is going on?

IM: I think the play resonated with an audience that's beyond just a narrow, small Indian community. When the play had premiered, its very first performance was at Wits University during the orientation week of the Muslim Students Association on campus. From there it went on to have a number of other venues, it performed at the National Arts Festival in Grahamstown where it resonated with a very diverse audience. It was at that point that the play was identified by David Kramer for inclusion in the *Drama for a New South Africa: An Anthology of Plays*. You know, there have been several readings of the play since then. There have also been several performances of the play since then, there's been up to last year even a adaptation of the play that was staged with three African women; and it was not even presented as a solo play. So for me it's a play that probably had a particular kind of resonance at that time when it was written but the instances of social violence still happens as you know, so from time-to-time we find people who are wanting to stage the play and they do. They're not necessarily Indian they come from diverse communities.

SP: Which brings me to my next question: like you said, this play was written in 1993, we're now in 2019, do you think that the subject matter and the issues dealt with in the text are still relevant today?

IM: Oh, without doubt. The fact that arranged marriages; the fact that social violence; gender violence is so much more visible in our country or we talk about it so much more transparently than what we may have done then, I think we as a nation, have dealt adequately with how we engage with this kind of social violence.

SP: Alright, so from your experience, what would you say are taboo issues that exist within the Indian South African community but are never discussed? If so, why do you think this is the case?

IM: Well, I think we have difficulty with how we interpret culture, religion and constitutional values. I think we all celebrate the fact that we have a wonderful constitution and that that constitution does allow us to celebrate our own diversity in the ways that we want. It also encourages us to forge an identity as a new nation but I don't think we succeeded adequately in forming a national identity. You know the fact that we may have a wonderful constitution that talks about freedom of association and freedom of movement or whatever but the "Group Areas Act" is still very much intact, not legislatively, but in our head spaces and the way our communities are still structured. And until we begin to create communities

that are not 'stuck' to these narrow values and we break those superficial boundaries, then I think we're going to have the kind of change we want to see. Younger Indian South Africans who are moving out of those traditional boundaries and traditional communities that we lived in and who are moving into more independent and integrated spaces are adapting their lifestyles. As long as our communities remain the way Apartheid had structured us to be then those values, cultural practices and norms that we carried over from our forefathers will remain with us and continue to haunt us as much as the ghosts of apartheid still do.

SP: Alright, what was, I know you've mentioned this already but I'm going to ask it again: what was the motivation for incorporating themes of domestic abuse in your text?

IM: Well, you know, when I looked at the story of the young girl who would've been married off to that 60-year-old Arab Sheikh, I began to imagine just what her life would be. The strength of being a writer is the ability to imagine. There's no way that you cannot imagine that it would have been a violent marriage. That it would've been a marriage of somebody who would always be wanting to get out of it. I think that is what influenced the development of the plot and the various characters in the play. I don't write as much now as I wrote in the early '90's, but when I did write *Purdah* I wasn't intending to write a play about domestic violence i wanted to write a play about a particular character whose life story inspired me, challenged me or provoked me. I enjoy delving into and re-imagining biographies irrespective of whether there would be violence or no violence in their lives. When I explored the story of this young woman, I was interested in how she would deal with the life ahead of her and how she would possibly break out of the circumstances. Some of that interrogation and imagination of possibilities is what influenced the writing of the play. The character is bigger than the issues. You know, I don't write issue-based plays, I write plays about characters. The characters' lives are influenced value-systems; their philosophies, the way their life journeys play out.

SP: The next question. I know it's a character-based play but for me, because I'm exploring domestic abuse its stood out for me because there aren't very many plays written that deal with this issue. So for me it stood out, and I'm going to ask you why does the issue of domestic abuse appear so pivotally in your text? Because at the end of the day like you said she wants to get out or you believe she wanted to get out but there are themes nevertheless of domestic abuse that are explored.

IM: Yeah well I think, in some ways it is a violent play but the violence that the woman takes in killing her husband happens because she was denied all other choices. It is an unfortunate choice but it was a desperate choice. I think to some extent it also tries to kill the 'Bollywood myth' that we are unable to ever deal with sensitive issues in our theatres. I was not going to give my audience a Bollywood story. I wanted to provoke them to ask many more difficult questions about our communities.

SP: What is your reason for depicting a female character in your text as the victim, suffering at the hands of someone who's male, who happens to be a loved one or should be a loved one?

IM: I don't at all see her as a victim; and to this day, I don't think she is a victim at all. I saw her very much as a character who goes through a journey and conquers that journey. The

fact that she was a rebellious kid even in the face of discipline, the fact that she stood up and several times said “no no no” even when the aunt humiliated her; and the fact that she had an extramarital relationship out of her own choice, doesn’t make her a victim. She was a survivor through various difficult circumstances.

SP: Why did you choose to focus on this form of abuse specifically? Not emotional necessarily, not where he’s, you know, swearing her and, it’s very physical.

IM: Well, in the Indian community we often see how things are pushed under the carpet. We know of people who are being abused. We see people at weddings and at funerals with a black eye but we don’t talk about it. We pretend as if we haven’t noticed it. With this play I brought that conversation out into the open. Of course, when we did stage *Purdah*, it did create a lot of debate and discussion. My actress received several threats. I received threats but we continued presenting the play. One of the most remarkable performances that we had was at the Windybrow Theatre in Johannesburg. Soon after the play had opened, on one of the evenings, there was an Imam who came to see the play. He looked very very firm, very stern and we were terrified. We thought that this performance was going to be tough. The Imam sat in the first row of the theatre. I said to the stage manager: “If he attempts to stand up in the middle of the play, (it’s one of the stages where there’s no separation between the audience and the performer), you go straight to blackout”. The Imam watched the play throughout the performance. He did not disrupt it. We had post-performance discussions after every single performance; and that evening after everyone had spoken, just before we were able to round-up, the Imam stood up and said: “I have something to say, what you’ve said in your play, is what we ought to say from our sermons”. And that for me, validated everything about why we were doing the play.

SP: You said that guys had post-performance discussions after every performance. That, for me, is very interesting. What was some of the feedback you were receiving from men and women alike?

IM: Initially people who heard about the play and wanted to come see the play were often progressive people. We’d get a sprinkling of people who’d come because they hadn’t heard about the play through word of mouth. My actress would have lots of people come to talk to her even after the post-performance discussions. They wouldn’t speak in the post-show discussions but they’d speak to her afterwards in the foyer and relay that elements of their life story was in reflected in the play.

The post-performance discussions were really dynamic. The interesting thing is that I was commissioned at the time by the Muslim Students Association at Wits University to write a play for them to be performed during orientation week. I had no idea what I was going to do or what I was going to write about until I read the story of the young woman on the aeroplane. It was then that I decided that a re-imagination of the life of such a character forced into an undesired arranged marriage was going to be my play. We received wonderful response to the premiere of the play. Ferial Haffajee, the editor at the time of the Weekly Mail (now Mail & Guardian) wrote a one-page story about the play. It all went off fine until one other journalist described the play as a story about a barefoot woman who was pregnant and who attempted to abort her baby. He lost the point completely. It’s not just a play about the Muslim community. It’s about a woman in a particular community that just happens to be Muslim. Every character you create has to have an affinity with where

they belong. Any character comes from a family, a community, a religion and a particular ideology. It just happens that in this particular play the focus is on the cultural practices related to proposals and weddings in a conservative Muslim family and community.

SP: Why have you chosen the medium of theatre to be appropriate for you to confront and raise a subject such as domestic abuse?

IM: I believe in the immense power of theatre not just to raise awareness but to move us into action. I think what the first post-performance discussions did to us --- even though the play stirred an enormous amount of controversy --- was that it created an opportunity for my actress to engage with women's organisations that would book the play and present it to small groups. Often it was closed groups for women's organisations that would book the play to stage it in their communities so that women could attend it on their own; and engage with the play. They would have open and wonderful discussions. Though the play was an hour long the post-performance discussions were often 90-minutes long. I believe theatre is a catalyst for change. Theatre is a catalyst for dialogue. Theatre has got immense power to empower us to challenge and change our societies. We attempted to do that with the play. We know about abuse in our society, but it's not talked about. The play removed the veil and broke the silence. The play '*Purdah*' is not so much about the physical veil; it's about the other veil that exists. The veil of deceit, the veil of lies. When we remove that artificial veil then we can have open and transparent conversations and dialogue and find the way that we need to build societies; and move away from the kind of violence that we have in our society.

SP: And the final question, although I think you've answered it already. Do you believe that theatre has the ability to bring about change in the audience and society at large?

IM: Oh yes, I'm an ardent believer in the humanising quality of the arts particularly that of theatre. I started my career as a mathematics teacher, I took a group of young people to an arts festival regularly during my teaching career; and it was growth that I saw in them emotionally and cognitively; the fact that they could come with open minds and be transformed by theatre. I took that particular decision in the 80's to quit from formal teaching to work in the arts where the transformative was immeasurable.

## APPENDIX E: VIVIAN MOODLEY INTERVIEW

After many failed attempts at trying to setup a face-to-face interview with Mr. Vivian Moodley, (neither of us were ever in the same city at the same time to meet), I had to use the limited technological resources I had at my disposal to conduct this interview. Mr. Moodley said that he did not have access to skype and implored me not to use emails as a way of corresponding. I had to find a way of extracting the relevant information while still taking into account his limitations. As such, I turned to WhatsApp, and a tool called voicenotes. At an agreed upon time and date (19 December 2019), I conducted the interview via WhatsApp voicenotes.

SP: Hi Mr. Moodley, your first question is what is your understanding or interpretation of the term Indian South African?

VM: Hi, that would be somebody that I would call a black person in South Africa who is of Indian origin.

SP: Number two: do you believe that being part of the Indian diaspora in South Africa contributes to Indian South African's longing/ desire to hold on to their roots/ traditions from the 'Motherland'? If so, in your opinion, how is this experienced and expressed?

VM: Look with the Indian South Africans from my experience they want to be Indian when it suits them and then they want to be treated like a South African black person when, you know, it comes to things like jobs and art and so on. But they can be very vociferous when it comes to religion and culture but then they also want to embrace the total westernisation of South Africa and, you know, they seem to be somewhat confused in my opinion. Not all of them but a major portion of this community.

SP: Are the characters in your text written to be reflections of people in their community i.e. the Indian South African diaspora?

- If yes, to what degree?
- If no, who do the characters in your text represent/ reflect?

VM: I've lived and worked in the 'diaspora' as you put it, and obviously it would influence the kind of characters that I would create for my work. But they're all based on truth. There are some plays that I've written which address the issues of racism within this community. They can be extremely racist towards their indigenous African counterparts. I don't know whether you follow the arts very closely, recently there was somebody who purports to be an artist of sorts who made very racist comments on social media about African people. That is the kind of sentiment expressed in gatherings like weddings and funerals and places like that that I've had to frequent. You find that you need to express your disgust at it, or that it contradicts the way you feel and think about being a black South African, that I've gone and written about these things. But the characters I create are quite fictitious but based in the truth. That's basically where my characters come from.

SP: Now, from your experience, would you say there are taboo issues which exist within the Indian South African community, but are never discussed? If so, why do you think this is the case?

VM: I'm sure that taboos exist in every community but I think we are all products of habit. And over the years as your own community, that you grew up in, has their dos and don'ts, so does this community as well. I think that over the years, becomes almost a religion and if they go back and try and dissect and find out where it comes from, they'll probably find it was just more a kind of discipline that's been instilled in them for various reasons. That may translate into taboo or just things we won't do. The way to get around that is to say well, in my culture we don't eat beef or we don't eat pork or whatever. So it's passed down from generations. It's difficult to really answer that question with any real conviction.

SP: Speaking specifically of your text, *A Cookie in the Kitchen*, what was the motivation for incorporating themes of domestic abuse in that text?

VM: I have written other works dealing with women abuse and child abuse and racism and so on and this particular case was more to tell the story of a woman who is like you and I. On the face of it, everything seems to be fine, but she comes from somewhere. She has a history, she has lived life in her community, experienced the joys that the community had to offer and so on. And then she leaves that kind of setup and goes and lives with her husband who is the abuser in that particular case. But it is to show that it can happen to anybody regardless of your religions, regardless of your political status, regardless of who you are as a person - be it rich, poor or any cultural group. Because, that story can be told through the eyes of a white woman or the eyes of a black woman in a rural area. So because I was working in this community and also I played on the word 'cookie'. Cookie is an endearing name for a woman used in this community. A cookie is also a treat that you get in a cookie jar and it also has other implications, or other meanings to it so I decided to call it 'A Cookie in the Kitchen'. This 'Cookie' could be of any other cultural group, anywhere in the world, telling her story.

SP: Why does the issue of domestic abuse appear so pivotally in your text: *A Cookie in the Kitchen*?

VM: Well, I've witnessed it myself throughout my life as to how domestic violence plays out. And I was a member of the Advice Desk for Abused Women and Children for years where I did programmes educating both victims and abusers. I used to produce work for the Advice Desk as well, regarding the issue of abuse. So I was pretty 'close to the action', as it were. I think I had enough background material to put into a text and to make possibly someday a movie about it as well, which I am currently doing.

SP: What is your reason for depicting the female character 'Cookie' in your text as the victim, suffering at the hands of a male loved-one, in this instance, her husband?

VM: Well it's obvious we live in a patriarchal society where a male is brought up to be 'the boss' as it were. You know, we would never ask our male child to run out when it's raining to go and get the clothes from the line but we would tell his sister. So we create that kind of



situation where the woman is always going to be the victim on many many different levels. This is not to say that men are not also abused. There are cases, my experience with the Advice Desk, a lot of men have come forward to say that they were being abused as well and I have written short plays specifically for the Advice Desk portraying men as abused people as well. But, in this case, one has to realise that most often the man is the perpetrator, the woman, in this case - the wife, is the victim. And in most cases they are unable to do anything about it because they are financially, emotionally dependent on their spouse or partner and they put up with the abuse. And this was one way of showing that she is still able to put up with the abuse and run her family and show the character Michael, who is actually the world outside, to show him that everything is fine in her household. When it really isn't. So I wanted to highlight those issues more than anything else.

SP: Why did you choose to focus on this form of abuse specifically?

VM (via text): I wanted to highlight all the emotional, financial and physical abuse. I attempted to do this with subtexts. I was pleasantly surprised when a lady came up to me and said "You told my story".

SP: Why have you chosen the medium of theatre to be appropriate for you to confront and raise a subject such as domestic abuse?

VM: I have had the benefit of working in all mediums: radio, stage, theatre, television, film and I've produced similar work for all of those mediums. In fact, a version of *Cookie in the Kitchen* was done for radio as well, in a ten-episode series. So, the movie that I'm working on now has to do with women abuse, and rape and so on. So what happens is, I would start writing the story and most often you share it with your muse or somebody and then they say, 'this would make a lovely television series' or 'this would make a lovely stage play'. So you sort of gear the product toward that particular medium. So I don't start off writing to say I'm going to write it for stage, it's just I wrote the story and then we took it from there.

SP: Do you believe that theatre has the ability to bring about change in the audience and society at large?

VM: Well my intention was initially, to stimulate debate, to get people talking about not only the product as to how good or bad it was, but the subject matter that I'm putting out there. And I've had that over the years, both my political plays and you know I write with a lot of social responsibility governing my work. So as long as I can stimulate that debate, I would have made some sort of impact and I think that's where I am with my work.

SP: Finally, do you believe Cookie is a character that would ever leave her abusive situation? She had an arranged marriage, do you believe she, at any stage, loved her husband and despite her love (even if she did feel it), would she ever leave her abusive situation or would she spend the rest of her days in this marriage, this abusive marriage?

VM: Leaving a marriage situation, especially in the kind of cultures we come from both in Zulu culture and Indian culture. It's very very difficult because of the pressures of family, extended family, children and all of that, it's a choice. But I find with the modern-woman,

career-woman, they find it's easier to do that, to try and take a stand, first of all, against the abuse. And then, if it doesn't work then they go for the ultimate: get a divorce or separation or whatever. Yes, the world is changing and I'm glad to see more and more women are standing up and saying: enough is enough. I think more often, it's women who also talk to other women and say 'no, please, you must try and make it work and so on'. But I think what you need to do is go deep to the heart of the problem and say 'listen this is not going to work', because my thing is, if a man raises his hand to a woman, that's it, he's going to do it again at some stage, unless he gets help. And no man, because of his ego, is going to say, alright I will go to a psychiatrist or whatever and get help for my condition, they don't see it as that and the patriarchal society doesn't allow them to think like that. It's relative but I think the world is changing and we're getting there slowly.

## APPENDIX F: ETHICAL CLEARANCE LETTER



20 June 2018

Ms Shirdika Pillai (205503398)  
School of Arts  
Howard College Campus

Dear Ms Pillai,

Protocol reference number: HSS/0537/018M

Project Title: Strangers amongst their own: Analysing the theatrical portrayal of domestic abuse in the Indian South African community – a textual study of three South African plays (between 1993 and 2002)

### Approval Notification – Expedited Application

In response to your application received 02 May 2018, the Humanities & Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee has considered the abovementioned application and the protocol has been granted **FULL APPROVAL**.

Any alteration/s to the approved research protocol i.e. Questionnaire/Interview Schedule, Informed Consent Form, Title of the Project, Location of the Study, Research Approach and Methods must be reviewed and approved through the amendment /modification prior to its implementation. In case you have further queries, please quote the above reference number.

**PLEASE NOTE:** Research data should be securely stored in the discipline/department for a period of 5 years.

The ethical clearance certificate is only valid for a period of 3 years from the date of issue. Thereafter Recertification must be applied for on an annual basis.

I take this opportunity of wishing you everything of the best with your study.

Yours faithfully

.....  
Professor Shenuka Singh (Chair)

/ms

Cc Supervisor: Ms Tamar Meskin  
Cc Academic Leader Research: Dr Nicola Jones  
Cc School Administrator: Mr Christopher Eeley

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Humanities & Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee

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## APPENDIX G: TURNITIN REPORT

### Turnitin Originality Report

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