THE ARTISTIC PRACTISES OF CONTEMPORARY

SOUTH AFRICAN INDIAN WOMEN ARTISTS: HOW RACE,

CLASS AND GENDER AFFECT THE MAKING OF VISUAL ART

by

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DECLARATION

I declare that '*The artistic practises of contemporary South African Indian women artists: how race, class and gender affect the making of visual art'* is my own work and that all the sources that I have used or quoted have been indicated or acknowledged by means of complete references.

Thavamani Pillay

Signature:_____   Date:_____

TITLE:

The artistic practises of contemporary South African Indian women artists: how race, class and gender affect the making of visual art

SUMMARY:

In view of the scarcity of Indian women in the South African art field, this study investigates how issues of race, class and gender can affect the decision to become and sustain a career as a professional artist. By exploring the historical background of the Indian community and their patriarchal mind set it becomes clear that women's roles in this community have always been prescribed by tradition and cultural values, despite western influence. Moreover the legacy of apartheid created a situation in which black artists, especially women, have not always benefitted in terms of career opportunities. The research is based on case studies of five Indian women who have received due recognition as artists: Lalitha Jawahirilal, Usha Seejarim, Sharlene Khan, Simmi Dullay and Reshma Chhiba. These artists' lives, careers and artistic output are closely studied, documented and critically interpreted using key concepts such as orientalism, black feminism and post colonialism.

List of key terms:

Race; separate development; education; culture; religion; patriarchy; class; gender; South African women; black feminism; contemporary art; apartheid; art institutions.

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PREFACE

My experience of the complex relationship between South African Indians and contemporary visual arts was a starting point for this study. I have always been interested in art but could not study it at high school as it was not part of our syllabus (1977-1980). After I matriculated I wanted to study Fine Art but financial considerations and the fact that it offered no tangible career led me to complete a Diploma in Fashion Design. During my student years, I encountered many talented young people, who like me had chosen to study Fashion, Graphic Design or Textile Design instead of Fine Art since it was more practical. The overriding reasons for most of us were similar: the study fees at Technikon were far less than at university; pressure from family to complete our studies and find work quickly; and for some, the refusal of their parents to allow them to study fine art. There were also no discernible professional Indian artists that we could look up to as mentors or examples of success.

Even now there is a perception amongst South Africans that there are no Indian women who are visual artists. Admittedly, only a proportionately small number is informed about the contemporary visual arts field since South Africans prefer popular culture such as sport, music, cinema and television. Those who are interested and attend art exhibitions or read art books, art reviews or magazines might not even be aware that articles seldom feature the names or works of South African Indian women artists. In Durban with its huge Indian population, newspapers like *The Post* and *The Sunday Tribune Herald* which cater for the

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Indian community do sometimes feature Indian visual artists. The focus of these articles tends to be on the artists' biography and achievements with no in-depth analysis or critical discussion of art works.

The main aim of this study is to fill the afore mentioned gaps in our knowledge of South African Indian female artists and to show how certain factors contributed to this state of affairs. In order to do this it is necessary to understand how ingrained patriarchal and traditional beliefs have shaped the South African Indian community and their attitude towards women. As discussed in Chapter one this community views visual art practise as a western construct and seldom supports art as a career. To paraphrase Linda Nochlin: "for a (Indian) woman to opt for a career at all, much less a career in art, has required a certain unconventionality both in the present and the past" (1971:31). When women choose to become professional artists they often face difficulties and a lack of support from their families or communities. Therefore, I examine gender as a factor affecting a career in art.

When considering the scarcity of Indian female artists, it is important to look at the educational institutions, art galleries, critics, art sponsors and art publishers in South Africa. Historically positions of power in the art world have always been held by whites and although transformation has created some change, there is still much that needs to change. The dynamics of race especially as it impacts on education, training and career opportunities are central to this study.

A third factor affecting Indian women artists is class since it has a direct impact on education, financial security and cultural background. Families in which one or both parents have higher levels of tertiary education probably have the economic means and a more liberal attitude towards art.

The consecutive chapters present five case studies of Indian female artists which serve as a means to explore how class, race and gender can affect the output of an artist. In each case study I include a brief description of the artist's early life, family background and education especially as it pertains to their development as artists. I also analyse four chosen artworks accompanied by illustrations within each case study. The selected artworks reflect the different periods in each artist's career from early works to more recent ones. The documentation and analysis of these artworks is an important aspect of my research since this is necessary in order for them to be included in the art history of South Africa. The intentions of the artists are also explored in the case studies - whether it is to create images that empower women, record the history of Indians in South Africa or explore the identity of modern Indian women.

In the conclusion the findings of each case study are used and compared to arrive at a convincing result that reflects the manner in which race, class and gender have shaped the artists and their work in this study. All the artists involved in this study expressed the belief that this was a necessary topic for consideration and I hope that other similar studies will expand on the issues mentioned here. As South African women of colour there is a need for us to research and document our history as artists.

I would like to acknowledge the help and support that I received during the long process of writing this dissertation.

I would like to thank Sharlene Khan who was initially the co-supervisor for my proposal. She provided me with the names and contact details of artists and academics, while challenging me to write and think more critically.

A special thank you to the artists Usha Seejarim, Reshma Chhiba and Simmi Dullay for responding to my questions and providing exhibition catalogues. Although she was not included in this study, I want to thank Rookaya Gardee for her valuable insights.

I am indebted to my supervisor Prof. Bernadette van Haute who provided me with valuable feedback and helped me to clarify my thoughts.

Lastly I want to thank my family, especially my husband Sankaran Pillay for his unwavering support.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

DUT	Durban University of Technology
UDW	University of Durban Westville
UNICOL	University College for Indians
WITS	University of the Witwatersrand
UCT	University of Cape Town
NIC	Natal Indian Congress
NAC	National Arts Council of South Africa
VANSA	Visual Arts Network of South Africa

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this study is to examine how issues of race, class and gender can affect the making of art by South African Indian women. In order to achieve this goal, I will present the case studies of five South African Indian women who are professional artists. Although they have contributed to the visual art field, many do not appear to have been given due recognition within the South African art canon.

Despite being relatively unknown, there are several Indian women working in the contemporary visual art field. One of the most prominent is Avitha Sooful, who is a respected academic and an acclaimed practising artist. The Durban Art Gallery has in its permanent collection works by artist Faiza Galdhari and the late Zainab Reddy (Stretton 2011). A painting by Lalitha Jawahirilal is in the South African National Gallery (Iziko) in Cape Town. In 2009, Poorvi Bhana won the coveted Thami Mnyele Fine Art award for her delicate ceramics (thamimnyelefineartsaward.blogspot.com). That same year Amita Makan, won second place in the Sasol New Signatures competition for her multi-media works (www.arttimes.co.za/news). Farzanah Badsha, the granddaughter of artist Ebrahim and daughter of photographer Omar Badsha, was the project manager of the Spier Contemporary 2010 competition and exhibition (Robertson 2010: 32). Reshma Chibba, Usha Seejarim, Simmi Dullay and Sharlene Khan are among other Indian women artists who have achieved recognition in the art field.

This research will explore the artistic practises of a selected group of South African Indian women artists in order to assess the impact that race, class and

gender have had on their ability to be successful in the contemporary visual arts field. Since Indian people are a minority group within the South African population and Indian women are a fraction of that number they are a marginalised group and as such there is little record of their contribution to the collective art of South Africa.[1] Furthermore no in-depth study has been made of their artworks, working methods or the difficulties that they encounter within their communities and within the South African art world.

It is also my intention to attempt to find out why there are so few Indian women studying fine art and entering and participating in the visual arts sector in South Africa. Only a small number of young girls choose to pursue art as a career despite the large numbers who study art at school. According to statistics from VANSA, there are only eight Indian professional artists (men and women) in South Africa as opposed to the 140 white and 80 black artists (www.vansa.co.za/research/section5artists.pdf: 117).[2] Young South African Indians have greater opportunities than before in terms of training and career options yet only a few have made an impact on the art world.

I aim to examine whether this 'invisibility' of Indian women is in any way caused by class, racial or gender discrimination. Other contributing factors could be found in the restrictive nature of their respective cultural or religious communities. In order to confirm or refute these assumptions, I will closely examine the careers of five selected Indian women artists and their artistic output.[3]

Another issue to be discussed is that of identity since it is closely linked with questions about race. According to Nasan Pather, an academic and writer, "The issue of identity is a complex one in which definition is fluid rather than static. None of us are 'Indian' at the exclusion of being born on the African continent, or having received a western education" (Pather 1999:6).[4] Some artists consciously incorporate Indian motifs or iconography in their work, while others believe it has no place in work that is meant to reflect their concern with contemporary South African issues. The struggle to establish an identity - whether it is as an Indian, an African or a woman - is closely linked to gender issues as well. Many Indian women artists define themselves as 'black'- an all-encompassing term including all women of colour. Others regard themselves as South African Indian or just South African adding to the further complexity of our notions of identity.

The oppressive forces of gender and race are inextricably linked. The impact of race on society is not confined to South Africa, a fact borne out by bell hooks, the African–American cultural studies critic who writes that "American society is one in which racial imperialism supersedes sexual imperialism" (1995a: 375). Sexual 'imperialism' or the notion that one gender (male) is superior to another (female), is no less problematic an issue. The struggle of Indians to overcome ethnic and racial prejudice and the struggle of women to overcome gender inequality will be examined more closely in my research.

The viability of this study is underscored by the problems and issues that face artists in post-apartheid South Africa which has the legacy of a racially divided art world.

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The visual arts system in South Africa largely evolved around the interests and aspirations of a minority of the population. As is the case in most other parts of the society and economy, the institutions, discourse, commercial activity and attendant networks of the visual arts sector have historically been dominated and shaped by the white population, with black artists and organisations being consigned to a largely marginal role in the development of the sector (www.Vansa.co.za/research/section 2overview.pdf: 40).

I plan to consider the South African art world which includes higher education institutions, art galleries, art writers, sponsors and art publications and the interaction of Indian artists with them. Within these white dominated power structures I shall examine the obstacles that Indian women have to overcome in order to be successful artists.

According to research undertaken in 2010 by VANSA, 58% of all professional artists in South Africa are white and 66% of white artists are women (www.Vansa.co.za/research/section5artists.pdf:118). While gender alone may not appear to be an inhibiting factor in pursuing a career in visual art, it is interesting to note that 33% of professional artists are black but that the majority of them are male. White males were the highest earners while black females earned the least (www.Vansa.co.za/research/section5artists.pdf:118). Other issues that affect a career in art are class, education and religion. Another important factor is overcoming racial as well as gender discrimination which affects financial aid, sponsorships and employment opportunities.

The reluctance by the Indian community to consider art as a career choice is not entirely unjustified, since it is fraught with economic instability and professional

uncertainty. Few artists can actually sustain themselves by selling their work and many need other means of support, such as lecturing, writing or taking on menial jobs. Institutions like the National Council for the Arts (NAC) do provide funding but few artists apply since many believe that they probably will not qualify for funds anyway (www.Vansa.co.za/research/section5artists.pdf). Others who lack formal arts education or who do not understand the bureaucratic processes approach these institutions with incoherent or presumptuous proposals and fail to get the support they need (www.nac.org.za:NACPPS for Web.pdf: 25).

The issue of funding, however, cannot be examined without considering how race, class and gender affect decisions as to how government and private institutions allocate them. In keeping with the government's transformation policies, efforts are being made to empower previously disadvantaged artists but these efforts are not enough to affect institutions and mind sets that have been entrenched for decades.

Between 1962 and 1999, the only institution where Indian women could study fine art was the University College for Indians (UNICOL) which later became the University of Durban-Westville (UDW). During this period 139 Indian students graduated with Fine Art degrees from both institutions (Moodley 2012:129). Only a handful of the women who graduated, have continued to work as professional artists. Those not dealt with in this study are Nalini Moodley, Judy Peter (neé Ramgolam), Avitha Sooful and Reshma Maharaj who are predominantly active in the academic sphere.

I have chosen five artists to study closely in order to assess their careers and discuss the art that they have produced. They are Lalitha Jawahirilal, Usha Seejarim, Simmi Dullay, Sharlene Khan and Reshma Chhiba. They have all received a measure of recognition in the art world, and have participated in joint and solo exhibitions. There are other Indian women artists who are well established but for the purposes of this study I have had to limit my research to the above mentioned group. Beginning with Jawahirilal, who was born in 1954, and ending with Chhiba, who was born in 1983, these artists cover a time period which goes from apartheid South Africa to the advent of democracy. Each of these artists comes from a different religion, culture, class and geographic location. The diversity of these artists is also reflected in the wide range of their subject matter, the different media and modus operandi each employs. By examining such a cross section of women, I hope to provide a greater depth of information.

In post-apartheid South Africa, many art writers are doing much to seek out and record the work and histories of those artists whose work was either ignored, banned or forgotten. The contribution made by South African Indian women to South African art has not been systematically documented, which could result in their cultural activity being forgotten or never entering the public domain (Naidoo 2010:1). In her paper 'Culture, politics, identity : The visual art of Indian South Africans', sociologist Nalini Naidoo (2010) supports the idea that this is a necessary area of study and writes that "the visual culture of the Indian community has not been dealt with in a meaningful or challenging way."

Devarakshanam Govinden whose book '*Sister Outsiders, The representation of Identity and difference in selected writings by South African women*' (2008) documents and analyses the literature of South African Indian women writers sets a precedent for how the work of Indian artists should be treated. She carried out this research since she believed that

> They have not been properly recognised locally or internationally
> as part of the collective critique of South African culture and politics.
> In this period of ongoing change it is necessary to incorporate these
> marginal voices ... into this critical discourse (Govinden 2008: 2).

In the same vein, Indian women artists and their works need to be critically examined and documented within the field of South African contemporary visual arts. Nasan Pather states in the exhibition catalogue for ' A place like home' (2004) that "little value was seen in collecting work by (visual) artists from communities of South Asian descent, regardless of whether they defined themselves as African, Indian, Indian African or South African Indian". He goes on to point out the need for the documentation and recovery of what he refers to as our 'hidden history' (Pather 2004).

In her essay titled 'Why have there been no great women artists", Linda Nochlin, points out that for those not born "white, preferably middle class and above all – male", the opportunities to achieve success as artists, were not good (1971:5). She believed that the obstacles facing women were to be found in education and certainly Indian women in the 1960s had little or no access to relevant institutions. Nochlin also maintains that when women pursue art, they are not taken seriously

and given the support that they need (Nochlin 1971:7 & 29). While some of these attitudes have changed in recent years, in South Africa with its history of apartheid, colonialism and patriarchal communities female Indian artists still have to contend with similar issues.

In the book *Women and Art in South Africa* (1996), the artist and academic Marion Arnold offers some insight into the experience of women working in a field in which they have had to struggle to succeed. Arnold's work provides a feminist viewpoint examining not only the art of South African women but also the manner in which women have been depicted by men. She points out the inequities in opportunity, training and support for black women artists. If she includes Indian women under this broad category, it is not immediately apparent. All of the artists discussed are either black or white and Indian women are not mentioned at all.

Artist and writer Sue Williamson's *Resistance art in South Africa* (1989) has often been hailed as being a definitive account of art reflecting the struggle against apartheid. In the 1980s UDW had been a site of political struggle and mobilisation, producing future leaders like Strini Moodley, Jay Naidoo and Saths Cooper (Reddy cited by Naidoo 2010). Despite this, the 'struggle' art that emerged from artists at the UDW, is never mentioned by Williamson. Artists like Kiren Thathiah, Vedant Nanackchand, Andrew Nair and Clive Pillay were amongst those who actively resisted the apartheid regime, and this is reflected in their work at that time. Williamson's exclusion of any Indian artists could lead future art scholars to believe that Indians were content with the status quo, or that they did not engage with the struggle in any way.

In their book, *Between union and liberation* (2004), authors Marion Arnold and Brenda Schmahmann deal with the period 1910 until 1994 and their self- declared aim is to bring the work and lives of South African women visual artists to the attention of the western world. The impression that an outsider would get is that South Africa had several white women artists and a handful of black ones. There is no mention of Indian artists even though women like Jawahirilal were working before 1994. Several black women who are not artists but craftswomen or members of craft collectives are included, indicating that no exacting criteria existed for inclusion in the book. Many of the artists featured also appear in the previously mentioned book by Arnold.

Schmahmann, in *Through the looking glass* (2004) considers the different ways in which South African women artists represent themselves. She has included a brief biography and two artworks of Jawahirlall's. Her in-depth analysis of the artwork in order to understand its meaning is appropriate treatment for an artist who has had more recognition outside South Africa, than in it.

The book *10 Years 100 Artists: Art in a Democratic South Africa* (2004) edited by Sophie Perryer is much more inclusive, featuring artists Sharlene Khan, Rookaya Gardee, Usha Seejarim and examples of their work. The collaborative nature of this book, in which 15 writers/curators each chose six or seven artists that they considered worthy of inclusion, allows for a broad range of artists. The empowering of different writers also offers an opportunity for those who would not normally be heard to express their own views, and present artists that might not have been included. As one of the writers and chosen artists, Khan's artwork is featured, along with several critical pieces of her writing. According to Khan,

she purposely chose to include Indian, coloured and black women artists, while she herself had been chosen by Khwezi Gule, a long- time friend and acquaintance (2011:9). Her insight makes it clear that the inclusion of selectors, artists and historians from 'other' communities can make a significant difference to the recording of art history.

South African art now (2009), also by Sue Williamson, again features no Indian women artists, although the Muslim twins Hasan and Husain Essop are included. It might be important to note that Indian male artists suffer a similar degree of invisibility within art publications. A case in point is Clifford Charles, who was the first Indian artist to graduate from the University of the Witwatersrand and who represented South Africa in the 2003 Venice Biennale (Khan 2011). He has worked consistently for over twenty years and regularly holds exhibitions, yet there is no mention of him in South African art publications.[5] Williamson claims that her book is a comprehensive record of artists working in different fields, such as painters, sculptors, photographers and performance artists and that political correctness is ensured by including men, women, black, white, coloured and gay artists (2009). The continued omission of Indian women could be attributed to their numbers, since the Indian population is a minority in South Africa. Yet another minority group, white women, who are a fraction of 9 % of the population appear to dominate the South African art world (VANSA).

Several key writers and scholars provide the theoretical framework for my research. They reflect the epistemology concerning the making, function and understanding of culture in a developing country.

Post-apartheid South Africa has often been hailed as a multicultural nation, within which Indians are positioned as a cultural and ethnic group separate from the mainstream western world. Thus South African Indians characterised by a set of stereotypical and generalised assumptions are often regarded as the 'Other' in cultural discourses. Edward Said explains the theory of the 'Other' in his book *Orientalism* (1978). He calls orientalism "a set of ideas that the West has about Asiatics, Muslims, Arabs, the Middle East, India and China" (Said 1978:1). Historically these places were viewed by Europeans as "places of romance, exotic beings, haunting memories and landscapes, and remarkable experiences" but this was coloured with doctrines of superiority, various kinds of racism and imperialism (Said 1978:8). Asiatics were also believed to be spiritual, primitive, unchanging and childlike (Said 1978:150). Women were usually regarded as subordinate, stupid, sensual and willing (Said 1978:207). In many ways these views were a justification on the part of the West for their colonial and racist practises.

The culture of colonised peoples was usually dismissed as inferior and these views were supported by leading intellectuals. A case in point is found in this statement by the Victorian art critic John Ruskin in which he denounces Indian art: "the Indian will not draw a form of nature but an amalgamation of monstrous objects. To all facts and forms of nature it wilfully and resolutely opposes itself, it will not draw a man but an eight armed monster, it will not draw a flower but only a spiral or a zigzag" (quoted by Rao 2007:18).

Different race groups are believed to have certain innate 'essential' qualities which affect their actions. In her book *Essentially speaking* (1989) Diana Fuss

defines essentialism as "a belief in the real true essence of things, the invariable and fixed properties which define the 'whatness' of a given entity" (1989: xi). An example of this can be found in the belief that men and women each have unchanging and inherent qualities that informs their actions (Fuss 1989: xi). An example of this essentialist thinking was demonstrated by the past curator of the Durban Art Gallery, Jill Addleson, when she claimed that artworks produced by the Indian students of UDW were not 'Indian' enough (Naidoo 2010:4).

The theories of bell hooks are pertinent to this study especially her views on black feminist art practise. In her book *Art on my mind* (1995) bell hooks examines how class, race and gender impact on the creativity and artistic production of African American women. As immigrants and part of a minority group in American society, they share many similarities with South African Indian women. Hooks points out the importance of being raised in an environment where art is valued in order to make, appreciate or write about art (1995:117). She writes, "if all black children were daily growing up in environments where they learned the importance of art and saw artists that were black, our collective black experience would be transformed" (hooks 1995:5).

The exposure to visual art can be linked in many ways to class, which is determined by wealth, education and family background amongst other factors. According to hooks, discussions about race and gender within the art world are more acceptable than discussions about class, which is still a taboo subject (1995:108). A level of class privilege appears to be especially necessary in art writing or in critical thinking, while art making can still include those from disadvantaged backgrounds (hooks 1995:108).

In discussing the limitations that women artists face, hooks believes that the lack of space and time are the most important. Many women prioritise their partners' or families' needs before their own, and feel guilty when allowing themselves time to reflect and create (1995:127). Hooks writes, "Despite feminist thinking and practise, women continue to feel conflicted about the allocation of time, energy, engagement and passion" (1995:127).

Art critic and curator Geeta Kapur, in her book *When was modernism* (2000), discusses how Indian artists have moved from tradition to modernity and to the contemporary. She details how post-colonial India sought to forge a national identity by turning to indigenous Indian craft (2000:271). As a developing country, however, artists were increasingly influenced by the West and by modern and contemporary art which led to the emergence of new art forms. Kapur examines the development of Indian women visual artists such as Nalini Malini, Arpita Singh and Nasreen Mohamedi. Kapur's writing is pertinent to this study since it deals with women living in a similar post-colonial, developing world, where tradition and contemporary practises clash.

As far as research methodology is concerned in this study I use qualitative methods. This method "attempts to collect rich descriptive data in respect of particular phenomenon or context with the intention of developing an understanding of what is being observed or studied" (Maree 2007:50). This methodology also deals with the manner in which individuals or groups view or understand the world and construct meaning out of their experiences (Maree 2007:50).

Several methods were employed to gather the relevant data: a study of the literature, historical research and in-depth interviews. The literature study provides a background to the South African art world and the position of women in it. The historical research contextualises the South African Indian community as a part of the wider South African culture. Maree writes, "historical research involves locating events in time and place and requires sensitivity towards understanding the context within which an event took place or developed over time" (2007: 73). Without this knowledge it is difficult to understand the mind set of South African Indians towards visual art.

A major portion of my research involved case study research. Smith describes case studies as being "intensive descriptions and analyses of a single unit or bounded system such as an individual, a programme, event, group, intervention or community" (cited in Henning 2004:78). In order to acquire these intensive descriptions and 'thick' data, I conducted case studies of five female artists who are well established professionally. The methods of data collection used to build an in-depth profile of each artist consisted of interviews and the use of secondary sources such as newspaper articles, critical reviews, exhibition catalogues and online articles. This approach is advocated by Maree who writes that the key to the "case study method is the use of multiple sources and techniques in data collection" (2007:76).

The aim of the qualitative interview is to "obtain rich descriptive data that will help ... to understand the [artists'] construction of knowledge and social reality" (Maree 2007:87). I used a discursive interview method although I incorporated some elements of a standardised interview by having a prepared set of questions

and controlling the focus of the topic (Henning 2004:57). In the discursive interview, the interviewer is flexible, open and uses the set questions as a guideline only which suits the varied nature of each individual artist's experiences. This is a semi-structured interview since the respondent is also allowed to ask questions, offer new information or points of view. The interviews served to gather as much data as possible about the education, life experiences, chronology of each artist, as well as social and economic factors that may have impacted on them.

The five artists that are included in this study are Lalitha Jawahirilal, Usha Seejarim, Simmi Dullay, Sharlene Khan and Reshma Chhiba. I met with and interviewed Khan and Dullay. Chhiba and Seejarim live in Johannesburg and they answered my questions by email. Jawahirilal lives in India and chose not to discuss her work with me. Information about her was found in printed interviews and articles. Issues of trust are paramount when personal information is shared and I ensured that facts were recorded correctly and that all information remained within the boundaries of academic research. Since a profile and biography of each artist appears in the study, anonymity is not possible but I endeavoured to present them and their work as honestly as possible.

Chapter one provides the background for the study of South African Indian women artists with regard to early education and training opportunities in the arts. The South African Indian community is not a homogeneous group and is divided internally by different religious beliefs, languages and classes. These factors, together with the influence of the modern western world as well as traditional and

cultural expectations give each Indian artist a different outlook. I examine the place of visual art in the Indian community and discuss a few pioneering artists.

In chapter two I present the case study of artist Lalitha Jawahirilal since she is the oldest of the five artists. I briefly discuss her biography including her decision to leave South Africa because of apartheid. An analysis of *Oh South Africa you've turned my world completely upside down* is included since this artwork hangs in the South African National Gallery. I chose to discuss *Oh goddess of African soil, Manasa the serpent god bothers me sometimes: please intervene,* as it is one of the few to allude to her Hindu background. Jawahirilal's artworks can be read as autobiographical and I examine *I dip my feet in wild waters* and *The Exile Returns* both of which reflect her sense of displacement and disillusion with South Africa after her return from exile.

Chapter three deals with the life and work of Simmi Dullay who grew up in Denmark within a politicised exile community. The artworks that I chose to include here, *African Eve* and *Motherland,* are expressions of Dullay's views about colonialism and the exploitation of women. Dullay's 2012, exhibition featured several political activists and I discuss one of these - *Angela Davis.* The sense of alienation felt by Dullay on returning to South Africa is captured in *Strangers in their own land,* and I have used this artwork to discuss her experience of exile.

Chapter four is the case study, of Usha Seejarim including a brief mention of her numerous public commissions. I have analysed her video *Two Rooms and a kitchen,* since it documents the forced removal of Indians from Fietas to Lenasia.

Her installation *Motherland,* is also an attempt to capture the insecurities of the immigrant Indian community. *Mine over matter* is part of a series of works that Seejarim uses to explore her complex identity. I included the sculpture *Three sisters in law,* which examines the gender roles, work and domesticity – all issues relevant to my research.

The outspoken artist Sharlene Khan is the subject of chapter five. Much of her work deals with urban street culture and I have included two works that reflect this: *Hush little baby* and an installation *Two fish and five loaves*. *Modern Urban Westernised Bitch,* is analysed here because it explores the different stereotypical roles assigned to women. The issues of race within the South African art world are discussed in attempting to understand the meaning behind *Doing it for daddy*.

Chapter six presents the case study of the youngest artist Reshma Chhiba. Chhiba's many years of training as a Bharatha Natyam dancer have influenced her art and this is evident in *Kali Tandava* which uses dance to tell a story. The series of four photographs, *Unawakened, Unbridled, Restrained* and *Stripped* explore Chhiba's concern with the restrictions imposed on women's sexuality. Chhiba has co-opted the image of the Hindu goddess Kali as a symbol to empower women. Her controversial installation *Come inside* is included since it serves as a talking point for issues of gender, sexuality and women's empowerment.

The conclusion offers a critical analysis of the information gathered and aims to answer some of the questions posed. The case studies are critically analysed and I discuss similarities, differences and common viewpoints which may help to understand some of the artistic practises of Indian women.

ENDNOTES

1. Indians make up only 2.6 % of the South African population.
(www.southafrica.info/about/people/population)
2. VANSA does not name the eight Indian artists in its survey. As a statistical
research paper- it does not name any of the artists regardless of colour.
3. I chose to limit my research to five artists since I had to consider the
requirements of the length of the dissertation. Choosing less than five would have
given us less information and more than five – would have made this study too
long.
4. Nasan Pather was Senior lecturer at the Michaelis School of Fine Art (UCT)
until 2010.
5. Clifford Charles is a well- established artist working in London. His latest
exhibition 'Less Ness' (October 2011) featured his signature ink drawings on
paper.

CHAPTER 1

The development of a modern South African Indian cultural identity

 In this chapter, I discuss how a modern South African Indian identity emerged. I show how this identity was influenced by education, western society, class inequities and African culture, coupled with an Indian cultural and traditional heritage. I intend to provide a historical overview of the art department at University of Durban-Westville and the development of some of the pioneers of the visual arts. The background provided by this chapter should provide a context for the closer examination of Indian women as producers of culture.

1.1 SOUTH AFRICAN INDIANS

In 1860, the British brought the first Indians to South Africa to work as indentured labourers on their extensive sugar plantations in Natal (http://www.sahistory.org.za/indian-indentured-labour-natal-1860-1911). In this section I examine the identity of the Indians who initially came to South Africa. They were a diverse group of people and not the homogenous group that most South Africans believe them to be. The indentured labourers were mainly from the Hindu faith and spoke either the Tamil, Telegu or Hindi language. The passenger Indians who later came to Africa as traders, priests and business men were often Muslim or Gujarati (http://www.sahistory.org.za/indian-indentured-labour-natal-1860-1911).[1]   The rigid caste system followed in India meant that

indentured and passenger Indians were further divided by class. When they left India, they were forced to abandon caste since as an alien group in a strange land they had to forge new relationships with their fellow Indians. "Language and religion survived as important building blocks of a new identity and many Indians continued to define themselves as Hindu, Muslim or Christian while caste evolved into a hierarchy of class" (Desai & Vahed 2007:188). These hierarchies resulted from lingering notions of superiority especially from the passenger Indians. Whether they were from the well-educated Brahmin caste or the wealthy Muslim business traders, they saw themselves as belonging to a higher class than those who were labourers.

 Initially very few women came to South Africa and those who did, worked in the fields alongside men or in the homes of white employers as nannies and cooks. They were paid less than men and were subject to violence and sexual abuse from both their employers and husbands (Desai & Vahed 2007: 18, 19). A strongly felt response to the dehumanising and brutal conditions of indenture was the determination to build a family (Desai & Vahed 2007: 192). After indenture, as the Indian population grew more settled and the proportion of women increased, the 'moral family' became a feature of the Indian community. The extended family sought to recreate a sense of the home and cultural identity that had been lost, providing solace, affirmation and dignity (Desai & Vahed 2007: 193).

In examining the changing roles of Indian women within the family since indenture, Jagganath, points out how the "manipulation of scriptural laws and the reinforcement of patriarchal controls" shaped the conservative roles and traditional expectations of Indian women (2011: 4). When Indian families

established themselves and settled into a life regulated by religious beliefs and traditional cultural values, they also created clear gender divisions and recreated patriarchal beliefs,

> While sons were expected to cope with larger, more worldly issues such as paid employment, education and business, daughters and daughters-in-law were expected to epitomise purity and tradition under the scrutiny of mothers and mothers-in-law, the perpetuators of subservient behaviour (Jagganath 2011: 5).

Women had no value or status within this community except in relation to men as mothers or wives. Over a period of time western influences, greater access to education and the gradual erosion of conservative beliefs led to many changes in the lives of Indian women.

This study will examine how this patriarchal and conservative community affected Indian women, who from around 1960 onwards entered tertiary institutions, the work place and the professions. For those Indian women from the poorer classes employment was an economic necessity intended to contribute to the survival of the household. This challenge to patriarchal families, where the roles of mothers and daughters were firmly ingrained led to much conflict and anxiety (Jagganath 2011: 9). Even in the present day, Indian women have to tread a careful path between an Indian identity and a modern, westernised identity, if they do not want to alienate their family and community. Indian women are encouraged to pursue higher education and choose suitable professions, especially those that confer status and economic stability, such as teaching, practising law or medicine. At the same time they are also expected to marry, raise and care for

children and maintain their cultural identity. There is a belief among the Indian community that "it is clearly the responsibility of the Indian women to uphold culture" (Radhakrishnan 2003: 12).

The identity of South African Indians have been shaped by these many factors - patriarchal families, hierarchies of class, religious and cultural belief systems. In recent times the effects of apartheid, better education and increasing wealth have changed the status of most Indians. According to a survey conducted by the HSRC in 2008, only 6% of Indians regard themselves as lower class, while 28% see themselves as working class. The majority of Indians consider themselves middle class (46%) while a relatively large number, 15% classify themselves as upper middle class (www.hsrc.ac.za/HSRCreview article.172.phtml).

1.1.1   Pursuing education

The position of early immigrants was tenuous since it was expected that they would work for their period of indenture and then return to India. However, as more Indians chose to accept a second period of indenture in return for land parcels and others found more opportunities for the future here, the status of Indians changed. Over a period of time, their numbers grew and those with families sought a better life for their children and they believed that education was the key to that life. Many indentured people "saw in education an escape for their children from a life of labour and the limited horizons of the plantation" (Desai & Vahed 2007:184). The first school for Indians was established in 1867 by Christian missionaries and by 1883, there were 21 mission schools in Natal (Desai

&Vahed 2007:184). Once the missionaries realised that all their efforts were not resulting in the conversion of Indian students to Christianity, these numbers dwindled (Desai & Vahed 2007:184). While the Indians wanted education for their children, most of them clung tenaciously to their religious beliefs.

In 1878, the Government became involved in establishing schools for Indian children by subsidising their costs and in 1885 there were 24 state aided schools.[2] But fear that education would create 'unrealistic expectations among Indians' led to the closure of many schools and restrictions against those who wanted to study further than Standard 7 (Desai & Vahed 2007:184).

These developments did improve the standard of schooling for Indian children but for girls, there were other problems that kept them out of the classroom. The Indian community had very patriarchal attitudes towards women irrespective of language or religion and shared the common belief that women had no need for formal western education requiring only domestic, cooking and child rearing skills (Pillay 1967:176). In poorer homes, school fees were unaffordable and parents usually chose to educate their sons. They believed that boys would need education and skills to find employment whereas girls were destined for marriage (Pillay 1967:176). In 1885, the total enrolment of Indian scholars was 1480 and only 223 of those were girls (Pillay 1967:179). Parents were also reluctant to send their daughters to schools where boys outnumbered girls and where all staff was male, since there were no female teachers (Pillay 1967:176).

Two girls-only schools were later opened in Durban and Pietermaritzburg; and female teachers were brought in from India. This led to a gradual increase in the

number of girls being educated. This was a very slow process since the patriarchal mind set of the community was difficult to change. Education for Indians was very basic, consisting of reading, writing and arithmetic with sewing for girls and woodwork for boys. The reluctance of the government to provide high schools or tertiary institutions can be summed up in the words of school inspector Charles Loram who in 1913 stated,

> All you boys want to go into an office, and the girls want to do fancy work at home...We are to keep the offices for the white boys, and thus it will come about that you Indians will have to work by your hands ... go in for manual training. It is in that way that you will earn your living and the sooner you realise that, and the sooner your education is directed in that way the better (Desai & Vahed 2007:184).

Loram's colonial view on the education of black children has been well documented and he believed that it was necessary to develop a system to train them to live in a modern society while limiting any challenge they would pose to white control (Davis 1976: 87-99).[3]

In 1929, several prominent Indian families banded together to establish Sastri College, a high school for boys and in 1930 Durban Indian Girls High school was opened (Vahed, Desai & Waetjen 2010:122). Sastri College offered a basic teacher training course and later, part time university courses (Rambiritch 1962:3).

Schooling for Indian children continued to be plagued by lack of adequate funding, poor facilities, and teachers who had no proper training. In 1944 the Wilks Commission reassessed the education system in the Province of Natal, and this led to some important changes. School attendance was now made compulsory

until the age of 13, school meals were provided, a co-educational teacher training college was established (1951) and more resources were allocated to Indian schools (Rambiritch 1962:3). In order to provide skills training, the M.L. Sultan Technical College was opened in 1954 with funds from Malukmahomed Lappa Sultan and land supplied by the Durban City Council (www.dut.ac.za/sites/default/files/DUT_100.pdf). Those Indian parents who had the means sent their children abroad, usually to India or England, to acquire a university education. In the 1920's the University of Fort Hare, intended for Black students, began accepting Indian students, leading to a rapid increase in the number of professional Indians (Vahed, Desai & Waetjen 2010:122).

Although indenture ended in 1911, Indians were only granted permanent status as South Africans in 1961 and the National Party set up the South African Indian Council in order to administer the affairs of Indians (www.indiainsouthafrica.com/india-in-south-africa/indian-community.html.) Indian education was brought under formal state control following the 'separate but equal' policy advocated by apartheid (Moodley 2012: 63). Accordingly a separate university named University College (UNICOL) was opened for Indians on Salisbury Island in 1961 (Vahed, Desai & Waetjen 2010:241).[4] The demand for tertiary education led to this institution being moved to Chiltern Hills in 1972 and being renamed, University of Durban-Westville (UDW). This institution was to prove important in the Indian community, not just as a centre of learning but also as a site for mobilisation in the struggle against apartheid.

1.1.2   Creating a cultural identity

The alien and hostile African landscape that the Indian immigrants found themselves in led to their attempting to recreate familiar cultures and traditions. Sudesh Mishra, an academic and the writer of *Diaspora Criticism*, refers to this as creating 'cultural markers' which "transform alienating territory into hospitable terrain" (quoted in Desai & Vahed 2007: 413). One way in which they did this was to build shrines, temples or mosques, most of which initially were no more than single-roomed shacks. As communities slowly prospered, these evolved into more elaborate structures resembling those in India. Wealthier Indians who could travel to India brought back religious icons and imagery which were circulated or reproduced locally. Other forms of culture, such as traditional dance, music and dress were similarly kept alive. However, by 1913 when Indian immigration ended, most Indians had been in South Africa for about 50 years and for many of them India "had no real tangible existence in their socio-political consciousness ... [and] existed as a pure imaginary space of epic plenitude" (Vijay Mishra quoted in Desai & Vahed 2007: 413).

Over a period of time South African Indian culture, religious practises and traditions evolved to create a hybrid identity. According to Bill Freund this was not a duplicate of any particular Indian society but a "creolised world that reflected mutual influences among Indian people and interaction with White, Coloured and African people in the new environment" (cited in Desai & Vahed 2007:213).

In her book *Appropriately Indian* Radhakrishnan states: "the end of apartheid opened up space for the renegotiation of Indianness as a primarily cultural, rather than racial, identity" (2011:15). She believes that for many "Indianness not only defined a set of cultural and religious values and a sense of connection and heritage to a land far away but also provided an ethnic identification in an increasingly multicultural terrain" (Radhakrishnan 2011:15). For those upwardly mobile Indians seeking to escape their working class origins, the claim to an ancient cultural heritage which encompasses classical dance, literature, music and philosophy is one way to gain middle class respectability (Thomas Blom Hansen quoted in Radhakrishnan 2011:183).

While the views of Radhakrishnan and Hansen may hold true for some Indians, it is not true for all South African Indians. There are just as many of them who see themselves as South African first and foremost and believe that India and Indian culture have little place in their daily lives. They are usually people who grew up in multicultural areas or those with little or no affiliation to any Indian religion. The struggle against apartheid politicised many Indians who identified themselves as black and ignored cultural differences to fight for equality.

The complex nature of a South African Indian identity has informed the work of many artists and this will be explored in greater detail in the following chapters.

1.2   VISUAL ART IN THE SOUTH AFRICAN INDIAN COMMUNITY

In Indian culture in South Africa visual art has seldom been regarded as important. In 1988, when V. Daya and T.H. Matthews categorised the artworks

collected by Indians in South Africa it was clear that for most of these collectors art is very narrowly defined. Nearly all the objects included are of religious deities intended to be part of a shrine for worship or displayed in the home to show pious reverence (Daya & Matthews 1988:13). These paintings and sculptures were imported from India and follow a traditional prototype that has remained unchanged over the years (Daya & Matthews 1988:13).

These types of religious artworks produced for the decoration of temples and mosques, probably provided the earliest outlet for artistic or creative Indians. There are few records of such artists or craftsmen, but one who was well known was Kistappa Reddy (1863-1941), a builder from India who successfully recreated temple domes and arches from memory. He was also a talented sculptor of Indian deities whose work appeared in several temples in Durban (Desai & Vahed 2007:235).

The lack of formal training in western visual arts did not stop those who felt compelled to make art. Ramsamy and Lutchman Pillay were the twin sons of indentured labourers, born in about 1890 and were both self-taught artists (Desai & Vahed 2007: 64). Lutchman was well known for painting a life-size portrait of his mother (fig 1), as well as those of Sir Srinivasa Sastri and Swami Shankeranand (fig 2). Ramsamy was also a renowned water colourist and worked as a cartoonist for *The Natal Witness* in the 1930s (Desai & Vahed 2007: 64).

Ebrahim Badsha, (b.unknown; died 2003) taught himself to draw and do graphic design at an early age. In the 1950s he founded the Bantu Indian Coloured Art Association, a community-based art organisation, in order to unite like-minded

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black artists. He was assisted by artists Scott Macnab and Nils Solberg, who also painted Badsha's portrait (fig 3) (Vahed, Desai & Waetjen 2010:275). Although Badsha was largely excluded from South African art history, he and his peers had great influence on the black artists of the 1960s. He was a close friend of Dumile Feni who lived in his house for several months in 1966 while he was preparing for an exhibition in Durban (Brodie 2010). Badsha also painted a portrait of Chief Albert Luthuli who sat for him during the time that he (Luthuli) was banned. Regrettably, this painting has since gone missing. His son Omar Badsha is an acclaimed photographer whose 2010 exhibition 'Under the Umdoni Tree' showcased both his and his late father's work (Brodie 2010).

One of the earliest known Indian woman artists in Durban was Zainab Reddy (born 1930). She was born in India and studied at the School of Art in Bombay (now Mumbai). She immigrated to Durban in 1955 after marrying a South African doctor (Vahed, Desai & Waentjen 2010: 274). Reddy was active in the art world, teaching, painting and participating in exhibitions in Bloemfontein, Kimberly, Stellenbosch and Queenstown (Berman 1983: 358). She taught Art Education at the University College for Indians before immigrating to London in 1967 (Proud 2008:53). Along with Ebrahim Badsha, she was one of the first black artists to have work exhibited in the Durban Art Gallery (fig 4) (Vahed, Desai & Waentjen 2010:275). Her work received critical acclaim although it was always seen as Oriental and filled with eastern symbolism. Esme Berman states,

> Such works, while making use of figurative conventions which present no difficulty to the Western eye, are subtly different in spirit and their metaphorical content is not easy for South Africans to comprehend. Some of the perplexity is occasioned by the artist's personal symbolism; the rest

is founded in the unfamiliar philosophical intention governing the work (1983: 358).

It is clear that Berman believed that just because Reddy was Indian, the work she produced contained some essentially mystical quality that South African viewers could not discern, and that there is no rational thought behind the image.

Ranjith Kally (born 1925) began taking photographs at social functions to supplement his income as a factory worker. His proficiency as a photographer (fig 5) led to him working as a photographer for *Drum* and *Golden City Post* between 1956 and 1985. Together with photographers like Bob Gosani and Peter Magubane he documented the daily lives of black South Africans. He has since published several books of his photographs and photographed many well-known politicians and personalities (Proud 2008: 46).[5]

The success of the commercial and industrial courses taught at the M.L. Sultan Technical College led to the introduction of art-based courses like Commercial Art and Design and Industrial Clothing Design in the late 1960s. One of these early students, Nanda Sooben, now a successful cartoonist and painter, recalls:

> I wanted to study fine art but it was pointed out by 'all and sundry' that it wouldn't put 'bread on the table'. I looked at graphic design as an option. Natal Technical College, as it was called then, was the best in the country when it came to graphic design but it was a 'no-go area' for me as I was 'NON-WHITE'. M.L. Sultan was in its infancy as a tertiary college... I enrolled at M.L. Sultan where I studied Graphic Design which was called Commercial Art then (Wells 2011).

Sooben went on to work as a cartoonist for *The Post* and *The Daily News* at various times and a recent cartoon of Barack Obama is exhibited at The Smithsonian in Washington. He held an exhibition of his watercolours titled

'Cato- Manor–People are living there' (fig 6) in New York and painted a 10 metre mural for the Rio 92 World in Brazil where he also lived and worked (Wells 2011). However, despite these successes, he has never been asked to exhibit any work in Durban, his birthplace.

1.3   ART EDUCATION FOR INDIANS

1.3.1 University College for Indians

The establishment of the UNICOL as a separate university for Indians was regarded with suspicion and mistrust by the Indian community. Mr P R Pather, president of the Natal Indian Organisation claimed to have unanimous support from the Indian community when he said that they rejected a separate university for Indians. Dr. G M Naicker, president of the South African Indian Council called it a 'tribal university' which would be a 'centre for the indoctrination of the Indian mind' (Moodley 2012:68). Badat explains the nature of segregated (ethnic) universities as attempts to control the education of Blacks and reproduce racial and cultural domination (2009: 59, 61) (Badat in Moodley 2013: 59). Despite initial protests from the Indian community at the segregation in education the University had 1200 students by 1966 (Vahed, Desai & Waetjen 2010:241).

The University College's Faculty of Education offered courses in Art and Craft from the mid-1960s onwards, as one of the requirements for those studying to be teachers. The idea behind this teaching was to equip young teachers to encourage creativity in their pupils (Lodge 1969:16). Those young Indians who were talented at art but who needed the security of a job chose to study as teachers. Most taught

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art and craft at primary schools while some taught at the few high schools that offered art, especially from the mid-1970s onwards. At the first National Indian Arts and Crafts Exhibition held in 1969, the works of scholars and students in tertiary institutions were displayed. The art and craft exhibited included silk screened prints, paintings, embroidery, drawings as well as wood and metal hand crafted items (Anon 1969:167-168). These early beginnings revealed a great deal of talent and paved the way for a greater involvement in visual art.

In 1962, the Department of Art History was opened under the leadership of Cassim Mahomed Lakhi who had a B.Com Degree but was passionate about art. He headed the art department until 1980, by which time he had obtained a Master's Degree in Fine Arts from Natal University (www.sahistory.org.za/pages/...lakhi). He was especially drawn to Islamic art and calligraphy and was instrumental in establishing the Department of Oriental Studies at University College in 1966. It offered a course exploring the Islamic and Indian contributions to philosophy, art and culture as well as a course in Sanskrit, Arabic and Hindi (Heystek May 1966:17). The library boasted an extensive collection of art books, especially those dealing with Oriental art.

By the time this college moved to Westville and became University of Durban-Westville (UDW) in 1972, the Fine Art department had grown and was quite well established.

1.3.2 Art at the University of Durban-Westville

The Fine Art department at UDW, which at one point was the only tertiary institution for Indians studying towards degrees in fine art, warrants closer

inspection. In this section I will discuss some of the issues students faced as well as some of the female graduates who excelled in visual art.

Unlike UNICOL, the art department at UDW was modern, with large studios and state of the art equipment (Moodley 2012:87). The curriculum included sculpture, printmaking, ceramics and for a short period, jewellery design (Moodley 2012:82). The history of art curriculum had from the outset, under Lakhi's leadership, included Islamic and Indian art, together with western art. It set the tone for a curriculum that was markedly different from those at other universities. In 1990, the course was set out thus,

> The first year ... is an introduction to world art (including the art of India, South Africa and Africa). The second year course is equally weighted between Western art ...and Oriental art with special reference to Buddhist art in India and Islamic art. The third year covers the art of the twentieth century in South Africa and the West, and offers a selection of studies in Indian art from the Hindu and Mughal periods, Rajput paintings and the modern era (UDW Department of Fine Art 1990:14).

The outcome of the inclusion of Oriental art into the syllabus was both positive and negative. On the one hand Indian students acquired an appreciation and knowledge of their cultural heritage. On the other, it set them up as 'different' and therefore not on the same level as other South African artists since their Indianness implied that they had to produce a different type of art. Nalini Naidoo points out how the ethnic nature of the university was "deplored by the very community it was intended to serve" (2010:3).

The teaching staff especially in the early 1970s was overwhelmingly white and all the students were Indian. The South African Indian was thus positioned as having a separate cultural identity from other South Africans. In 1984, the university

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became an autonomous institution and began admitting students of all races which led to a gradual change in the ethos of the university (www.casa-vsa.org.za/General%20Information.htm).

As graduates of the university returned as lecturers an increasing political awareness marked the atmosphere at the racially diverse university. Vedant Nanackchand (born 1955) exemplified this idea of an influential and politically aware lecturer. He graduated from UDW with an Honours Degree in Fine Arts in 1978. He was awarded a British Council scholarship to study Art and Design in London in 1980-81 (www.sahistory.org.za/people/vedant-nanackchand). Many of his works reflect his concerns with the struggle for human rights. *The Purple Shall Govern* (1991) (fig 7) represents the key players in the fight for freedom: Archbishop Tutu, Archbishop Dennis Hurley and others covered in purple dye. The weapons used by the Security police to disperse protesters, that is, tear gas and water cannon laced with purple dye were well known. The dye was meant to mark protesters making it easy for the police to identify and detain them, and 'the purple shall govern' became a popular resistance phrase.

Kiren Thathiah (born 1959) who graduated from UDW in 1983 and went on to lecture there, also had a major influence on the work of students. Thathiah's works exemplified by *Transitions* (fig 9) reflects a concern with western, contemporary art and a "new South Asian African consciousness" (Pather 2008:10). This work features a landscape from which vaguely Indian symbolic shapes emerge. Thathiah points out that as Indian artists working at that time there as a critical debate around the issue of how one dealt with 'Indianness' within one's artworks. He states,

There were a few people who took their work into a mode that could be described as obviously Indian, but generally it was very low key. We tended to reject the constricting identities prescribed by apartheid and reacted negatively to essentialist definitions of who we were (Pather 2008: 10).

By the 1980s students, influenced by the growing feelings of dissatisfaction with apartheid, became increasingly politicised and the University became a site of the struggle. The campus was heavily policed and "the consequences of the struggle were severe - expulsions, bannings, detentions, teargassing, beatings and closure of the university" were common (Reddy quoted in Naidoo 2010:3). Not wanting to not lend credibility to the 'separate but equal' apartheid policies, students chose to behave in a spirit of non-cooperation. This entailed, among other things, not attending graduation ceremonies and for art students, refusing to exhibit their work in Durban (Pather 2008:10).

Avitha Sooful who is now a member of the Management Committee of the South African National Association of Visual Arts (SANAVA) as well as Senior lecturer and Head of Department at Vaal University of Technology graduated from UDW in 1986 (http://afh.org.za/avitha-sooful). She remembers her student days as "being really instrumental in her growth" especially since all the people she encountered were from communities affected by apartheid. She recalls that, "the art department was ... seen as separate. We were seen as trouble causers or anarchists because of our identification with the struggle" (quoted in Pather 2004:2). Avitha Sooful's work for Art for Humanity, a part of the Women for Children portfolio, includes *Children Should be Seen and Heard* (2006) (fig 10) and reflects her concern with human rights (http://afh.org.za/avitha-sooful).

Faiza Galdhari (born 1970) who graduated with a Master's Degree from UDW in 1999, is the only South African born Indian woman to have artwork in the Durban Art Gallery's permanent collection. The two works *Praying Woman* (2001) and *Purdah* (1994) (fig 11) refer to her early years during which she was very focused on the position of Islamic women in our society. Since the Islamic culture forbids representational work, Galdhari has received much adverse criticism for her images. In later works she has chosen to create more symbolic and less representational images. Galdhari has been quoted as saying: "As a mother and an artist I can identify with the struggles of artists within the community because there is no support for them. They are often alienated from the community if the art they produce does not conform to the acceptable stereotype" (Attwood 1991:1). More recently, the failing health of her husband as well as financial difficulties, have prevented Galdhari from being active in the art world (Du Toit 2000).

Galdhari's view that the Muslim community was conservative and unsupportive of its artists, is borne out by the experience of another UDW graduate, Asiyah Swaleh. Her 1988 exhibition titled 'Principles of Lust' explored themes of sexuality and eroticism. She drew inspiration from the 12th century temple sculptures of *Khajuraho* in India which are famous for their erotic content. The images (fig 12) were met with outrage and anger especially from the Muslim community from where she came (Pather 1999:6). No longer active in the art world, Swahleh now works as a Customer Relations Manager for a large insurance company (linkedin).

The Fine Art department at UDW was closed down in 2000 when all tertiary institutions in post-apartheid South Africa underwent major transformations. The University of Natal and UDW were merged in 2004 to create the University of KwaZulu-Natal (Naidoo 2010:1-2). The art department at University of KwaZulu-Natal which is situated on their Pietermaritzburg campus, thus became the only place in KwaZulu-Natal offering a Visual Art Degree. The art department of UDW was too short lived to evolve and grow into the kind of institution which could nurture, support and promote new and emerging visual art and artists in Durban. The isolated nature of the university due to apartheid and the failure of students to participate in exhibitions prevented them from becoming a part of the art world. Many graduates acquired teaching diplomas or retrained for other professions since having a degree in Fine Art did not guarantee employment (Moodley 2012: 265 -266). Pather also points out that the "debilitating effects of segregation, job reservation and the cultural boycott [meant that] they were unable to sustain careers as professional artists" (2008:11). The Indian community itself failed to support its artists. "In the nineteen seventies and nineteen eighties a burgeoning Indian middle class reinforced perceptions of wealth and self-sufficiency" (Pather 2008:11). Due to this perception, there was little support from businesses or other institutions for visual artists.

In this chapter I have attempted to provide a background to the history of the development of the South African Indian community. This history has influenced the modern identity of the women of this community, whose work I will examine more closely in the following chapters.

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ENDNOTES

1. Passenger Indians were 'free' Indians who were not part of the indenture system at all. They paid for their own passage to South Africa and mainly came as traders to serve the needs of the Indian people.

2. State Aided Schools were common in Indian communities and continued until the 1960s. The community contributed funds for the schools and the government contributed either land, premises or some funds.

3. Charles Templeton Loram in his book *The Education of the South African Native* (1917) explains clearly his view of how Natives and Indians should be educated according to a colonialist viewpoint. He believed that if left uneducated blacks would behave like savages and pose a threat to white settlers. Industrial education was his solution - educating blacks in the basics of reading and writing and training them in specific employable skills.

4. The university was opened at Salisbury Island as a temporary measure while suitable land was sought to house the university permanently.

5. Ranjith Kally recently published *Memory against Forgetting* (2014), *Women: South Africans of Indian Origin* (2011) with Dr. Devi Rajab. Previous publications were *Sofiatown Blues* (1994), *From Canefields to Freedom: A Documentary on Indian South African Life* (2000) and Fatima Meer's *Portrait of Indian South Africans* (1969).

CHAPTER 2

Lalitha Jawahirilal

2.1 BIOGRAPHY

Lalitha Jawahirilall is a prolific artist whose determination to make art led her to overcome many obstacles. Born in 1954 in the small town of Ladysmith in Natal during the apartheid era, she recalls a happy early childhood (Oliphant 1989:49). Jawahirilal and her extended family lived in her grandfather's house on a small farm with a stream running close by.

Around the time that she turned 13, this comfortable lifestyle changed completely due to apartheid. Her grandfather's house and land were deemed to be in a white area according to the Group Areas Act, and the family was forced to split up and move to an Indian township (Oliphant 1989:49). The loss of their means of livelihood led her parents who had not had much formal education, to find work in a factory and hotel respectively (Oliphant 1989: 50). This economic hardship was compounded by the descent of her grandfather into alcoholism (Oliphant 1989: 49).

Jawahirilal's early experiences of art cannot be linked to her schooling. She says that "school in South Africa neither encouraged nor generated any creativity in me ... Art did not exist here" (Oliphant 1989:49). She credits her creativity to her family since her uncles were writers and her mother was artistic (Nolte 2001:54). Her early experiences amongst nature on her grandfather's farm also inspired her

creativity. She recalls "I used to go to our region and look at 'art'- look at rocks and look at things on rocks" (Nolte 2001: 54).[1] She taught herself to draw portraits of her family and tried to capture the community life around her on paper. After completing her schooling, her parents had no money for her to study further and so she had to work in a factory. Later she studied nursing and subsequently worked as a nurse in Cape Town.

Jawahirilal had always been politically aware but as a nurse, she became exposed to the extreme suffering caused by apartheid (Oliphant 1989:52). In 1979, she chose voluntary exile and left South Africa for the Middle East (Schmahmann 2004:31). She spent two years living and working just outside Lebanon (Schmahmann 2004:31). After travelling around Europe, she finally settled in England in 1981. However, she admits that "subconsciously I was preoccupied with making pictures" (Oliphant 1989:52). In England, she took advantage of the fact that after three years of living there, she would qualify for free education. During this time she continued nursing, studied art part-time and worked with the South African exile community.

In 1984, she enrolled at the Camberwell School of Arts and Crafts in London to study for a B.A. Degree in Fine Art which she obtained in 1984 (www.afriart.org). Throughout this period she collaborated with writers, musicians, sculptors, painters and photographers from the exiled community. This involvement included raising funds for apartheid victims and organisations as well as holding exhibitions and meetings to support the anti-apartheid movement. These years had a profound influence on her artwork and on her lifestyle choices. As she explored African, Oriental and Latin American art, she began to place more emphasis on

form, texture and colour. The South African artists that she met in exile, namely Dumile Feni, Louis Maqubela and Pitika Ntuli alerted her to the 'possibilities of working symbolically and mythologically without neglecting the social dimension of art' (Oliphant 1989:53).

In 1989, Jawahirilal graduated from the Royal College of Art (London) with a Master's Degree (www.afriart.org). Between 1985 and 1994, she exhibited her works at several venues in and around London including her participation in the 'Artists Against Apartheid' exhibition in the Upper Street Gallery. Outside London, she held solo exhibitions at the Africa Centre in Stockholm, Gallery 21 in Johannesburg and the Galerie Trapez in Berlin. In 1990, she was awarded a residency by the Delfina Studios Trust in London. In 1991 she won the Discerning Eye Award and in 1992, the Pollack Krasner Award (Nolte 2001:55). This was followed by residencies in Germany, Spain and India (www.afriart.org).

During her residency in India in 1993, she followed the dismantling of apartheid systems in South Africa with great hope. She writes, "My only relationship with South Africa at this moment was watching the news in the evenings and to a growing feeling of sadness at being physically apart from my country" (Nolte 2001:56). Jawahirilal subsequently returned to South Africa in 1994, when apartheid was officially abolished. She lectured at UDW from 1994 until 2000 when the art department was closed down. In 2001 she lectured at Monash University in Australia, where she was also artist in residence for six months. In 2002 she was artist in residence at Caversham Press and then Greatmore Studio in Cape Town.

Jawahirilal has designed and executed several murals indicating her interest in public art. In 1994-1996 she researched this topic extensively in her paper titled - The role of public art in a post-apartheid society with special reference to the greater Ladysmith Area.[2] As a student Jawahirilal had studied the work of the Mexican muralists Diego Rivera and David Alfaro Siqueiros who used this accessible art form to spread socialist ideals (Marschall 2002 :211). Jawahirilal believed that the role of murals was to make art available to those people in post-apartheid South Africa who had no access to museums or galleries (Marschall 2002:211). In 1997, she designed several murals for her hometown of Ladysmith (Khan 2002:10). In order to encourage local talent and teach mosaic skills to selected participants, this was organised as a community project. Her concern with the upliftment of those who are disadvantaged has always been central to Jawahirilal's beliefs.

On a personal level, Jawahirilal has always kept her private life and relationships from public knowledge. All that is known about her is that she never married and appears to have pursued her career as an artist and academic to the exclusion of all else. Her ex-student, Sharlene Khan, remembers her dedication to her students, offering her own art materials to those who needed them and allowing them her own home studio when they had work to finish (Khan 2005).

Another integral part of Jawahirilal's life has been her intense spirituality. She claims, "At age 8 years I left my body and experienced freedom of (my) soul travelling to other plains of consciousness. Although I was so young, I was never afraid and accepted my spiritual experiences as part of life" (www.aa-arts.com/lalitha). Her strongly held spiritual beliefs affect her art and lifestyle, and

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in the past ten years she has chosen to settle in Puttaparthi in India (www.artandaesthetic.com/lallitha-jawahirilal). Her recent works feature divine beings, mythological creatures and nature, and reflect her search for spiritual growth. Regardless of where she has lived Jawahirilal has consistently produced and exhibited her art both locally and internationally.

Another reason why Jawahirilal chose to leave South Africa can be found in her disillusionment with the post-apartheid society that she encountered when she returned. She struggled to find permanent employment or adequate financial support for her art. In 2001, she voiced her intention to leave South Africa for good saying it was because she could not pay her bills (Quist–Arcton 2001).

2.2 ARTWORKS

Jawahirilal's artworks can be found in several collections, among them the Iziko Gallery (South African National Gallery), Tatham Gallery, Nelson Mandela Foundation, Monash University Collection (Australia) and the Van Der Ende Collection (The Netherlands). In this section, I shall critically discuss a selection of her artworks in order to better understand her influences, themes and working methods.

Jawahirilal is best known as a painter, working either with oils, watercolours or mixed media but she has also produced several screen prints and etchings. In 1998, she produced *Puddled Sand and Red Ashes*, a photographic documentary on the Kumbh Mela in India.[3] Jawahirilal works in an abstract, almost naive style which is reminiscent of the Expressionists. Similar to the Expressionists

Jawahirilal is deeply influenced by nature, spirituality, colour and the belief that art should be an emotional form of expression. The abstract nature of her work and her reluctance to attribute any particular interpretation to her work makes the understanding of it difficult. The interpretations and critical analysis of the following works are largely my own since most have not been discussed in depth in other texts.

The painting of *Oh South Africa you've turned my World completely upside down* (1996) (fig 12) is part of the permanent collection at the Iziko Gallery (South African National Gallery) and is described by Hayden Proud as 'celebratory' (2008:7). When Jawahirilal returned from exile in 1994, it was to a 'new South Africa', the first democratic elections had taken place and Nelson Mandela was President. This painting reflects her joy at returning home and an optimistic view of South Africa's future. She portrays herself lying on the bank of a river underneath a tree. In many interviews, she has claimed that her happiest memories as a child were of the times she played on the banks of the stream near her home. The white bird could represent a dove thus signifying peace. In a boat are two masks, symbolising differently coloured faces that represent the integration of the different races in South Africa. There are reminders of our violent past in this work, but they appear as subliminal images. In the upper left hand corner is a broken barred window or perhaps prison door. In the lower right hand corner, submerged under the water is a shadowy image of a face. Unlike the other elements in the painting it is not abstracted but looks like a murky photograph.

Jawahirilal's connection to South Africa is a deeply spiritual one, and when she lived in exile the memory of home sustained her (Nolte 2001:56). The bright clear colours and the sense of harmony in this painting echo Jawahirilal's words, "This is where my colour comes from and this is my spiritual home" (Nolte 2001:263). Nolte interprets the two masks on the boat as a symbol for the returning exiles (2001:140). In common with all exiles, Jawahirilal's notions of 'home' are romanticised and optimistic and the early works she painted on her return reflect that. In her video entitled '*Exiles*' she says, "For South Africa, there is always the nostalgic longing for childhood. Days always seem endless yet simmering with hope" (1987).[4] Academic and writer, Polouektova writes that exile and nostalgia are inseparable since the incessant yearning to return home is what distinguishes exiles from émigrés, expatriates or nomads. That longing though is for a remembered past that seldom resembles reality. Childhood is typically the object of such nostalgia "with its carelessness and obliviousness to the passing of time" (Polouektova 2009:439).

The full title of the next artwork is *Oh Goddess of African Soil, Manasa the Serpent God Bothers Me Sometimes, Please Intervene* (fig 13). In this etching, an orange figure of a woman stands with her arms raised, while a dark figure reaches toward her. Above them a vivid sun beats down on them. On the ground is a curious creature with a human face. In the Hindu religion Manasa or Manasha Devi is the folk goddess of snakes. She is worshipped for protection against snakebites, poison and infectious diseases and is usually considered to be unhappy and bad-tempered (Das [Sa]). The creature on the ground is probably intended to represent Manasa. The figure dressed in dark clothes appears to be offering

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something to the distressed woman in orange. Perhaps the figure in black is the "Goddess of African Soil" that Jawahirilal is referring to.

This etching seems to tell of the struggle to overcome the negative/evil forces that can affect one. The African goddess as the embodiment of Africa, and who is responsible for healing shows Jawahirilal's deep connection to her African roots. The Indian folk goddess and the African goddess appear to be opposing forces between which the artist is caught, a reference perhaps to the multiplicity of identities experienced by Jawahirilal. She has always identified strongly with the African landscape and people as well as with her Indian culture and spirituality, both of which are alluded to in this work. Jawahirilal will not attempt to provide rational explanations for her work, she explains her creative process as a continuity of the visions that she has always lived with (Nolte 2001:138). However, her years of study in the artistic traditions of the west do affect the choices that she makes especially in terms of colour, composition and aesthetics. Throughout Jawahirilal's body of work, certain symbols, phrases and images are often repeated.

In the next painting that I am going to discuss, *I Dip my Feet in Wild Waters* (fig 14), many of the phrases and images have appeared in previous works. Nolte describes this 'limited lexicon' of images as the placement of a rudimentary female figure within a land- or seascape beneath a full sun/moon, with a small bird and /or tree/floral motif (2001:138). She compares this imagery with the drawings made by children which feature themselves, sun, bird, tree and horizon (Nolte 2001:138). In this particular painting, an abstract figure of a woman stands

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at the edge of a body of water next to a tree. The sun appears as a bright red ball in the sky and below a boat sails in the water. Across from her is an island or land on which are a plant and a pair of masks, one red and one black. Scrawled across the image are the words, "At Durban 2000 – how to continue -leave for wilderness - live with the snakes – dip my feet in wild waters – then rest".

In 2000, Jawahirilal faced a dilemma when the UDW art department where she had lectured was closed and she lost her job. The phrase "how to continue" indicates her re-evaluation of her circumstances. She had lived in London since 1981 and chose to return to South Africa in 1994 after the advent of democracy. The unexpected job loss and her disillusionment with post-apartheid society led to a reassessment of her decision to live in South Africa. Her struggle to decide whether to leave South Africa and go to the "wilderness" (Australia) and "live with the snakes" (strangers) is clearly portrayed here. In 2001, she went to Australia to lecture at Monash University for six months. The boat is the vessel that takes her to a strange land which is perhaps indicated by the two different masks which reflect two different cultures. The difficulty and stress involved in moving to another country and the need to maintain a career as an artist is contained in the words "then rest" indicating her need for peace and stability. Earlier I discussed the comparison made to children's drawings, (pg. 51) but Jawahirilal's work lacks the most essential item which appears in such early works - a house. While Jawahirilal feels the connection to the physical place - South Africa - she appears to not be at home here.

In contrast to *Oh South Africa you've turned my world completely upside down* , in which similar images appear, this painting is dark and sombre, the masks are no

longer in the boat and the self-image is no longer calmly reclining on the bank. All Jawahirilal's anxiety and concern for the future are reflected in this work. Nolte supports this theory when she writes, "it is difficult to avoid reading such images as direct biographical references to Jawahirilal's own relocation to Africa" (2001:142).

The Exile Returns (fig 15) is a screen print produced during Jawahirilal's residency at Caversham Press in 2002 in Kwazulu Natal after her return to South Africa. However, the return that she describes here is more in keeping with her return from exile in 1994 and may be a newer print of an old image. At the top of the print is a large female figure that extends her arms towards Jawahirilal in welcome. The words "exile returns" are in a bubble between them. Jawahirilal appears small and hesitant, clutching a handbag indicating her status as a visitor or new arrival. In a strip below are images of struggle heroes including Nelson Mandela and Steve Biko. Below that is a blue band covered in randomly worded text, some of which are in speech bubbles. At the bottom of the painting the 'self-image' appears again, first being stroked by a large being and then surrounded by people.

The scrawled text gives some clues to the meaning of the artwork, although many of these have appeared before. "Yesterday was like twenty strange dreams and many thoughts - today a beautiful white light floods the Beloved country - oh South Africa this moon ties me to its anchor". Other phrases that appear here and in at least ten other works as titles or text are: "Oh South Africa, this wind seems so strange, blowing its cold whip at me, this road is long and ardous [sic] how to continue, why live in flesh". There are also references to Manasa and snakes. In

her analysis of Jawahirilal's inclusion of text, Nolte states that they are "written evocations of suspended historical moments - that act as a diary - marking the passage of moments, yet also providing glimpses of a subtle ebb and flow that has little relation to linear progression" (quoted in Schmahmann 2004:34).

In this print, Jawahirilal explores her return to South Africa after the advent of democracy. There are many opposing emotions contained within the image. On the one hand, the struggle heroes, the welcoming arms and the phrase "a beautiful white light floods the beloved country" indicate a positive and happy experience. This is counterbalanced by the phrase "this wind seems so strange" and by her depiction of herself as small and vulnerable. The return after such a long period to a place that had become largely unfamiliar to her was probably as distressing as leaving for exile must have been. Jawahirilal who was around forty when she created this screen print represents herself as childlike to invoke the idea that she was in an early stage of her new life (Schmahmann 2004:34).

Since this image was created soon after Jawahirilal's return from Australia, it would appear that her earlier return from exile (as depicted in fig 13) was a much more joyous occasion. The second return is largely coloured by a sense of foreboding and a more realistic view of what South Africa was like post-apartheid. In many ways Jawahirilal's artwork can be explained by the words of Homi Bhabha who writes, "Remembering is never a quiet act of introspection. It is a painful remembering, a putting together of the dismembered past to make sense of the trauma of the present" (1994:63). The memory that he discusses is that of the history of race and racism (apartheid), colonialism and cultural identity - factors which have all affected the life of Jawahirilal (Bhabha 1994:63).

2.3 SUMMARY

> During my student days and in 80s and early 90s there was also a mixture of dream, symbols, worldly experiences, worship systems etc, we live on this earth and collect a lot of information. I can never be sure and confidently say that this is what I paint about. But nature has always fascinated [me], birds, trees, mythologies all these creep into my work sometimes. I have lived in three continents, and whatever the physical, mental or divine experiences are at that moment I paint about that, it is not conscious but something that comes from within (www.global-art-space.org/lalitha-jawahirilal).

Lalitha Jawahirilal's experiences as a South African Indian woman and visual artist reflect her struggle to overcome the restrictions imposed on her by class, race and gender. Racial discrimination in the form of apartheid had a direct impact on her. The impoverishment of Indian families as they were forced by the Group Areas Act to change from extended family systems to nuclear families, is well documented by Thomas Blom Hansen in his book *Melancholia of Freedom* (2012). Jawahirilal's working class parents could not afford tertiary education and she turned to nursing since it guaranteed a stable and reliable income. For many black South African girls from working class families, art was not a viable career option, leading them to choose careers like nursing, teaching or secretarial work. Given these circumstances, Jawahirilal's commitment to have a career in art and overcome the barriers of class and race required a strong will and determination.

In a documentary titled *The luggage is still labelled: Blackness in South African art* (2003) Vuyile Voyiya and Julie McGee captured some of the frustrations and instances of marginalisation experienced by black artists (Pissarra 2004:183). Jawahirilal is one of the few black female artists that were interviewed and she is

quoted as saying "apartheid is not going to fly out of the window after nine years" (Pissarra 2004:184). The film focuses on the overwhelming dominance of whites in the art world even after the transformation policies of the new government. Fellow artist Berni Searle also makes the point that there are so few women artists of colour and that when references to black artists are made, the assumption is usually that they are male (Pissarra 2004:189). This documentary reveals Jawahirilal's and other black women artists' constant battle against race, gender and class differences.

Jawahirilal's decision to leave South Africa and settle in India, where she has lived for the past eleven years, arose primarily from her frustration over the lack of opportunities. After 2000, she was unable to find any permanent employment here. In an interview in 2001, she claimed that she had fought against apartheid and was not ready for another fight. She went on to say, "I cannot fight alone. We can't do it alone. We are highly qualified. I think we need the whites to talk to us. We need all the universities in South Africa to talk to us, invite us and say we need the Africans, we need the Indians, we need everyone" (Quist-Arcton 2001).

The 'transformation' policies of the post-apartheid government which led to the closing of the art department at UDW played an important part in Jawahirilal's lack of faith in the South African art world. She experienced just how difficult it was to enter other academic institutions which had been 'white'. She said "there is still a great distinction between black artists and white artists [in South Africa] – most of the academics lecturing in art – they are all white or mainly white. Maybe

they have one lecturer on contract who is black or part-time lecturers who may be black" (quoted in Quist–Arcton 2001).

Jawahirilal's experiences as an exile and her frequent travels have led to a sense of dislocation from the different spaces that she has inhabited. Despite her strong childhood attachment to the physical landscape of KwaZulu Natal, her exile has rendered her uncomfortable in post-apartheid South Africa. Jawahirilal's failure to settle in South Africa bring to mind Bhabha's term – 'unhomed'. He writes "to be unhomed is not to be homeless, nor can the unhomely be easily accommodated in that familiar division of social life into private and public spheres" (Bhabha 1994:13). This loss of attachment to one's culture, traditional and personal space can lead to one "becoming vulnerable to the outside world" as Jawahirilal appears to have (Briton 1999: 120). The long periods that she spent studying and working in London, India and Australia led to a solitary existence without family. Jawahirilal's desire for solitude was coupled with her romantic notion of the artist as a loner (Nolte 2001:55). She continues to live this solitary existence, dedicating herself to her art.

The most important aspect of Jawahirilal's art is her spirituality. She writes,

> In art there can be an ideal; all is one, art, identity, spirituality- Creativity and Spirituality are like husband and wife, or mother and child, or God and us. One cannot exist without the other. Creativity needs spirituality to exist (quoted in Nolte 2001:260).

Jawahirilal describes her art making as a product of her visions and her acceptance of an unconscious working process (Nolte 2001:261). She believes that her artworks are a physical expression of the deep spiritual union between herself and "The Greater Supreme Consciousness" (Nolte 2001:264). According to Nolte,

"Jawahirilal has described her own form of working as intuitive, and rejects the need for rational explanation. Yet given the MA degree in painting she received from the Royal College of Art, it is clear that Jawahirilal's intuitive working processes have emerged out of years of painting grounded in Modernist abstraction" (2001:138). I believe like Nolte that no matter how much Jawahirilal is moved to create in a purely instinctive manner, the years of formal art training and theory cannot be ignored or fail to have some impact on the ultimate outcome.

Jawahirilal's commitment to the artistic process remains all important and she is indifferent to the opinion of critics and the reception that her work receives. For the past eleven years, she has chosen to live and paint in India where she has experienced a spiritual growth and a lifestyle that she is much happier with (www.artandaesthetic.com).

ENDNOTES

1. This quote by Jawahirilal may allude to the fact that Ladysmith and the areas
surrounding it have a number of rock paintings.

2. This research paper was written long after Jawahirilal had obtained her
Master's Degree and was possibly related to research that she had undertaken for
the university.

3. In 1998, Jawahirilal travelled to India and while there she used photographs to
capture the spectacle known as Kumbh Mela – an event that occurs every 12 years
when some 100 million Hindus travel to Allahabad to bath in the Ganges River in
a ritual purification.

4. Jawahirilal created the video "*Exiles*" which was shown at the 8th National
Festival of Independent Video in 1987 in the United Kingdom.

CHAPTER 3

Simmi Dullay

3. 1 BIOGRAPHY

Simmi Dullay was born in South Africa in 1973, but left Durban when she was

just four years old. Her father Prithiraj Dullay, a political activist, was forced to

flee with his wife and two small daughters from the ongoing threat of persecution

from the apartheid government. A year earlier, Dullay's father's close friend Steve

Biko had died in police custody and as a member of the Black Consciousness

Movement Dullay was also wanted by the police (Govinden 2010). When a bomb

exploded in their home, the Dullays fled to Tanzania. They later settled in

Denmark, where they lived until 1992 (www.indiansinafrica.co.za/Book -

Reviews/salt-water-runs-in-my-viens). Dullay's formative years were spent there,

attending school and later studying art at the Aarhus Kunst Skole

(www.dullay.com).

While in exile, Dullay's parents continued the struggle from abroad and were

actively involved in the anti-apartheid movement in Denmark. They maintained

close ties with other South African exiles most of whom were part of the Black

Consciousness Movement, or African National Congress (ANC) members and

their families. Dullay's formative years were strongly influenced by politics and

the liberation movement. For Dullay, growing up in Denmark as an Indian had its

own obstacles. She says, "We were never accepted as Danes. I was very conscious

of the racism we experienced" (Mngoma 2011).

When Dullay returned to Durban in South Africa as a nineteen-year old in 1992, she did not feel comfortable in this land whose culture seemed foreign to her (Dullay 2011). In Durban she worked as an art teacher at the R.P. Moodley School for disabled children between 1993 and 1994. Unhappy with the reality of post-apartheid South Africa and nostalgic for Denmark, she returned there in 1995 (Machen 2010). She remained in Denmark for another five years, working at a women's museum, Kvinde Museumet. In 1999, she ran a print workshop for the mentally handicapped at Riskov Psykiatrisk Hospital combining art and therapy (www.durbanmediaproject).

She continued to waver between Durban and Denmark, until in 2000 she chose to settle in South Africa, having made peace with the idea that her home was here. Her family was an important factor in her decision to remain in South Africa. Their shared experience in exile has created a very close bond between her, her parents and her sister. As a single mother, she not only needed their support but also wanted her son to grow up within a loving family (Dullay 2011).

Dullay decided to continue her studies at Durban University of Technology (DUT) where she attained a National Diploma in Fine Art (2003), and later a Bachelor's Degree in Fine Art. During this period she gradually built up a reputation as an artist. She participated in several group exhibitions 'Women's Day- Imvubelo' (2004, Durban Art Gallery), 'Satyagraha Exhibition' (2006 New Delhi), 'Heritage Festival' (2007 Kizo Art Gallery), Red Eye 'Ready' (2009 Durban Art Gallery), and many others.[1] She also held solo shows, 'Terra

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Incognita' at Peter Engblom's Gallery (2005) and 'Exiles and Cultural Intersections' at the DUT Gallery (2010) (www.dullay.com).

In 2010, Dullay completed her Master's Degree in Fine Art at the Durban University of Technology. She is currently employed as a lecturer in Art History and Visual arts at UNISA. Before that, (2011) she lectured at the University of KwaZulu-Natal (UKZN).

3.2 SELECTED ARTWORKS

Dullay works in a variety of different media, using oil painting, photography, video and text, to create multi-layered images. On a personal level, she finds the process of creating, especially when using a painstaking pointillist technique, to be an almost spiritual experience, and one which she finds cathartic (Dullay 2011).

Dullay's passionate involvement in women's rights is obvious from her participation in several related exhibitions; 'My Life: Reflections of Women's Lives' (2003), 'Women's Day Imvubelo' (2004), and 'Urban Women' (2005) amongst others (www.dullay.com). One painting that reflects some of her concerns is *African Eve* (Fig 16) which features a nude image of a young black woman. A map of Africa is behind her, with the map lines also superimposed across her body and the rest of the image. Next to her is a large bowl of apples, one of which is bitten, while planes circle around. At the bottom is a scroll with a

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quote from the singer and poet, Patti Smith, "Jesus died for some bodies' sins, but not for mine. Not for mine."

The map and planes refer to the colonisation of Africa by the West, while Dullay refers to the nude as an African Eve. The quote and the apple allude to the original sin but the implication here is that the sin is colonisation. The map and the planes suggest western technology and science, as well as an idea of power and control. The woman, naked and vulnerable, appears to be the victim of the militant and mechanised West. The woman is subject to the control of the west and her nudity also suggests the western view of her sexual availability. Like the biblical Eve, the subject woman is made to feel that the sin of colonisation is her fault owing to her race. Bhabha explains, "The objective of colonial discourse is to construe the colonised as a population of degenerate types on the basis of racial origin, in order to justify conquest and to establish systems of administration and instruction" (1994:101).

Dullay feels strongly about colonisation and writes that "While colonialism is a thing of the past, its legacy remains entrenched" (simmilunar.blogspot.com). This is evidenced by the fact that while colonialism and apartheid are long past, racism and the exploitation of women still continue. "The stigma attached to being black is etched into flesh, in the same way that a map is upon land, due to the ongoing persecution and imprisonment enforced by colonial, 'post-colonial', neo liberal hegemonic slavery and exploitation, past and present" (Dullay 2006, simmilunar.blogspot.com).

Another work featuring a similar theme is *Motherland* (2009) (Fig 17) which is part of a series titled *Love in Exile*, in which Dullay projected images across the nude bodies of men and women and then photographed them. This particular image features the lower half of a woman's torso, with the map of South Africa superimposed across it. The word 'motherland' is written across her pubic area and refers to this as a site of conception and birth, highlighting the role of women as the creators of life. Motherland also refers to South Africa as the land of our birth, and the origin of all humankind according to Dullay. Ironically, South African Indians are seldom allowed to feel that this land where they have lived for generations is the 'motherland'. Since indenture, various political detractors have called for the South African Indians to return to India.[2]

Dullay also draws comparisons between women's bodies and the land, and writes that "my use of maps projected over female bodies comments on how women and land are made objects to be explored, conquered and exploited" (2010 Press Release www.dut.ac.za/pages/36071).

As an educator involved in teaching Gender Studies, Dullay is concerned that the younger generation of women, born in the 1990s, are not aware of feminist theory or ideals. She uses images of women and their bodies in her art to examine and draw attention to these issues. Some of her work, like *Motherland*, has been deemed too controversial by some Indian audiences and has had to be removed from certain exhibitions (Dullay 2011). This work is reminiscent of Gustave Courbet's, *The origin of the world* (1866), exhibiting the same idea of women's bodies as creators of life. Although Dullay's work lacks the frank eroticism of

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Courbet's, she claims that the sexual and sometimes erotic images that she uses are often misunderstood. The South African Indian community is generally a conservative one in which modesty is emphasized especially in women's appearance. Within the Muslim community, women wear the *hijab* or wear western clothes that cover the chest, most of the legs and often their hair. Older generations of Hindu and Christian women despite following fashion trends, generally dress in a conservative manner. Younger women tend to have fewer inhibitions wearing shorts, midriff bearing tops and bikinis. However, there is a general understanding that nudity, semi-nudity and excessive displays of one's body will be frowned upon within the Indian community. This attitude to women's bodies carries over to the appearance of nude women in artworks, movies and other media.

Dullay believes that these are ways of highlighting issues around women's sexuality, repression or abuse in order to bring them into the open. She states, "I believe that creating images initiates dialogue, making sense of the world and our place in it" (Pillay 2010). She points out that there are not many women talking about the experiences that all women regardless of colour have and that it is only when we become accustomed to certain images that people's perceptions will change.

 In the book, *Grey Areas*, editors Atkinson and Breitz facilitate a discussion about the right of artists of different races to represent each other, especially in terms of women's bodies (1999). Veliswa Gwintsa writes, "In contemporary South Africa … what … remains constant is that to speak on behalf of, whether per agreement

or not, is to declare a position of authority" (Gwintsa in Atkinson & Breitz 1999:143). It becomes necessary, then that Indian women 'speak' for themselves in our post-colonial society and not allow others to declare their authority over them. Dullay is doing what all Indian women artists should do and representing ourselves and our own stories. South African Indian women, especially those in patriarchal communities, seldom discuss or explore identity or sexuality.

When controversy arises around Dullay's work her identity is usually questioned, especially since her name is not typically South African Indian. There is always a sense of disbelief that an Indian woman can create work that is sexually open and uninhibited. This is similar to the outrage levelled against Asiyah Swaleh (see Chapter 1) and later Reshma Chhiba when they addressed similar issues (Chapter 6).

Dullay's strong political convictions, and her attempts to overcome a sense of dislocation brought on by her experience as an exile, are some of the other themes often found in her work. She refers to her return as another form of exile:

> This exile took the form of the strangeness of the surroundings ... as South Africa had changed in the time that we had been away. But even more significantly, it was not until I returned that I discovered that I was classified Indian and not African as I had always thought of myself, not only legally but also as it informed people's perceptions of me (Dullay, www.facebook.com/note.).

The painting *Strangers in their own Land* (2003) (Fig 18) encompasses these concerns. The painting features a large portrait of Steve Biko, surrounded by smaller portraits of Dullay and her sister as little girls, her parents and a shadowy

image of B. J. Vorster who was Prime Minister of South Africa in the year they went into exile. Below Biko is an image of Dullay's son as a baby, and in the lower corners of the painting are photographs of Biko taken after his death, showing the injuries on his feet, hands and head. Dullay uses text in many of her works, since it adds another layer of meaning, and here she uses dates and words, some of which are legible ('apartheid', 'whites only') and some that are not. Biko was a friend of her father's and she was told that he carried her as a baby. His influence on her life has been profound, and she states, "Biko's passion, sense of justice, curiosity, ideology, healthy disregard of authority and fearlessness became a lived experience in my life without my being conscious of it ... My parents affirmed who we were, where we came from and questioned issues of discrimination in our day to day experience" (Dullay, www.facebook.com/note). Biko's portrait is painted in a monochrome, reddish black colour using a pointillist style, which is also used for the other portraits, but these are rendered in a greyish, blue tone. Only the baby nestled under Biko's collar is rendered in full colour oils. Dullay works intuitively, seldom questioning her choices, until after an artwork is done. In this work, she believes that the monochrome portraits refer to the past and are therefore shadowy, while the baby is a sign of the future and the colour alludes to an affirmation of life (Dullay, www.facebook.com/note).

The alienation Dullay felt as an exile is at the heart of much of her artworks and theoretical writings. She writes, "To be exiled is to be severed from your life, and equates in so many ways to a finality, almost the finality of death. All who have been removed, dislocated and displaced go through mourning, permeated by the deepest sense of loss" (Dullay 2006 www.simmilunar.blogspot.com). Her parents

kept the memory of 'home' alive and yearned to return but their return was to a changed country and not the longed for one of memory (Mngoma 2011). As Homi Bhabha claims, "The final return is mythic ... it is the stuff of longing and prayers … as imagined it never happens" (Bhabha 2003:316). Dullay wavered between Denmark and South Africa for many years longing to be in both places but not being at 'home' in either. Eventually she chose South Africa claiming that "the physical body is home", meaning perhaps that one's lived experiences and memories are all you need (Dullay 2011).

As a student, Dullay was often told by lecturers in Durban that her work was too political (Dullay 2011). Her exhibition for her Master's Degree in Fine Art, titled 'Exile and Cultural Intersections' (2010), featured iconic figures many of whom have fought for freedom: Che Guevara, Hector Pietersen, and Leila Khaled. One of the artworks from this exhibition is *Angela Davis* (fig 19) which I would like to examine closely.

The painting features the young Angela Davis in a contemplative pose. Davis is a prominent African-American activist, scholar and author who fought unceasingly for civil rights. In the 1960s her radical stance as leader of the Communist Party and her close association with the Black Panther Party led to persecution by the American public. Davis continues to fight against racism, injustice in America's penal system and for gender equality. Her books *Women, race and class* (1983) and *Women, culture and politics* (1990), shaped much of the theories behind black feminist thought.

The co-option of great revolutionary figures like Khaled, Guevara, and Davis as 'fashionable' images for T-shirts and posters has become so much a part of popular culture that it is problematic. Dullay states, "I think that this is my way of reclaiming what these people really were. A person like Angela Davis is seen as a fashion icon. She is not seen as a revolutionary anymore, and I want to put it back into context" (Pillay 2010).

Dullay defends her political iconography, saying that art has always been influenced by politics and that those who find her work too political are "uncomfortable with their privileges" (Dullay 2011). Even in this post-apartheid society, and within our new democracy, she believes that there is still a need to fight for equal rights and justice. She refers to South Africa's current government as an 'oligarchy' and feels a sense of betrayal that the liberation struggle has not provided a better life for all South Africans (Machen 2010).

Dullay's Indian heritage is an intrinsic part of her identity and she often references Indian symbols in her work. She sometimes uses Sanskrit or Hindi script, elaborate floral motifs or paisley and geometric patterns to add texture or meaning to an image. Dullay feels a strong connection to India, even though she has never been there. She feels inspired by Gandhi's civil disobedience and by the fact that India did not accept the imposition of Christianity as did other colonised countries (Machen 2010). Although Dullay is comfortable with her cultural heritage, she is at pains to point out that she identifies herself first as a Black, South African woman who was educated in Denmark and who is also Indian. Negotiating these different identities is difficult and while she acknowledges that the opportunities

for Indian women are very few, she also hates being included in events as a form of tokenism.

3.3 SUMMARY

> My work deals with nostalgia, exile, dislocation, unrequited love, between destination and destiny, the travels which mark and shape our bodies and minds, exposing the hybridity of trans-cultural layers (www.facebook)

In my study of Simmi Dullay and her career as an artist, I found that race, class and gender have had a profound effect on her. Dullay's parents were both teachers, and her father taught art for many years. She states, "I was brought up in an environment where we were encouraged to read, to participate in discussions and form our own opinions about critical issues" (www.facebook). Besides the strong academic influence and her father's passion for art, she also remembers watching her father making posters for the BCM when she was little. This echoes bell hooks's sentiment that being raised in an environment where art is valued, leads one to either make, appreciate or write about art (1995:117).

Dullay's experience of exile and her family's active involvement in the struggle has meant that race and apartheid have had a strong impact on her life. Her opinions and militant reaction to racial inequality continues to influence her art and writing. She writes, "When I think of art my thoughts turn to anarchy" and points out that artists are often the first to be censored or persecuted in undemocratic regimes (www.simmilunar.blogspot)

Dullay's attempts to deal with the alienation of exile as well as being an artist in a post-colonial world has led to her involvement in activities that attempt to solve some of these problems. She is South African facilitator of the Transnational De-colonial Institute, a body which serves as a forum for de-colonial aesthetics. A part of their mission statement reads,

> Interculturality promotes the re-creation of identities that were either denied or acknowledged first but in the end were silenced by the discourse of modernity, postmodernity and now altermodernity. Interculturality is the celebration by border dwellers of being together in and beyond the border. De-colonial transmodern aesthetics is intercultural, inter-epistemic, inter-political, inter-aesthetical and inter-spiritual (transnationaldecolonialinstitute.wordpress.com).

Dullay believes in the need for those with common issues to discuss them with each other, and with wider communities, regardless of what race that wider community is. She remembers an early exhibition held in Durban in 2004 called 'A Place like Home', (subtitled Art of the South Asian Diaspora) which was organised by Zayd Minty and included Indian artists from various places in the Indian Diaspora, namely Britain, Guyana, New York, South Africa and Trinidad (home.intekom.com/one/makingplace.htm).[3] On a personal level, she felt a strong sense of home coming and identified closely with the artists present, especially Chila Kumari Burman. Burman showed work from her *Fly Girl* (1992-2004) series, in which she deals with issues of identity, cultural stereotypes and womanhood. Having grown up in Britain, with parents who had emigrated from India, her struggle to establish herself as a strong, empowered, black woman artist is reflected in her work. In *This is not me* (1992) (Fig 20) she features a photograph of herself, heavily made up, and adorned in elaborate, Indian

jewellery (www.chila-kumari-burman.co.uk/). The words 'This is not me' are spray-painted across the image. This work embodies her struggle for identity which many immigrants and displaced people share. Dullay points out that the notion of constructed identity is not confined to South Africa (Dullay 2011).

Dullay's own struggle to establish a balance with her Danish upbringing, Indian heritage and South African identity was not an easy one. On returning to Durban, she found a great sense of belonging within the Indian community but at the same time she hated its "stunted conservatism, its pettiness, its gossip, racism and sexism" (simmilunar 2006). In Denmark, Dullay had grown up in an open, liberal and permissive society which was totally at odds with the attitudes she found in Durban. Her attempts to participate in the Durban art scene in the early 2000s, was difficult. She recalls that galleries like the then Natal Society of Arts (NSA) were white dominated and closed to those perceived to be outsiders.[4] She recalls also her shock that art was regarded as being a bourgeois activity and the domain of white people, who questioned her involvement in art. While the white domination of art in Durban is still true today, it is important to note that Indian male artists like Andrew Nair, Kiren Thathiah and Vedant Nanackchand had all participated in group shows at the NSA, namely the 'Transitions' Exhibition as early as 1991. While the white art community might have been un-accepting, the Indian community were even more so – women artists being so scarce.

While Dullay has worked hard at establishing herself and furthering her career, earning a living as an artist is very difficult. She says that the only way to make money as an artist is to sell paintings. She has never had sponsorships, or funding

from institutions or galleries. However this is true of most artists working in South Africa who have to support themselves by lecturing, writing or curating exhibitions. Even participation in exhibitions such as 'Satyagraha' (2006) and 'Samsara' (2010), which were well attended and received wide media coverage, did not offer any financial reward.[5] On the whole, she points out that apart from a small group, the Indian community at large seldom supports or attends any visual art exhibitions (Dullay 2011). The only time that they do attend art exhibitions is when those exhibitions are predicated on Indian heritage or culture.

This attitude to the visual arts is typical of South African society where only a minority supports art. South African Indians generally will support Indian dance or music performances because they view this as their culture. Art exhibitions are usually viewed as a past time for white upper classes, wealthy art buyers or those with special knowledge of art.

ENDNOTES

1. The Satyagraha Centenary Exhibition was held in 2006 to commemorate the life of Mahatma Gandhi. It was a joint venture between the Indian and South African government with exhibitions held in Delhi and Durban (www.afrikhadiindia.org/durban.html)

2. At various times in the new South Africa there have been calls for Indians to return to India since they are not African. Phumlani Mfeka (City Press May 2013); the Mayibuye African Forum (July 2013); the rap group AmaCde in their controversial song 'Umhlab Uzobuya' (August 2014).

3. Zayd Minty curated this exhibition when he was the director of One: The Cultural Production. He is now the Manager of Arts and Culture for the City of Cape Town (Creative City South blog at http://zaydminty.net/)

4. NSA is now known as KZNSA or The KwaZulu-Natal Society of the Arts.

5. 'Samsara: A Continuous Pursuit' was an exhibition held in November 2010 to commemorate the 150 years since Indians arrived in Durban. (news.artsmart.co.za/2010/11/samsara.html).

CHAPTER 4

Usha Seejarim

4.1 BIOGRAPHY

Usha Seejarim (née Prajapat) was born in Bethal in Mpumalanga in 1974. While

at school she was already interested in art and between 1990 and 1992 she studied

art part-time at the Federated Union of Black Artists (FUBU)

(www.ushaseejarim.com). After matriculating she completed a Diploma in Fine

Arts at Witwatersrand Technikon (now University of Johannesburg) in 1996.

When discussing her decision to study art, Seejarim notes that her family

supported her choice without understanding it (Seejarim 2012). After she

graduated she participated in two group exhibitions '50 Stories' (1997)[1] and

'Isintu' (1998)[2] receiving favourable criticism for both (Edmunds 2001).

Seejarim obtained a certificate in teacher training in the visual arts from the

Curriculum Development Project for Arts and Culture Education and Training (an

NGO) (www.ushaseejarim.com). She went on to work for the Curriculum

Development Project for some years facilitating the training of educators in

incorporating visual art into the school curriculum (Favis 2012). In 1999, she

acquired a B-Tech Degree in Fine Art from Witwatersrand Technikon and held

her first solo exhibition titled 'Long Distance' at the Generator Art Space in

Johannesburg. In 2001 Seejarim was invited to participate in the Fresh Artist in

Residence programme which allowed seven young artists to work in Cape Town.

They were given a studio, exhibition space at the South African National Gallery,

funding and a monograph focusing on their work was published (Bedford 2003:5).

Later that same year, Seejarim and Thembinkosi Goniwe were named joint

winners of MTN New Contemporaries (Seejarim's video submission was titled

From Eight to Four).The following year 2002, she was a nominee for the FNB Vita

Art prize. In 2003, Seejarim was awarded a two month residency in New York

through the Ampersand Fellowship. In 2007, she was one of five finalists for

Sasol Wax Art (artthrob.co.za/07sept/news).

While working as a practising artist, Seejarim has variously worked as a trainer,

facilitator and lecturer in the visual arts. She is also passionate about teaching the

disabled and visually impaired to make and appreciate art (Favis 2012). Her

interest in craft led to a long association with Visual Arts and Crafts Academy

(VACA) as a trainer, facilitator and manager. From 2006 and 2007, Seejarim

lectured on a part-time basis at UNISA and Wits. In 2008, she obtained a

Master's Degree in Fine Arts from the University of the Witwatersrand.

Seejarim has participated in numerous group exhibitions both nationally and

internationally, including Paris, Minneapolis, Tokyo, Belgium and Havana. She

has also held six solo exhibitions to date (www.ushaseejarim.com).

Seejarim has received several public commissions and in 2005 she created

Pincode (fig 21) a chandelier made out of safety pins for the MTN head office in

Johannesburg. In 2007 she was commissioned by Eskom to create a mural. The

finished work is installed in the reception area at Megawatt Park in Woodmead

and comprises coloured electrical wire on board (www.ushaseejarim.com).

In 2008 Seejarim completed ten sculptures representing the ten clauses of the Freedom Charter. These sculptures were commissioned by the Johannesburg Development Agency and were placed in the Walter Sisulu Square of Dedication in Kliptown (www.joberg.org.za). Another important commission for Seejarim was the creation of a giant mesh sunscreen for the facade of the South African Embassy in Addis Ababa (fig 22). Installed in 2008, she used pop rivets embedded in the mesh screens to successfully depict Khoisan rock art (Morojele 2010).

She also created the *Why Men* lighting project, a public art installation in Central Sandton. It won the Business and Arts Business Day Award for 2008 and 2009 (www.artatwork). The figures of men created from LED rope lights were initially put up in 2006 for the festive period. Their popularity led to new *Why Men* being created each year until 2010 (www.joberg.org).

Seejarim and fellow artist Hannelie Coetzee established a public arts organisation called Such Initiative in 2009. Their vision is to change perceptions through eco-conscious public art (www.suchinitiative.org). Since most of their projects entail collaborations with other artists, craftsmen and community members, none of the work from Such Initiative will be included in this study.

Seejarim is married and has two children. She is a Hindu who follows the austere Radhaswami sect of the Sikh faith which requires lengthy daily meditation and strict vegetarianism (Bedford 2001). The consumption of drugs and alcohol are strictly forbidden as is the worship of idols and pursuit of an extravagant lifestyle.

4.2 ARTWORKS

Usha Seejarim works in various media ranging from video, photographs and installations, to making assemblages out of found objects. Her public commissions have seen her creating slate sculpture, wire murals and using pop rivets in stainless steel mesh to conjure up patterns. She uses everyday objects like safety pins, coat hangers, clips for bread packets, tickets or irons and transforms them into art. The constant themes in her work are daily routines, repetitions and rituals as well as the mundane quality of domestic life.

One of Seejarim's early works *Mother Land* (fig 23) was exhibited as part of *Isintu,* an exhibition curated by Zayd Minty and Tumelo Mosaka in 1998 (Minty 2003). A project initiated by the Flinders Art Museum in Australia and Robben Island Museum, it became the first exhibition held in the South African National Gallery to have all black artists and black curators (Minty 2003).

In *Mother Land*, Seejarim has demarcated an area of the floor using red pigment on which are placed numerous small wax urns. Suspended with red and yellow dyed string above them are nine hessian bags. The bags hold their shape and appear heavy but are actually empty. The floating bags remind one of ships/ boats at sea and act as a reminder of how South African Indians came here as indentured labourers.

 The red pigment, yellow and red string and the wax urns cast from clay pots often used in Hindu rituals, all reinforce the references to Indian culture. Red is an important colour in the Hindu faith, it symbolises purity and is the colour associated with marriages, births and prayer. The red string (*kalava)* usually worn

on the wrist is a symbol of piety worn after praying to the goddess Lakshmi and is said to bring the wearer good luck. The yellow string is a reference to the string, (*Thali*) rubbed with turmeric that is tied around a woman's neck when she is married. The clay pots resemble those used to offer milk, water or food in prayer observances. All of these items readily reference the religious practises of Indians which act as a tenuous link with the Motherland i.e. India.

Seejarim states, "The bags, in which goods were transported from India to South Africa, operate as metaphors. They look voluminous but are very light. I feel that the Indian people in South Africa, because of being removed from India, feel a need to hold on so tightly to their culture. And in that process they are losing it" (Bedford 2001). This work deals with the experiences of location and dislocation from India to South Africa and embodies "the fragility of cultural continuity" (Bedford 2001). This installation lacks permanence since the wax pots turn yellow, crack and break apart. The pigment, too, is by nature fragile and susceptible (Edmunds 2001). Bedford believes that this impermanence refers to human existence, which is central to many Indian belief systems (2001).

The colonial experience of South African Indians is different from that of other races in South Africa. While Black people were oppressed under apartheid, they were always aware that this was the country of their ancestors. In *The Occasion for Speaking*, Lamming bears this out when he writes, "The African has never been severed from the cradle of a continuous culture and tradition" (Ashcroft, Griffiths & Tiffin 1995). The white races that colonised South Africa believed in their inalienable right to establish themselves and rule this land. However, Indians as a separate subject race were always regarded as transient peoples who were

only granted permanent status as South Africans in 1961

(www.indiainsouthafrica.com/india-in-south-africa/indian-community.html).

Until then the government had regarded Indians "as a foreign group that did not

belong here" (Kathrada 2010). In 1950, the Congress of the Federated Dutch

Reformed Churches had led a strong campaign advocating the immediate

repatriation of all Indians living in South Africa (Kathrada 2010). Despite the fact

that most Indians were South African born and owned land or property, they were

still not regarded as belonging to this country. The Government of India severed

trade relations with South Africa in 1946 and later imposed a complete -

diplomatic, cultural, sporting and commercial - embargo against the apartheid

regime (www.indiansouthafrica.com). It is ironic that South African Indians were

told that they belonged in India but they effectively had no contact or relationship

with India. Kavitha Ramachandran describes this invidious position thus: "the

ancestral homeland denies the cultural 'authenticity' of its diasporic children

while the adopted homeland insists upon their essential 'otherness' to argue that

the group is indeed foreign" (quoted in Govinden 2008:48). In effect, Indians

were made to feel that they were not really Indian in India but not really South

African in South Africa.

When Seejarim talks of South African Indians clinging to their culture, it is

because the half remembered customs and rituals gave many a sense of belonging

and comfort. After the end of apartheid, the older generations, especially those

who had lived through separate development, viewed the new government with

fear and suspicion (Govinden 2008:46). For those of Seejarim's generation who

had lived through and/ or participated in the struggle, an Indian identity was even

more complex. When the National Indian Congress (NIC) realised that they were failing in their attempts to get rights and privileges for the Indian community, they aligned themselves with other disadvantaged groups and began to call themselves 'blacks' (Bhana 1997 in Govinden 2008:39).[3] After democracy, the new government sought to create a sense of unity-in- diversity and coined the phrase 'One nation many Cultures' (rainbow nation). Many Indians felt that they could now reclaim their cultural heritage, but for others the identification as Black or South African remained of greater importance.

The next work that I want to discuss is Seejarim's video installation *Two Rooms and a Kitchen* (fig 24) which also explores the dislocation of the Indian people through forced removals and apartheid.[4] Seejarim has created a replica of the type of setting found in most working class Indian homes using a draylon three-seater couch and cheap vinyl flooring. Three screens on the walls show different people speaking and her intention was to engage the viewer as if s/he were part of the conversation (Seejarim 2006:71).

Seejarim interviewed and filmed fourteen elderly people – all were over 75 - either as groups or individually as they spoke about their past experiences. All except one was from Lenasia and the majority of them were living in the Johannesburg Institute of Social Services Centre for the Aged. The oldest interviewee was Mr. Parshotam (fig 26) who was 93 at the time and who remembered being born in India and his arrival in South Africa in 1923 (Seejarim 2006:71).

Seejarim's intention in this work was to collect historic evidence that would serve as an archive (Seejarim 2006:70). She says of the subjects, "They have witnessed in their lifetime major political change, unrest, immigration, the advent and demise of apartheid and the achievement of democracy .... Their experiences and insights constitute a resource potentially forgotten if not preserved" (Seejarim 2006:70). This work has personal significance for her since she lives in Lenasia, an Indian township. Most of the interviewees had originally lived in Fietas, a vibrant multi-racial community to the west of Johannesburg. At that time it was the only place, besides Alexandra and Sophiatown, where black people could live (Seejarim 2006:21). Within Fietas, the area called Pageview was predominantly Indian (referred to as the 'Coolie Location') since it featured temples, mosques and Indian owned shops. The small cottages rented by most families had no electricity and comprised 'two rooms and a kitchen' and four cottages would share a communal toilet and shower (Seejarim 2006:21). Despite the harsh living conditions, all the subjects fondly remember the vibrant atmosphere, shared sense of community, the sporting and cultural events and small family owned business

In 1950, the Group Areas Act was promulgated by the National Party and each of the four racial groups was to live in specifically demarcated areas in line with Apartheid policy. Pageview was declared a white area in 1956 and black people were moved to Soweto, coloureds to Eldorado Park and Indians to Lenasia (Seejarim 2006:24). Despite fierce resistance, most of the Indian families moved during the 1960s while the businesses eventually moved around 1977. Many of the women remember their despair at arriving in the new township (Lenasia). "Oh God, I didn't like it, I didn't like Lenz. I cried for three months when I came here.

I wanted to go back from where I came" (Mrs. Fatima Sali:Video). Lenasia had no electricity, the 'bucket' system of toilets and the roads were not developed. Mr Thandrand remembers his wife having to leave a lit candle in the window so that he could find his house when he arrived home from work in the dark (Video). There were no shops, medical services, police station, fire station or telephone services (Seejarim 2006:28-29). Since the journey to Johannesburg where most of them worked took two hours by car, a luxury few of them had, they had to use public transport. This meant taking the morning train into Johannesburg Station and then another into Doornfontein or a tram to Melville or Newlands. "Ja, it was hard, transport was terrible. If you missed the one train in the morning, you can stay at home, there was no other train to go to work" (Mr. Thandrand:Video). These conditions in Lenasia only improved after 1975 and most of the inhabitants have since formed strong emotional ties to this place.

The experiences of this group of working class Indians demonstrate quite clearly how race, class and gender affected their lives. None of the interviewees completed their schooling, most left when they were fifteen or sixteen, since it was more important for them to earn an income and contribute to the survival of the family. One of the women had never been to school and another only knew the basics of reading and writing. Apart from a few that were housewives, the majority of the group had worked all their lives as shop assistants, waiters, cleaners and factory workers. Their attitudes to the restrictions of apartheid varied from acceptance to anger and resistance. Two of the oldest women claimed that as long as one followed the rules, that is, not sitting on public benches, only using allocated seats on trains, and staying in their own areas, things were fine. Mr and

Mrs. Thandrand remembered the humiliation of not being allowed into hotels or restaurants –'They serve you in the back door" (Video). Another interviewee, Peter Moonsamy was a struggle activist who distributed a communist newspaper while evading the security police. His brother was in the Treason Trial with Nelson Mandela and he remembers Mandela coming to his house (Video).

The video functions as a vehicle for the recording of oral history and serves to contradict some of the misconceptions about Indians. These include notions that Indians were privileged under apartheid, or that all Indians were wealthy and owned businesses. Since this recording was made, many of the participants have passed away. As with many of the older generations of Indian people, their stories would have gone unheard, and South African Indians would not have known of the hardships and triumphs of these ordinary people.

  In 2009 Seejarim held a solo exhibition titled 'Mine over Matter' at the Momo Gallery in Johannesburg. This exhibition was comprised of several sculptures made of pop rivets and mesh, and a series of images created by using ink stamps on paper. One such work (fig 27) is the next artwork that I will discuss. Seejarim defines the word 'mine' in the title as meaning the ego - the constant need to want, have, own and desire while the word 'matter' refers to all the material objects that we accumulate (www.ushaseejarim.com).

The artwork is divided into two blocks. On the left half is a self- image of the artist created out of the repeated stamping of the word 'present', a word which also surrounds her. The right half shows a negative image of the artist around which the words 'future' and 'past' are stamped. Seejarim states, "Linked to our

endless desires is a denial of the present moment. We seem mentally and emotionally to always be everywhere else but here. And whenever we are not present our ego, or superficial self is" (www.uashaseejarim.com). In the image Seejarim is physically present in the area stamped present but not in the past or future. She believes that she has reached this stage through a heightened awareness created by her practise of meditation. She likens the act of creating images out of repeatedly stamping to a meditative process. In her summary of the ideas that she attempted to engage with in this exhibition she writes,

> 'Mine over Matter' explores a deeply personal investigation of the self and the relationship of the self to its environment; an understanding of oneself beyond the labels of being female and African, beyond being a mother, and an artist. It is an analysis of identity further than culture, nationality, gender and heritage. When the illusionary workings of the mind and ego is [sic] revealed then a clearer perception of the true self emerges. This exhibition is an attempt to grapple with this duality; the outer appearance of self; the one presented to the world, and the inner voice that exists in us, (www.ushaseejarim.co.za).

Sophie Perryer notes that the advent of democracy has freed artists from making work in response to the socio-political conditions of apartheid South Africa and led to the emergence of concerns with complex issues often relating to individual identity (2004: 6). While racism, social injustice and political concerns still exist in post- apartheid South Africa, it is no longer incumbent on all artists to expose this in their art. Artists can now more readily explore intensely personal or private issues. Seejarim's attempts to portray her true identity arise out of her deep spirituality and her need to see herself beyond the usual labels of wife, mother and artist. The identifications imposed by apartheid South Africa were based on

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ethnicity and race, which led to an "institutionalised sense of identity that allowed South Africans to define themselves through various designated identity strata"(Vally quoted in Moodley 2012:97). During the struggle most Indians identified themselves as Black in solidarity with all oppressed people in South Africa. In post-apartheid South Africa, the notion of multiculturalism – 'one nation, many cultures'- was to replace the racial designation leading to further complication in asserting an identity (Radhakrishnan 2003:2). In this artwork Seejarim appears to want to transcend these different identities – whether it is South African, woman, wife, mother, artist, black or Indian. She believes we should live in the present regardless of the labels we have.

The last artwork of Seejarim's that I would like to examine is *Three sisters in law* (fig 28) from her 'Venus at Home exhibition' (June 2013). Seejarim engages further with questions of identity, especially the roles played by women. Drawing on her own experience of being a wife, mother, home maker and artist, Seejarim uses old irons, brooms and mops to create a series of installations and sculptures (www.seejarim.com). The use of the word Venus (goddess of love) in the title is a play on the concept of the woman as 'domestic goddess' – a term that is euphemistically used to refer to a woman's role as housewife. Seejarim finds irony in the fact that many people believe that her job as an artist is glamorous but she is usually 'changing diapers', doing housework or looking through 'rubbish dumps for found objects'(Makeng 2012).

This sculpture is made up of three old brooms, linked together with colourful bangles. Bangles have a special significance in Indian culture, since women are always expected to wear them. Young unmarried girls will wear a few glass/

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coloured bangles on each wrist and women usually receive gold bangles from their husband's families when they marry. Seejarim shares a close relationship with her own sisters-in-law and this is reflected here (Middleton 2012). In the past, in extended Indian families the daughters of the married sons would share in the running of the household. Besides cooking and cleaning, they would also take care of each other's children and form a support system for each other. Nowadays women have careers, are single, are divorced, are single parents, or are married and live as nuclear families. The close bond and support shared by women especially within families, seldom exists these days and many women feel overworked, overextended and alienated.

bell hooks writes that even after the feminist movement examined great art and women, causing a re-think of the nature of gender and artistic practise, "we must still confront the issues of gender and work with respect to the politics of making space and finding time to do what ... women artists do. Most artistic women I know feel utterly overextended" (1995:126). She points out that most women artists work at other jobs to support themselves, take care of their loved ones and worry that if they care too much about art, "they will be companionless and alone". To this end many will show no visible signs of the work that they do by clearing their workspace, not displaying work, and finding time for their work once the needs of others are taken care of (hooks 1995:127).

While Seejarim alludes to her Indian heritage - the bangles, lotus shapes used elsewhere in the exhibition - the artworks refer to the collective experience of all women.[5] Despite the fact that many women have careers, domestic responsibility (cleaning, cooking, grocery shopping) and child care still remain largely

'women's work'. In the United Kingdom a recent survey found that 1 out of 10 married men did as much housework as their wives (Institute for Public Policy Research) and in America, women still do more household chores than their male counterparts (Parker and Wang 2013). In South Africa, most working women can afford domestic help since it is relatively cheap but in our patriarchal society all women, whether they are professionals, artists or domestic workers still bear the major responsibility for the home and family.

Seejarim's approach to her roles as wife, mother and artist is a celebratory one as she claims a level of acceptance and a sense of joy and inspiration in the mundane, everyday tasks and chores (Klein 2013). She describes her sculpture and installations as playful and created with a sense of humour. The 'materials' (brooms, irons, mops, ironing boards) that she used were donated by friends, neighbours and others, all of whom were not just eager for their possessions to be included but who were interested in seeing the transformation of these objects into 'art'. Seejarim points out that many everyday objects have a certain value, function and meaning and by putting them into new configurations, their aesthetic and sculptural qualities can be appreciated (Klein 2013).

Another positive outcome of this exhibition was the interest generated amongst the community of Lenasia who donated their household items. This was largely a group that were not familiar with contemporary and conceptual art and although the exhibition was not quite what they expected, they enjoyed the work. Seejarim received positive feedback from them since they appreciated the humorous approach and related to the familiarity of the domestic experience (Klein 2013). The inclusive nature of Seejarim's approach is important in changing the mindset

of the Indian community into understanding that 'art' and the idea of visiting an 'art gallery' can be part of their experience. Most still believe it is something reserved for people who are white, very wealthy, part of the upper class or that the work will have no meaning for them.

4.3 SUMMARY

> I find the process of making art to be incredible. Sometimes, it is as simple as reconfiguring two existing elements/objects and this modest act creates new meaning. And this meaning is further transformed when the individual viewer, informed by their own histories, preferences and experience bring their specific interpretations to the artwork (www.ushaseejarim.com)

Usha Seejarim is an artist who has transcended the barriers of race, gender and class. She has produced a considerable body of artwork and been awarded nine public and/or corporate commissions to date. She is also more 'visible' than other South African Indian women artists featuring in numerous shows, books and other publications.

One of the reasons why she is recognised in art circles can possibly be found in the institutions at which she studied. At the Witwatersrand Technikon (now University of Johannesburg) she studied under Willem Boshoff, Kim Berman and Leora Farber amongst others (www.uj.ac.za.). When she was studying for her Master's Degree at the University of the Witwatersrand, the staff comprised Walter Oltman, Jeremy Wafer, Karel Nel, Jo Ractliffe and many other recognised artists (www.wits.ac.za). All these lecturers are well established artists, art writers,

critics, curators and judges for various art competitions or selectors for exhibitions. While one cannot dispute Seejarim's talent, hard work and dedication, there is a possible advantage to her being known by them. There is some truth to Sharlene Khan's assertion that "the art world is a social one as much as it's a business one, a matter of who knows you, who you know and who they know. It's a sphere of friends, patrons, other artists, curators, collectors, gallerists, critics, journalists, lecturers, corporations, consultants and students. It takes a familiarity with quite a few people in these circles in order to gain your place as 'top artist' or even earn your place in art history" (Perryer 2004:9).

This sphere of influence is even more effective in an area like Johannesburg where large corporate companies, international art dealers and important galleries support and work with artists. These circumstances and those of many of the Indian women who emerged from other disadvantaged institutions is quite different. Institutions with an apartheid heritage were not always well positioned to prepare students for the commercial aspects of being an artist.

In an interview, Seejarim admitted that being a woman does sometimes have its advantages when work opportunities arise (Seejarim 2012). She graduated two years after the first democratic elections at a time when South Africa was in the process of transformation. Those who had been previously disadvantaged, especially black women, were afforded many opportunities from which she has benefitted.

One of the recurring themes in Seejarim's work is that of identity, particularly integrating the African, Indian and female aspects of herself. She says, "I do not

specifically make work about an Indian identity, perhaps because I see my identity as more complex than that. It does feature in my work because who I am does include an Indian heritage. Critics and academics want to put artists into a box, and I am always disappointed by the simplification of a sense of identity, because it is more complex but also (more) fluid" (Seejarim 2012).

Indeed there is nothing of the 'exotic' in Seejarim's work, even in referencing her heritage. She depicts her experience as a South African Indian as modern, working class, ordinary, and rooted in the mundane routine that is true of all of our experiences.

ENDNOTES

1. '50 Stories' (1997) was a group exhibition held at the Carlton Centre in Johannesburg curated by Storm van Rensberg and Tracey Rose.

2. 'Isintu' (1998) was a group exhibition held at the South African National Gallery curated by Zayd Minty and Tumelo Mosaka.

3. The National Indian Congress was originally called the South African Indian Congress formed in 1919. It was established to fight for the rights of Indians, specifically of Indian traders.

4. The title *Two rooms and a kitchen* is a term that resonates with the Indian community since it was a common feature of Indian families to build an outbuilding on their property for the express purpose of letting it out to tenants in order to acquire an extra income. It was used as a catch-all phrase to describe that type of property.

5. The lotus flower has great significance in Hinduism – since it unfurls its petals each morning and then closes them again at sunset – it represents rebirth and death. The God Brahma is said to have been born from a lotus.

CHAPTER 5

Sharlene Khan

5.1 BIOGRAPHY

Sharlene Khan was born in 1977 in the working class township of Newlands West in Durban. Her father is Muslim, her mother is Christian and she was raised in a Tamil family. Khan herself is a committed Christian (Valoyi 2012).

As a young girl she had always loved to draw, but it was only when she was in high school at New West Secondary School that her ideas about making art began to change. A new art teacher, Andrew Nair, introduced her to the possibility of making art professionally (Valentine-Khumalo 2008:127).[1] Up until then her family and teachers had led her to believe that there was no future in art. While she was in Matric, Khan won first prize in the Durban creative Youth Arts Festive art competition held at Technikon Natal Art Gallery. Besides winning prize money, she also sold her painting on the opening night of the exhibition (Nair 1994:2).

 Her parents wanted her to have a stable profession and after Matric she was registered to study microbiology (Valoyi 2012). Two weeks before her course started Khan realised that she was making a mistake, "The thought of never drawing again was too overwhelming and I knew I couldn't live without it" (Valentine-Khumalo 2008:127). Supported by her art teacher who felt she had the talent and attitude required to succeed, Khan begged and pleaded to be allowed to

pursue art. Her father eventually relented and allowed her to study art, agreeing to pay only for her first year of study (Valoyi 2012).

Khan was talented enough to receive sponsorships until she completed her studies. In 1998, she completed a B.A. Degree in Fine Art at the University of Durban-Westville (UDW). After her first exhibition, prominent Durban artist Andrew Verster wrote that "Sharlene Khan takes the most ordinary of things and turns them into poetry. She makes us notice people and incident, landscape and pattern which we otherwise might miss" (quoted in Pather 2001). In 2002, she also obtained a Master's Degree in Fine Art from UDW. She completed a second Master's Degree at the University of the Witwatersrand in 2006. During this period, she also took up various residencies – locally at the Caversham Press in Pietermaritzburg and the Fordsburg Artists Studios (previously called The Bag Factory) International Residency in Johannesburg (www.sharlenekhan.co.za). This was followed by international residencies in Cairo, France and Italy. Khan has exhibited her work at several group shows in South Africa, Switzerland, India, France, USA, Sweden and Holland. She has also held several solo shows in Durban, Cape Town and Johannesburg (www.sharlenekhan.co.za).

In addition to her work as an artist, Khan has co-ordinated and curated several art projects. In 2004, Khan together with David Koloane co-ordinated and curated an exhibition of more than 100 South African artworks, titled 'The ID of South African artists' in the Netherlands. Khan participated as an artist, writer and curator in the *10 Years 100 Artists* project by Bell Roberts Publishing (www.sharlenekhan.co.za). She is also a member of the Dead Revolutionaries Club, a non-profit group that organises art classes and talks, and hosts a website

focused on cultural production in southern Africa. As a member of this group, Khan co-curated 'Esikhaleni spatial practises' at the Africa Art Centre, as an official Joburg Art Fair event in 2008 (www.sharlenekhan.co.za).

Between 1995 and 2003 Khan has participated in community driven mural painting projects. Her keen interest in the effects murals have on communities is reflected in her unpublished Master's dissertation 'A critical analysis of the iconography of six HIV/ Aids murals from Durban and Johannesburg, in terms of gender, race and class' (2006). Among the many projects are the murals painted at the Ladysmith Provincial Hospital, Addington Children's Hospital and the Durban Magistrates Court (www.sharlenekhan.co.za).

Khan has worked briefly as a lecturer at UNISA. One of her other interests is writing poetry and she has had several of her poems published. In 2011, she was awarded a Commonwealth scholarship to study towards a Ph. D. in Arts at Goldsmiths College, University of London.

5.2 ARTWORKS

Sharlene Khan produces work in a variety of media including video, installations, performance-art, fashion, embroidery and photography as well as charcoal and ink drawings. Her favourite medium though is painting and she states, "I love paint ... It's forgiving, it can be layered, and it's rich and vibrant" (Valentine-Khumalo 2008:127). Her early work centred on the lives of street traders and the informal economy found in most South African cities. More recent works deal with issues of identity, race, womanhood and self. Khan is an outspoken critic of the

problems that plague the South African art-world, and as such is a controversial figure.

The first artwork that I want to discuss is *Hush little baby* (fig 29) a painting from 'State of Being', a group exhibition held at the Fordsburg Artists Studios in Johannesburg during Khan's residency in 2002 (www.sharlenekhan.co.za). This exhibition was inspired by the street life she encountered in her daily commute from Parktown to the Johannesburg city centre on her way to the Bag Factory.

Hush little baby shows a woman street vendor sitting at her stall from which she sells fruit and sweets. Her head rests on her crossed arms and she appears to have dozed off. Since these vendors are informal traders, their 'stalls' are makeshift or temporary structures and the woman's awkward pose reflects a level of discomfort. The fruit and the vendor's clothes are rendered in bright colours which reflect the vibrant kaleidoscope of South African street life. The woman's sweater is detailed with various images of other women traders, many of whom appear in other paintings in this exhibition.

For most South Africans, vendors are a common sight, whether they observe them from the window of their cars or buses, or on the streets as they walk. Many unemployed people sustain themselves by selling cooked food, cool drinks, fruit and sweets. They support themselves and sometimes their families in this manner while also providing cheap snacks for other workers. Most of them wake early - around 4 am - in order to get to the taxi ranks or train stations to sell to the early morning commuters. The dozing woman in the painting reminds us of this harsh reality, since many vendors will only pack up, and go to their own homes after the

workers return in the evening. Some women choose to live on the streets either because the travelling can become quite expensive or because they have no homes.

Khan states: "I couldn't help notice the plight of women who worked on the streets that I walked on daily and eventually this exhibition ended up focusing on images of women and their young children who were growing up on these streets" (www.sharlenekhan.com). The title *Hush little baby* seems incongruous when referring to a grown woman but the phrase also reminds us that most of these women are single mothers. Other paintings in this series feature women with babies strapped to their backs (*Thula mama*) or cradled in their arms (*Madonna and Pokemon child*). Khan claims that she did not wish to romanticise street trade, but wanted to acknowledge that despite the hardship, people had dignity, humour and resilience (Talotta 2005:4). She points out: "People don't just throw their wares down on the pavement. There's an immense pride in what they do, they arrange their goods to their best advantage" (Talotta 2005:5).

A similar sense of decorative pride can be seen in the roadside 'hair salons' that are frequently found in city centres. In *Two fish and five loaves* (fig 30), Khan has created an installation featuring a 'haircut salon' and a vendor's stand. Using a standard gazebo, she has added side panels made out of painted images of street traders that she stitched together. The images are the same as those that appear in her 'Durban at work' exhibition (2001). A hand painted sign advertising men's haircuts, a box and a cheap plastic chair are inside the gazebo. Next to it is a vendor's stand made out of crates and a piece of board. On this stand are plastic plates with papier-mâché fruit on which Khan has painted the faces of street

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vendors. A pile of empty fruit boxes lies on the floor and they are also painted in oil paints depicting scenes from street life. A recording of the sounds usually heard on a busy street market plays inside the gazebo.

The title *Two fish and five loaves* refers to the miracle Jesus is believed to have performed when he fed a crowd of 5000 people with nothing more than two fish and five loaves of bread (Matthew 14:13-21). This biblical reference could refer to the everyday miracle performed by these traders, of eking out a living and feeding themselves and their children with the bare minimum. This entrepreneurial spirit allows them to sell items, cut hair, mend shoes and even recycle cans or bottles in order to earn a few rands. This informal economy works outside of the large commercial enterprises and appears to sustain those who live in poverty.

Fellow artist Khwezi Gule calls Khan 'brave' for choosing to depict the lives of these "people we see but do not acknowledge". He also points out how dangerous it is to "transgress racial, class and gender lines" when portraying marginalised people "who have no acess to art discourse and lack the resources to respond to how they are represented" (Gule quoted in Perryer 2004:178). Khan offers many reasons for choosing this subject matter, the primary one being that she grew up in a township and as a South African, the street culture was very much part of her lived experience. As a young child she went from door to door selling pillows made by her parents to earn money and has great empathy with those struggling to make a living by any means possible (Ligaga 2008:26). When she was a student in Durban she travelled by mini-bus taxis and has fond memories of the vibrant street culture which was a combination of Zulu and Indian cultures

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(www.sharlenekhan.co.za). It was this 'South Africa' that she missed when completing her first residency in London. Later when she took up residency at The Bag Factory in Johannesburg and travelled daily to the city centre in mini-bus taxis and walked through the streets, she was struck by the friendship, humour, fraternity and creativity of people (Gule in Perryer 2004: 178).

In discussing Khan's pre-occupation with street culture and plight of the black working class Gule points out that it is "tempting to draw parallels between Khan's work and the township art of Gerard Sekoto, Durant Sihlali and others"(Gule in Perryer 2004:178). However, Khan chooses to focus on the richness of her subjects' lives rather than their poverty. Most of her subjects are individuals who are known to her, since she got to know them during the process of sketching. She also returned to those who featured in the exhibition with colour photocopies of the artworks so that they would understand how they were being portrayed (Talotta 2005:5).

The debate over who is entitled to depict whom is well documented in *Grey Areas*, a book by Atkinson and Breitz which followed the furore over Okwui Enwezor's controversial article entitled "Reframing the black subject:Ideology and fantasy in contemporary South African art (1997). Some 15 years later, the question of who is allowed to represent whom as the subject of art is still a controversial one. As a black person herself, is Khan then allowed to depict the black subject, or does her race as an Indian woman mean that that is the only group that she can paint? Khan calls herself an "Africanised Indian who is also westernised" and believes that "understanding this africaness is important" (Tadjo 2008:12). She says, "I have been constantly questioned as to why I never

paint my culture, my roots, my ancestry, why I revoke my 'Indianness' in my portrayal of black lower-class people, when there are a whole pantheon of gods awaiting my representation of them. Of course the fact that I come from a half-Muslim, half-Christian background doesn't seem to deter the belief that I should be painting Hindu gods because after all I am Indian" (Khan 2005).

Indeed in South Africa, Indians are often viewed as a homogenised group by other races who fail to distinguish between religious and cultural differences. Moodley discusses the implications that homogeneity had for Indian graduates when they presented work to galleries. Their work "was expected to reflect their Indian-ness almost as a static and identifiable form that all Indians naturally manifest and adhere to" (Moodley 2012: 96). Khan states that she, and fellow artists Clifford Charles and Rookaya Gardee, can testify to the struggle that they endured at university in not conforming to white lecturers' expectations of what subject matter they as 'Indians' should engage with (Khan 2005). Charles, a practising Christian, was advised to "paint in the colours of the temple" even though he had never set foot in a temple. Gardee, together with fellow Muslim Faiza Galdhari, was constantly expected to portray Islam as oppressive especially towards women (Khan 2005). There are some Indian artists, such as Reshma Chhiba, who constantly reference the Hindu religion and Indian culture in their work, and that is perfectly acceptable because it is their choice to do so. Khan points out that the problem with "the gaze held by dominant people/structures is that they are unable to engage with works that do not conform to exoticised expectations of the Other" (Khan 2005). While much has changed in the recent decade or so, the

stereotypical expectations of whom or what artists of colour should depict are still hotly contested.

In an article which Khan presented at the South African Thupelo International workshop in 2003, she used the example of white South African photographer Jennifer Lovemore-Reed's depiction of black subjects, to discuss the Other. In this article she quotes artist Paul Kagawa's view that Third World artists who are sympathetic to the conditions of Third World people in all sectors of society are a voice of the oppressed (Khan 2003:4).[2] Khan also points out that a common misconception is that those being photographed are powerless and have no choice. "This thinking seems to convey a weakness, a naiveness upon the Other, thus further disempowering the disempowered. The fact that many of the people Lovemore-Reed photographed, were willing subjects and wanted to have their photographs taken out of choice is overlooked. The privileged photographer is seen as active and the photographed exploited Other as merely passive" (Khan 2003:4). In much the same way, Khan's depiction of street vendors cannot be read as privileged painter/ passive subject.

The next artwork that I will discuss is from the exhibition titled 'What I look like – What I feel like' (2008). In this exhibition Khan has used her body in various guises and settings in order to explore how she views herself as opposed to how others view her. Each artwork juxtaposes two such images around various themes of identity, gender, class, religion and sexuality. Khan was deeply influenced by the work of Cindy Sherman and to a lesser extent Sophie Calle both of whom used their bodies and 'masquerade' to explore identity (Tadjo 2008:13). Locally the artist Tracey Rose also makes use of her body to portray different female

archetypes in Ciao Bella (2001). She "explores the multiple identities that are inherent in woman, identities that are often kept in check by patriarchy and conservative upbringings" (Malatjie 2012:58).

In *Modern. Urban. Westernised. Bitch* (2008) (fig 31) Khan has juxtaposed images of herself assuming two different personas. On the left is an image of a modestly dressed, domesticated young woman, probably a housewife. She wears old fashioned clothing and her hair is conservatively braided, while her hands are primly folded on her lap. She is seated at a kitchen table surrounded by a fridge and broom, all of which reinforce her domestic status.

The image on the right is of Khan in an overtly provocative pose dressed in tight revealing clothing and high heels. She wears lots of jewellery, make-up and her hair is wildly tousled. It is night and she is posed in front of a tattoo parlour. She represents the "Modern, urban, westernised, bitch" of the title. An embroidered image of a broom unites both the pictures.

The domesticated Khan is an exaggerated idea of an ideal Indian woman – conservative, meek and bound to her home and family. This ideal exists both in the Indian community and amongst the larger South African community. There is a stereotype about Indian women wearing saris while making samoosas and cooking curries that persists even when they become professionals and live urbanised lifestyles. On the other hand, when Indian women do pursue professional careers, move out of the family home and seek independence, the Indian community labels them 'loose' and immoral. These are the two polar opposites that Khan presents us with as stereotypes. In discussing this exhibition,

Khan states, "I question expectations of me as a potential mother, as a good woman, as a tertiary educated woman, as a Muslim/Christian woman, a rebel-rouser, a demonised woman, a sexual person. I am not any of these things, but bits of these things on any day, and I question how these layers of identity ... are often spliced, foregrounded [sic] and used to stereotype ... compartmentalise, as well as to subjugate me" (Khan quoted in Ligaga 2008:29).

Malatjie maintains that gender is a 'construct' and explains that "people in society arguably perform gendered constructs / roles that are taught to us by society" (2012:61). Women, especially, those in patriarchal societies, are constantly reminded of the gender roles that they have to take on. Malatjie believes that one of the ways in which these gendered constructs can be 'unlearned', blurred and restructured is through performance art or performativity (2012: 61 – 62).

In *Doing it for Daddy* (2008) (fig 32) Khan again places two self-images next to each other. The image on the left shows her in her underwear but with the outline of a burqa stitched around her. The image on the right is of the same photograph but a black cloth burqa has been stitched over it covering her body leaving only her feet, hands and eyes visible.

The title of the artwork refers to an article written by bell hooks, in which she describes how white women assume dominant positions of power previously held by white men ('Daddy'). In performing this act of domination white women hope to win 'Daddy's' love and approval (hooks 1995). Khan wrote a controversial article titled "Aluta Continua: Doing it for Daddy" in *Art South Africa* in 2006 and in her opinion, it changed the course of her career as an artist. In it she bemoaned

the lack of transformation in the visual arts sector and the dominance of white women in positions of power in the art world (Khan 2006). "Overnight I went from being an upcoming visual artist to a pariah. I experienced first-hand the power relationships that I had written about when the white vanguard closed ranks, and projects, jobs, scholarships, reviews and even listings of my exhibitions became impossible" (Khan 2006).

Most audiences have assumed that this artwork is a commentary on Islam and the effect of patriarchal societies. However, it is Khan's response to the backlash evoked by her article. In the first photograph where she is visible within the lines of the burqa, she references her upbringing in a Muslim-Christian home within the Tamil culture (Ligaga 2008:33). Despite growing up amongst various religious and cultural spaces, she rarely felt stifled and was always free to voice her opinions. In the second picture, she is completely covered and officially silenced after the publication of her article. She says, "It is racism that has taught me about being rendered invisible" (Khan quoted in Ligaga 2008:33).

In her critique of this exhibition Mary Corrigall wrote that "what has become abundantly clear from this exhibition is that the racial polemic that has preoccupied her writing has filtered into her art, colouring her engagement with the politics of visuals". A greater part of her review does not focus on the exhibition itself and discusses Khan's 'controversial' opinions and points out that Khan "keeps the focus on her victimhood" (Corrigall 2008). She ends by saying that many of the artworks are disappointing since they are too one dimensional: "Perhaps that is the price one pays for presenting a tableaux of cardboard cut-out personas" (Corrigall 2008).

In reviewing this same exhibition, Sipho Mdanda does not see Khan as a victim at all, but finds her images provocative and challenging. He believes that Khan has made a bold statement to those who would stereotype, undermine and bully her for her opinions (Mdanda 2008).

Corrigall writes that this exhibition engages with gender, ethnicity and religion, "in other words, all the popular motifs of the post-colonial, post-liberation era" (2008). She trivialises these issues as if artists only deal with these issues because they are fashionable and make their work appear to be relevant. However, the reality for most black South Africans is that gender, ethnicity, religion and race continue to be areas of internal and external conflict. As Khan reveals in this exhibition, her identity as an Indian woman is sometimes in conflict with her identity as an African woman. She does not see herself as part of the Indian diaspora and finds the word 'distasteful'. She comments:

> It [diaspora] chiefly recognises similarities at the expense of equally important localised differences. I don't really consider myself as part of such a diaspora, I am a South African Indian who is very located in this specific country at this specific juncture in time. And while I realise that the sense of 'Indianness' is probably a valid one among many migrant communities, in South Africa it was promoted by the apartheid government to ensure that Indians in this country were made to feel like outsiders (quoted in Martin 2009).

Khan also believes that many diasporic communities cling on to racial, cultural and ethnic identities. She is adamant that she has no identification with India, knowing nothing of its languages or history. While South Africa with all of its internal conflicts, is the only country she regards as home.

5.3 SUMMARY

> I don't live life as just any woman. I have a racialised, gendered body and an outlook affected by westernisation, urbanisation, by living in South Africa, by being of Indian descent. These are not factors to be separated at will. As such, I am faced daily with a society that looks at my race, gender and class as markers of how to react with me (Khan quoted in Ligaga 2008:29).

Sharlene Khan is an artist and activist whose struggle against class, gender and racial discrimination is an ongoing one. As a young girl growing up in a working class township, she had to fight against the expectations of her family and community for the opportunity to study and pursue art as a career. A combination of hard work and talent allowed her to secure sponsorships and financial help to complete her studies.

In comparing his experiences as an art student at Natal Technikon (a previously white institution) to Khan's at UDW (a previously black institution), Khwezi Gule points out that both institutions were conditioned by history, race, privilege and locality. "Hence the manner that we were politicised in terms of the art world were different. Whereas I might have been more acquiescent to the status quo, Sharlene has always had a radical sense that the state of affairs in the art world were extremely abnormal, not only in the sense that there was and still are racial and gender imbalances, but that the art world is to a large extent intellectually and metaphysically impervious to change" (Gule 2006).

When Khan first emerged on the art scene, she appeared to be an artist to watch, curating shows, writing and participating in several exhibitions. In 2004, she was chosen as one of 15 writers/curators to be included in the book *10 Years 100*

Artists. Khan, together with Andrew Lamprecht, Thembinkosi Goniwe and Sipho Mdanda, each dealt with the lack of transformation in the art world in their allotted sections. These sentiments were not unheard of since many other artists had made similar statements, Tracey Rose and Berni Searle among them. Vuyile Voyiya and Julie McGee had shown their video '*The Luggage is still labelled'* in which they discussed racism in art, at the 19th South African Association of Art Historians Conference in 2003 (www.artthrob.com). At the same conference, Goniwe and Mgcineni Sobopha pointed out how white females had replaced white males in positions of power in the art world (www.artthrob.com). In 2006, Khan extrapolated Sobopha's theory of a "white-female-only-ascendancy" in her article "Aluta Continua: Doing it for Daddy". She believes that this article led to her becoming "persona non-grata in the South African contemporary art world." Khan says, "I have sat at scholarship and job interviews and have been interrogated by the white powers about THAT article rather than any of my research" (Khan quoted in Ligaga 2008:27). She believes that the strong reaction to her saying what many other artists had already said was that she had added a side bar to the article with the names of prominent art institutions, easily identifying individuals (Khan 2011).

Professor P.G. Raman responded to her article by writing in *Art South Africa*, "Ms Khan's writing, apart from being undignified, vulgar and shameful, is dangerous. It is the beginning of xenophobia and will encourage a drift towards ethnic cleansing" (2006:11).[3]

Linda Stupart, Renee Holleman and Bettina Malcolmess formed a collective art group in 2007 which they named 'Doing it for Daddy' claiming to have done this

in reaction to Khan's article. In an interview with Robert Sloon, Stupart states, "Khan ... implied that there were all these evil white women that were continuing the hegemony of white maleness in the South African art world and they named all these people. Some of whom we really like. And seemed a bit ridiculous and very confrontational. And quite offensive" (Sloon 2009). Holleman added, "And a little simplistic" (Sloon 2009).

In her blog Thought Leader, Anthea Buys, a writer and curator, wrote in the aftermath of the xenophobic attacks that occurred in 2008 on African foreigners, "Perhaps Sharlene Khan will daub some portraits of suffering refugees and take them to Sweden" (Buys 2008). The subject of the blog was the lack of adequate government and community help in improving the plight of the refugees – a subject which had only a very slight connection to Khan. While Khan and several other artists were part of the Urban Concerns initiative that Buys felt was not doing enough to help, it is Khan who is singled out for ridicule.[4] Buys' statement implies that Khan is a bad artist (daub) and that she deliberately patronises her subjects by depicting them as objects of pity for an overseas audience.

The ensuing online debate between supporters of Khan and those who vehemently opposed her descended into a slinging match about race and the merits of Khan's abilities as an artist. While most artists often face bad reviews, Khan's aggressive stance on race may have led to a blurring of lines between her output as an artist and her views. She is outspoken about her belief that young white art critics and writers generally denigrate and devalue black artists (Khan 2008). It then becomes difficult to differentiate between negative reviews based on the actual artworks

and those written by the very writers, and people with power, in the art world in retaliation against her assertions.

As a South African Indian woman artist Khan has been very vocal about the impact that her race, class and gender have had on her career thus far. She has been accused of 'having a chip on her shoulder' (www.stagingthoughtleader.com) and she has portrayed herself as a martyr in her artwork *Anybody but Sharlene* (Ligaga 2008:29). Either way, she is intent on ensuring that issues of race and gender remain important topics of concern within the South African art dialogue.

ENDNOTES

1. Andrew Nair has been an art teacher for more than 20 years but is also a well-known local artist with several exhibitions to his name.

2. Paul Kagawa is an Asian American artist and art theorist.

3. Prof. P.G. Raman is research professor in the department of architecture at the University of the Free State.

4. Urban Concerns is an initiative that was set up between Johannesburg Art Gallery and the Bildmuseet Gallery in Umeå in Sweden. It was meant to explore the relationship between urban life and artists, particularly the public spaces inhabited by people.

CHAPTER 6

Reshma Chhiba

6.1 BIOGRAPHY

Reshma Chhiba was born in 1983 into a Gujerati speaking Hindu family in

Johannesburg. Unlike most Indians who are third or fourth generation South

Africans, Chhiba's grandparents only arrived in South Africa in the 1950's from

the town of Gujarat in India (Chhiba 2013:4). They travelled with a group of

fellow immigrants who were also from the same village in Gujarat. This group

settled in the Transvaal forming a tight knit community which clung to its

language, religion and traditional practises. Chhiba remembers that she could not

converse with her maternal grandmother who spoke no English (Sassen 2008).

Despite this conservative background she was allowed to study art. She says, "My

family is not strictly orthodox - if they were I probably would never have studied

art – but the traditions from which they originate are" (Sassen 2008). She recalls

that her immediate family was very supportive, but her extended family reacted as

though they did not believe it to be a real career. She thinks that this stems from

the belief that one cannot make money from art – and for most Indians success is

still measured by one's bank account (Chhiba 2014). Chhiba studied Fine Art at

the University of Witwatersrand, obtaining a Bachelor's Degree in 2003. She and

fellow student Lester Adams were joint winners of the Martienssen prize that year

(2003) (www.wits.ac.za/news). Over the next few years, Chhiba participated in

several group shows, including 'Women: Photography and the new media' at the

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Johannesburg Art Gallery (2006) and 'Impossible Monsters' at ArtExtra (2007) www.urbanartprojects.org).

Chhiba has also worked as part-time assistant to artists such as Penny Siopis, Jo Ractliffe and Natasha Christopher. These positions involved teaching, working on projects and conducting research (www.goethe.de). In 2007, Chhiba was chosen by the Goethe Institute to train and work as an art mediator at 'Documenta 12', an international art exhibition held in Kassel in Germany (Sassen 2008). In 2008, Chhiba held her first solo exhibition titled 'Kali' at ArtExtra (Sassen 2008).

Chhiba worked at the Johannesburg Art Gallery and has participated regularly in other group exhibitions, some of which are 'Self/ Not Self' at Brodie Stevenson Gallery (2009), 'This is not a Porn Song' at Aardklop (2010) and 'Samsara' at Durban Art Gallery (2011) (www.urbanartprojects.org/ROOM). In 2013, Chhiba completed her Master's Degree in Fine Art at the University of the Witwatersrand. She also held another solo exhibition titled 'The two talking Yonis' which comprised three site- specific exhibits, one of which namely *Come Inside* attracted much controversy. She is currently employed part-time as a lecturer at the University of Johannesburg thus allowing her more time to create art (Chhiba 2014).

Chhiba is also a trained dancer and began practising Bharata Natyam, a traditional form of classical Indian dance when she was eight years old.[1] She now has a diploma in Bharata Natyam and in 2010 she co-founded a dance school, where she is a dance teacher (Sasseen 2008). Since the study of dance

encompasses the study of Hindu religion and traditions, Chhiba's output as an artist is hugely influenced by Hinduism and dance.

6.2 ARTWORKS

Reshma Chhiba's artworks include paintings, photography as well as other mediums such as video film, needlework and art installations. She does not paint in acrylics or oils, but uses earth-based pigments and substances like *kumkum* (vermilion powder), turmeric powder, sandalwood powder, coal and ash (Chhiba 2013:48).[2] All these substances are traditionally used in Hindu worship and ritual practises. Her extensive knowledge and understanding of dance and Hindu mythology have a clear and direct influence on her art. In her works she addresses issues of identity and female empowerment specifically through the idea of *shakti* − a feminine force which is believed to activate all living things on earth (Chhiba 2013:49).

A central figure in most of Chhiba's work, and whom she discusses in great depth in her Master's dissertation is that of the goddess Kali. In order to understand Kali's importance, I want to briefly summarise some aspects of the Hindu religion. In Hinduism Lord Shiva is worshipped as the most powerful manifestation of God. There are three aspects of Shiva − as the destroyer (Shiva), the creator (Brahma), and the preserver (Vishnu). Shiva is transcendent, formless and can exist as pure cosmic energy. His female consort is Parvati and she is

thought to represent *shakti-* the female primordial energy which animates Shiva's male power.

Parvati is regarded as a benevolent figure and she is worshipped as the mother goddess symbolising creation, love and devotion. As Shiva's wife she is usually depicted with two arms and is beautiful, feminine, richly dressed in silk sari and jewellery. However, when angered she evolves into Durga - usually depicted alone as a powerful being with eight or ten arms most of which bear weapons. In this incarnation, she is believed to protect her followers from evil and all human suffering. In times of great adversity Durga is believed to appear as Kali, whose power is equal only to that of Shiva (www.pantheon.org).[3] Unlike other Hindu goddesses, she is depicted as dark skinned (*kali* in Sanskrit means black) and naked, her face is contorted in a ferocious snarl with her tongue sticking out between fanged teeth. Around her waist she wears a girdle of severed hands, around her neck is a garland of male heads and her hair is wildly dishevelled. In two of her four hands, she holds a blood stained scythe and a man's head (www.pantheon.org).

Many images of Kali show her standing with one foot on Shiva who lies at her feet, indicating her position as his equal or superior. Despite her fierce appearance, her two empty hands make the symbols of protection and fearlessness indicating her true nature (Chhiba 2013:3). Kali is thought to be the devourer of time and the one who destroys illusion (Maya) and ego. Her naked form is sometimes thought to refer to her position as mother of the natural world – a being

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that western culture would call mother nature. According to Chhiba she is the ultimate symbol of female empowerment (Chhiba 2013: 8).

The first artwork that I would like to examine is *Kali Tandava* (fig 33) from Chhiba's exhibition titled 'Kali' (2008) presented at ArtExtra in Johannesburg (Chhiba 2013:48). This black and white photographic work is made up of forty five images that are placed together in rows to form a narrative when read from left to right. Chhiba has referenced the art of the Bharata Natyam dance in which stories are told through the use of gesture (*hasta mudras*), posture, facial expression as well as the movement of the feet and torso (Chhiba 2013: 56). There are 32 single hand root *mudras* and 23 double hand *mudras* used in classical dance, all of which convey particular meanings. Through the use of this 'language' Chhiba tells the woman's story.

In the first frame we observe a seated woman who is wearing a *sari,* she has *sindoor* (dot) on her forehead and wears her hair pulled into a bun. Her appearance is that of a married, conservative Indian woman. In the frames that follow, she appears to be engaged in some type of domestic work, until something makes her look up and stop. In the next row, she raises her hands in a defensive position, turning her face away and crouching low to protect herself from the unseen force. In the next row, the woman looking visibly upset covers her ears with both her hands. The last frame in the row sees her bent over, one hand raised to her cheek while the other covers her mouth. In the next row, the woman is contemplative and as the frames progress, she becomes more confrontational and

gazes out directly at the viewer. The following row shows a greater change as the woman rises, her hand on her hip, her body in a full frontal position, as she points an accusing finger. The woman continues to transform and in the next row she raises her fisted hands but still she appears afraid.

The next three rows show the woman in an increased frenzy of movement, using her arms and body, her face is fierce and resolute. In the final frame, she is appears in a triumphant pose – her hands resting on her spread knees, her hair is dishevelled, her dot smeared – she has conquered her enemy.

Chhiba writes that the repetition of the dancer's figure within the artwork becomes like an alphabet, or a 'lexicon of symbols' that can be read like a 'coded language' (Chhiba 2013:57). The word *Tandava* in the title refers to the dance performed by Shiva and is usually associated with male dancers and male energy (Chhiba 2013:58). In Indian dance and Indian society, women are associated with more submissive and sensual roles, while men perform more aggressive roles. Chhiba says, "The woman goes through different stages of being, she moves from the submissive, weak, insecure, loyal wife to a challenging, somewhat indifferent woman and eventually becomes a defiant, Kāli-like figure. In this last part of the narrative the female becomes more prominent in both stance and presence" (2013:57).

Chhiba's intention here was to deal with the stereotypes of the South African Indian woman as well as the roles expected from them within their patriarchal communities. She believes that apartheid is to blame for this conservative mindset since communities were forced to hold themselves together during apartheid and

certain traditions of behaviour have stayed with them. Despite the changes that society has undergone, the male dominated household is still a regular feature in the Indian community (Chhiba 2013:4). Men use the Hindu religious scriptures to perpetuate the idea of male superiority and justify this mindset. This is contrary to the core philosophy of Hinduism which believes that male and female energy is found in every being and that the one cannot exist without the other since there is a constant duality and balance of these energies (Chhiba 2013:64). An example of this duality is when Shiva is sometimes depicted as Ardhanareshwara, an androgynous being that is half male and half female (www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/ardhanarisvara).

Another basic tenet of Hinduism is the importance and reverence afforded woman. An ancient Sanskrit phrase is '*Matha, Pitha, Guru, Deivum'* which means 'Mother, Father, Teacher, God' which places the status of the mother (woman) above all else (www.vjai.com). Most Hindus understand that there is only one God and that all the deities that they worship are simply manifestations of the one. So the goddesses / mother figures are no less powerful even though the gifts that they grant - fertility, creativity in arts or music, or happy homes - may seem more 'feminine'. The goddess Kali*,* powerful, independent and aggressive is an example to all women of their latent power. Chhiba aims to use the image of Kali and what she stands for to create an alternative identity for the Indian woman: one who is assertive and challenges societal expectations (Chhiba 2013: 64).

The images in the artwork show the woman being abused both physically - when she cowers and uses her hands to ward off her attacker - and verbally – when she covers her ears with both hands. The emotional and physical abuse of women in

South Africa has reached staggering proportions and domestic violence in which women are beaten up, raped and murdered by their partners or families is a large part of that. According to Sanger and Waterhouse,

> South Africa has one of the world's highest levels of domestic violence perpetrated by men against women. Over 40% of men report having been physically violent to an intimate partner and 40% to 50% of women report having been victims. In South Africa, half of women murder victims are killed by their male intimate partners. Intimate partner violence is often also sexual and emotional, and it usually occurs in a broader context of relationships marked by controlling behaviours by men and a pervasive sense of fear among women (Sanger and Waterhouse 2013).

Chhiba's artwork is aimed not just at Indian women but all South African women to empower themselves and speak out against our victimisation.

The next artworks that I would like to discuss are *Unawakened*, *Restrained, Stripped* and *Unbridled* (figures 34, 35, 36 and 37 respectively). Although they are four separate artworks, Chhiba intended them to be read together and in her exhibition 'Kali*'* (2008) they were hung as a group. Each photograph is of the back view of a female with attention focussed on the hair. In *Unawakened,* we see the image of a young Indian girl on the brink of womanhood with pierced ears, and with her long hair in a braid down her back. *Restrained* features the image of a mature married woman as indicated by her traditional attire of sari and the necklaces (*thali* and *mangal sutra*) around her neck.[4] Her hair is neatly pulled back and knotted into a bun on her head. The woman in *Stripped* is elderly, wears no jewellery and her greying hair is shaven off, indicating her status as a widow.

In India , when a woman's husband dies her hair is ritually shaven off, her *sindoor* (dot) and jewellery removed and she is expected to wear white. This practise is

unusual in South Africa except in very orthodox families. In *Unbridled,* a young

naked woman with long unbound, dishevelled hair stands with her back to us. In

India, unbound and unkempt hair is a sign of mourning, being in an impure state,

or being sexually loose (Hiltebeital & Miller1998:263).[5]

In the past women in traditional Hindu families subscribed to certain norms for

what their hair should look like. Female beauty including long luxuriant hair is

marital currency in India and an Indian girl's hair is ideally never cut (Hiltebeitel

& Miller 1998:264-5). According to Seema Mohanty in *The book of Kali,* "the

unmarried virgin plaits her hair, the married woman oils, combs, parts and knots

her hair, while the widow is made to shave her hair. Hair is thus a metaphor for

sexuality- poised for fulfilment in the virgin, domesticated and controlled in the

married woman, and stripped away in the widow" (Mohanty quoted in Chhiba

2013:59).   The rigid norms and social mores that dictate and control Indian

women's decorum and modesty is challenged by the fourth image added by

Chhiba. The hair of the woman in *Unbridled* is wild and unrestrained – implying

an untamed sexuality. This idea is further reinforced by her nudity. Chhiba claims

that this 'Kali image' is another option for women in which they can embrace

their sexuality without confinement or control (Chhiba 2013:60). She wishes to

evoke a new sense of female identity within all women – a femininity that is not

bound by societal or patriarchal expectation (Chhiba 2013:61).

The last artwork that I want to examine is an installation that Chhiba created as

part of her recent exhibition titled 'The two talking yoni's' - (*yoni* is a Sanskrit

word meaning vagina/ vulva) held in 2013. The exhibition consisted of three

parts: a series of photographic works at the Kalashnikov Gallery, artworks at the

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Room and an installation in the former women's prison in Constitution Hill (www.urbanartsproject.org/ROOM). The installation titled *Come Inside* (fig. 38) referred to as a 'walk-in-vagina' is 12 metres long and made out of padded red velvet and cotton (Obuobi 2013). Around the opening black acrylic wool is used to mimic pubic hair and the entrance into the walkway is shaped like a tongue. As visitors enter, a high pitched scream is heard followed by a mocking laugh. At the end of the passage, a central area features a photographic image of Chhiba titled *I am Kali, I am black* and overhead hang five curved knives (www.urbanartprojects.org).

Chhiba was commissioned to create an artwork for the disused women's prison on Constitution Hill which is now part of the Constitutional Court complex. This prison was called The Fort during the apartheid era and the women's section once held Albertina Sisulu, Winnie Madikizela-Mandela, Fatima Meer and other political prisoners (www.constitutionalcourt.org.za). Chhiba wanted to create a conceptual art installation that would make a statement about women's power. The concept for the installation grew out of a series of talks between Chhiba and the curator of the exhibition, Nontobeko Ntombela.

> These discussions were also centred around the *yoni* as a creative space, not just as a space of birth, rather as a space of power and defiance. These spaces, as we considered them, were spaces of complexity that spoke to the *yoni* as a metaphor and an abstract idea. In that moment the *yoni* became a space of criticality, protest, mockery, battle and femininity (Chhiba 2013).

The pre-recorded sounds – laughter and screaming - represent the feelings of the women once contained in this place. The screams recreate the anger and protest, while the laughter mocks this space that cannot really stifle the power of women.

The installation references the image of Kali in the tongue at the entrance, the curved knives similar to those usually carried by Kali and the photographic image of Chhiba as Kali. Ntombela points out that Kali is almost an alter ego for Chhiba, who is shown with wild hair and her tongue stuck out defiantly (2013:23). Chhiba believes that this show represents a progression of her ideas about feminine energy and a re-investigation of the creation of alternative identities for women within patriarchal systems (Chhiba 2013:3).

The installation sparked outrage, ribald online comments and controversy. The Indian community, in particular, responded with vitriol against Chhiba for associating a vagina with Hinduism. Newspapers and radio stations catering for the Indian community were inundated with angry comments and letters, with the general Indian public agreeing that this installation was nothing more than blasphemy. Chhiba admits that she was initially taken aback and upset by this response (Chhiba 2014). An article by James Legge in *The Independent* in Britain discussed the exhibition and included the shocked opinions of a security guard and a gardener, both employed at the Constitutional Court (www.theindependent.co.uk). That article was picked up and repeated several times online, in sensationalised blogs or news articles. The views of those two individuals who have no art education rather than the serious reviews of art critics have now become inextricably associated with this artwork. Chhiba has defended her work by stating, "You don't often hear men talking about their private parts and feeling disgusted or shamed, and that alone speaks volumes of how we've been brought up to think about our bodies, and what I am saying here is that it's supposed to be an empowering space"(Legge 2013). She also points out that her

request at the entrance for visitors to remove their shoes before entering the vagina, shows respect and makes it a sacred space (Legge 2013).

Arts and culture writer Sharon Obuobi states that it is alarming that the themes raised by the work – women's power, the scourge of rape in South Africa, respect for the female body and challenging entrenched patriarchal systems - were overlooked. She believes that Chhiba's work is doing what art should do in society which is encouraging the public to think about specific social and political issues (Obuobi 2013). African writer Yewande Omotoso says that sex has become a central part of marketing in South Africa, but the sex that is packaged for consumption in advertising is more acceptable to the general public than any anatomical representation of the female body (Obuobi 2013). Kubi Rama, head of Gender Links which promotes gender equality in Africa, says of Chhiba's work, "It is bringing the private into the public, (saying) that the women's body is not necessarily a private matter" (Rama quoted in Legge 2013). Obuobi points out that "what we construct as privacy can often be an oppressive tool for concealing evidence of gender violence. Privacy can sometimes be the reason why we don't deal with alarming issues of sexuality, domestic violence, and 'corrective rape'" (Obuobi 2013).

Nadya Tolokno (real name Tolokonnikova), a Russian conceptual artist, political activist and member of Pussy Riot, believes that Chhiba's work is a powerful piece of feminist art in a nation that has a history of gender repression. She links it to a similar work by Niki de Saint Phalle called *Hon* (She) which featured a giant vagina through which visitors had to walk to enter the gallery (Tolokno 2013). Tolokno believes that Chhiba's work must be seen in the context of the South

African feminist struggle and that the reaction to Chhiba's work is similar to the reaction of the public to Celeste Coetzee's *Bridal Ontklee* (Bridal Strip) (2013). Other South African women artists who have faced similar censure over work that seeks to promote gender issues are Zanele Muholi, Berni Searle and Tracey Rose; Muholi for her intimate pictures of lesbian love, Searle for the use of her naked body in her work and Rose's creation of alter-egos like Cicciolina and her nudity in *Span II.*

Chhiba's installation should be examined against the work of other feminist artists especially those from the 1970s who used the female body as a point of departure. In Judy Chicago's *The Dinner Party*, (1974 – 1979) a table is set with places for iconic women in history - each plate features a design that represented the vulva. Hannah Wilke used ceramics and terracotta to create *Yellow Rose of Texas* and *San Antonio Rose* (1960s) – intricately folded sculptures resembling female genitalia (www.hannahwilke.com). Cindy Sherman has used her own body as well as prosthetic body parts in her photography. The intention in all these disparate works is similar namely to draw attention to the objectification and sexualisation of women's bodies within a male dominated world just as Chhiba has attempted to do.

Writer and artist David Thompson dismisses Chhiba's work by claiming, "There's the apparent belief that the way to Smash the Patriarchy is to do something that fits perfectly with the pretensions of the modern gallery-visiting set. As if Johannesburg's installation art crowd were teeming with patriarchs who'd tremble at the sight of a velvet tunnel and then hastily rethink their woman-crushing worldview" (davidthompson.typepad.com 2013). This is only one of hundreds of

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online comments and criticisms that seem to say 'enough already – women have equality – it's time to move on'. The problem is that for South African black women who are still recovering from apartheid, colonialism and decades of abuse and inequality, there is still much to be done. South African black women cannot be seen as a homogeneous group. They include black rural women, Indian university educated women and coloured housewives - each of these women will have a different experience of what patriarchy or feminism means to them. Feminist art practise in South Africa has mostly been about the experiences of white women artists and Ntombela points out that black feminism in South African art history is a newly adopted phenomenon which has barely been engaged as a form of theoretical discussion (Ntombela 2013: 25).

Mainstream feminist practises deal with issues affecting white middle class women and do not consider race. According to Daby Nkululeko, black feminism, especially as it applies in South Africa has to overcome "the quadruple negation of black women" whereby women are oppressed by colonialism, racism, classism and sexism (Nkululeko quoted in Malatjie 2011:18). One important aspect of feminist practise is for black art historians and writers to document and write critically about artists and their work in terms of each artist's particular experiences and intentions.

> The result of excluding black women (and men) from institutions of higher learning and knowledge production serves to elevate knowledge production by white people, which ultimately enforces colonial hierarchies and its attendant oppressive structures. While black women remain on the margins, white men and women occupy the centre, in this way dominating knowledge production in South African art histories (Malatjie 2011:17)

Another aspect is 'autobiography' which allows black women to represent themselves and their bodies and allows them to negate the stereotypical images often assigned to them by imperialist cultures (Malatjie 2011:11). Chhiba's insertion of Indian women as the subject of her artworks (figures 33 to 37) and as the ferocious Kali figure in the 'Two talking yonis' exhibition (not shown here) is a clear example of this practise. These images subvert the stereotypical image of the domesticated, submissive housewife, the exotic 'Bollywood babe', and the benign smiling goddess that is usually associated with Indian women.

6.3 SUMMARY

> The only decision I made very early in my career is whether I wanted to be an artist or a curator – I knew that I wanted my focus to be on creating work rather than creating exhibitions of work by other artists ... I am a person who needs to create, so if it means it gets done in the dark hours of the morning then so be it (Chhiba 2014).

Reshma Chhiba was only 11 years old when South Africa became a democracy and as a young contemporary artist her experiences with issues of race, class and gender differ from those of older Indian women artists. Chhiba's family was never involved in politics since their main focus was survival and coming to terms with a new country. The advent of democracy led to more inclusionary systems in schools and universities, broadening the opportunities available for young girls. Coming from a working class background meant that Chhiba never really benefitted from these early changes in education. She confesses, "one still feels inferior in certain environments, and I think this has a lot to do with not having the same basic educational opportunities that white kids and perhaps some Indian and black kids would have had" (Chhiba 2014). The reality of apartheid is that

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even when it officially ended, its repercussions are still being felt years later. As Chhiba says, "While the demons of apartheid didn't really haunt my daily existence ....race and politics still affect me" (Chhiba 2014).

Chhiba's artwork is inextricably linked to her racial identity as an Indian woman and her religious beliefs as a Hindu. While Chhiba agrees that we should not allow ourselves to be classed or grouped in specific race groups, she does believe that we are at a point now where there should be some reflection on where we come from, without denying our heritage, but instead finding a relevant place for it in a contemporary art space (Chhiba 2014). In the book *Figuring Faith* which discusses South African images of faith, she writes, " The dearth of work associated with the Hindu faith in South African art suggests that South African artists of Hindu culture are little interested in exploring aspects of their faith in their creative work. The few that do include such elements in their work do so allusively, integrating aspects of their religion into wider concerns" (Chhiba in Rankin-Smith 2011:172). Most South African Indian women artists probably refrain from making art that has obvious religious content since they wish to be viewed as being in line with international and contemporary practises and not as being 'oriental' or 'exotic' in their outlook.

Chhiba's use of the Kali figure to empower women in South Africa is part of a wider concern to affect and inspire women. The importance of goddess worship in feminist thinking has been widely documented in several books and papers. "Religious symbols systems focused around exclusively male images of divinity create the impression that female power can never be fully legitimate or wholly beneficent" (Christ and Plaskow 1979:275). Judaism, Christianity and Islam all

centre on male figures of worship and are inherently patriarchal. Some feminist writers believe that in ancient times, goddess figures were worshipped by all genders, placing women in positions of strength. According to Rachel Mc Dermott, "where women held power goddesses reigned" (quoted in Hawley and Wulff 1998:282). The presence of powerful female figures in spirituality allows women to draw strength and inspiration thereby empowering themselves. "Kali is an image that helps us say no to victimisation and yes to creating new forms of social organisations. Her image represents creative power through the destruction of oppressive forces" (Tomm 1995:291).

South African Hindu women are encouraged by spiritual leaders and elders to emulate Luxmi[6], Saraswathi[7] and Parvati, the goddesses that embody the idea of virtuous, domesticated women who are sensuous, beautiful, and complement the male gods to whom they are consorts. Special days are set aside in the Hindu calendar to worship Luxmi and Saraswathie and images of these goddesses appear regularly in most South African temples (Maxwell, Diesel & Naidoo 1995:184). Kali worship on the other hand is much more complex. In India it was associated with blood offerings, animal sacrifices and was carried out on cremation grounds (Dash 2008). Although these practises are no longer popular, some of the negative connotations remain. Kali's fearsome appearance and aggression belie her true nature as protector of the innocent and destroyer of evil. In South Africa male priests usually perform the strict rituals of Kali worship and maintain that it is dangerous and can lead to the unleashing of negative energy (Chhiba 2013:34).

Another aspect of her that is seldom discussed is her sexuality – in many ancient images she is depicted engaged in sexual union with Shiva who lies passively

under her while she sits astride him (Chhiba quoted in Rankin-Smith 2011:164). This image found within the Hindu culture illustrates that the pleasure in the sexual act, in which women can be bold and in control of their own sexuality is the right of every woman. However, within the Indian community and especially the older generation, sex is a taboo subject and 'good' women are not expected to be sexual.

Chhiba believes strongly that women need to be in charge of their own bodies, sexuality and biological health. The price women pay for not doing so is clear in South Africa's horrific statistics for rape, child abuse, domestic violence, teenage pregnancies, and diseases like AIDS, which result from unsafe sex.

As a young emerging South African artist, Chhiba explores issues of race and gender in her work. Her attempts to empower and impact on the lives of South African women has led to a divided audience – those who are outraged and those who applaud her bold approach.

ENDNOTES

1. Bharata Natyam is derived from an ancient dance form originating in the 3rd or 4th century AD in which temple dancers told stories relating to Hindu mythology through music and movement.

2. *Kumkum* powder is a red or orange red powder used to mark the forehead, or is placed in the hairline of married women to symbolise their status.

3. Some myths and stories describe Kali as a being that emerges from Durga's forehead.

4. The *thali* string is tied around a women's neck when she is married. The *mangal sutra* which is made up of gold and jet beads is also traditionally worn by married women.

5. Hindu women who are menstruating are regarded as impure or unclean and as such are forbidden to enter temples or perform any prayer rituals.

6. Luxmi is the goddess of wealth and prosperity. She sits upon a lotus flower, always wears red and gold coins stream out of her hands.

7. Saraswathi is the goddess of knowledge, music, art and dance. She always wears white and holds instruments, scrolls and books.

CONCLUSION

The central aim of this dissertation was to examine the artistic practises and career paths of five selected South African Indian female artists and the manner in which their race, gender and class have affected them. Since all these women are products of a post-apartheid, post-colonial and largely patriarchal society, it was important to understand whether these factors would account for their success or lack thereof within the wider context of South African art.

Initially I provided a brief history of Indians as a subject race - first as British colonial subjects who were brought to Natal as indentured labourers and then as they became part of a racial minority group in apartheid South Africa.

> Apartheid, bred of colonialism, was one of the most psychologically destructive and insidious social engineering experiments in world history... the social and political identity of South African Indians (has to be understood) within the context of the systematic processes of socialising them as a distinct, separate and inferior population group within the racially divisible 'nationhood' (Moodley 2012:35).

The first chapter set out the historical background to the Indian community in South Africa, with the focus on the effects of 'apartheid' education. Indian students suffered from inferior schooling facilities, fewer opportunities and inadequate funding. In the past, the patriarchal views of the Indian community meant that young girls were expected to marry young and be domesticated (Desai & Vahed; Jagganath et al). More recently, young girls who did pursue tertiary education were encouraged to choose conservative careers. During the 1980s art education was seldom offered at high schools and entry into tertiary institutions

offering fine art was limited. Another important fact that prevented many Indian girls from pursuing art was that for "the Indian family, the concept of "Fine Art" meant very little in terms of how one would pursue a career or in fact *if* a career was indeed possible" (Moodley 2012:121).

The subsequent chapters were case studies of five artists with particular focus on their education, biography, artworks and their status within the art world. These five women – Lallitha Jawahirilal, Simmi Dullay, Usha Seejarim, Sharlene Khan and Reshma Chhiba reflect the diversity of the Indian community in their family backgrounds, religious affiliations, class and artistic output. All they have in common are gender and race, but even those factors had a different impact on each of them.

Each of the artists' careers has been discussed, beginning with their education and training. The only university offering fine art to Indian students was the University College for Indians (UNICOL) which later became the University of Durban-Westville (UDW) where Khan studied for her undergraduate degree and where Jawahirilal was a lecturer. This institution was marked by political unrest and an apartheid agenda which prevented the art department from integrating with the predominantly white art world. Pather writes that artists from UDW produced a vast body of work but this never entered the public domain (Pather 2008:11).

> Due to the politicised nature of UDW, especially since the late 1970s, many students at the university believed that in exhibiting their work they would detract from the real task at hand, namely, their commitment to all facets of the struggle for freedom. Amidst the cultural boycott and the sustained university boycotts of all activities that would give credibility to the institution, students, up to the early 1990s, relegated their careers as

> artists in favour of supporting the fervent political agenda which was central to most students at the time (Moodley 2013:8)

Only a handful of the women who graduated from the art departments of UNICOL and UDW have continued to work as professional artists. A few chose to complete the Higher Diploma in Education which allowed them to teach in schools. The early closure of the Fine Art department at UDW while it was still developing meant that it could not offer young artists the support that they needed.

WITS was established as a university in 1922, and its art department produced artists like Cecil Skotnes, Jane Alexander, Judith Mason and Jeremy Wafer as well as a host of contemporary artists that are highly successful. Both Usha Seejarim and Reshma Chhiba are graduates of WITS and appear to be well positioned as artists. Seejarim has had many public commissions and solo exhibitions to date. As a young artist Chhiba also received a public commission at the Constitutional Court and recently contributed a chapter to Fiona Rankin Smith's book *Figuring Faith*.

A prestigious university like WITS has a long established tradition of training and preparing artists for careers in art. The lecturers themselves are established artists, critics, writers, judges and curators and so are able to help graduates to distinguish themselves. WITS' location in Johannesburg, which is home to large corporations and businesses that patronise the visual arts, is also a distinct advantage. While race might have presented a challenge for Chhiba and Seejarim, their education and association with an influential art network has enabled them to overcome the oppressive forces of race and gender. The advantages that Khan

gained from her study at WITS and her initial success as an artist and curator were adversely affected due to her outspoken stance against racism.

The case studies of both Jawahirilal and Dullay reveal their experiences of exile as a result of apartheid. The struggle against racial discrimination in South Africa was a long and painful one. Those who chose exile escaped apartheid but suffered the alienation and loss of leaving home. Jawahirilal chose voluntary exile since she could not live under the apartheid regime. Simmi Dullay's activist father was forced into exile to safeguard his young family against the security police. Both artists have spoken out about the difficulties that they have endured as a result of exile. Susan Rubin Suleiman in her book *Exile and Creativity* writes that "exile in its broad sense designates every kind of estrangement or displacement, from the physical and geographical to the spiritual" (1998: 2). Jawahirilal's abstracted artworks (as discussed in chapter 2) speak of this 'displacement' and her longing for the home she left behind. When she returned as an adult she was disillusioned since the home of her imagination was never the same as the reality of the changed South Africa in which she found herself. She has lived variously in South Africa, London, Sydney, and currently in India where she has made her home. Dullay's return to South Africa was marked by a similar sense of alienation especially since she had left as a child and her formative years were spent in Denmark. The conservative Indian community, the cultural differences and the prevailing racism that she encountered here on her return were unexpected. Like Jawahirilal, she also found it difficult to accept South Africa as home, as is evident in her painting, *Strangers in their own Land*. She returned to Denmark for another five years but chose to bring up her son in South Africa where her family

lives. Her family and child have acted as a stabilising force and provided the sense of home.

In each case study I investigated how race and ethnic identity have affected each of the artists and it became apparent that this is a complicated issue. As discussed in chapter 4, one of the reasons for this can be found in the tenuous position of Indians in South Africa who only became permanent citizens in 1961. Indians had always been regarded as 'Indian citizens' although as second or third generation settlers they had no contact with or recollection of India. During the struggle, the NIC and Black Consciousness Movement advocated that all disadvantaged groups in South Africa refer to themselves as 'black', not just to engender a sense of unity and common identity but also to negate the apartheid use of the term 'non-white'. Ethnicity and cultural differences were put aside in order to pursue the higher goal of freedom. After apartheid the new government promoted the term 'rainbow nation' and coined the slogan 'One Nation- Many Cultures' implying that South Africans are many separate groups living harmoniously in one country. This has led to further complexity for South African Indian identity, ranging from those who continue to regard themselves as black or African and those who feel they can now reclaim their Indian identity. Saths Cooper, an activist and leading member of the Black Consciousness Movement, claims that in post-apartheid South Africa, "one should have the freedom to assert pride in one's cultural and ethnic background and not be locked into predetermined categories"(Govinden 2008:43). Moodley calls this a 'double edged sword' stating,

> On the one hand, by articulating the need to be culturally identifiable, they (Indians) extend the insulation and isolation of the Apartheid regime and

write themselves into a new racialised politics for minority recognition within the new dispensation. On the other hand, there is a strong desire for Indian South Africans to be seen as South African first and as Indian second, which unfortunately is a seemingly impossible process, as contemporary South Africa perpetuates race-based thinking (Moodley 2012:108).

All the artists in this study are united in their claim that they are South Africans first and that their Indian heritage is an integral part of their identities. Dullay has referred to herself as 'Afro-Asian–Danishstani' in view of the three aspects of her identity that she often has to reconcile. Khan defines herself as black, and says that she is more African than Indian and has also identified herself as an "Africanised Indian who is also westernised" (Tadjo 2010:12). She is also Christian with a Muslim father and finds it offensive when curators, art patrons and academics expect her work to reflect her 'Indian' origins. She seldom employs Indian imagery and it is only in her exhibition titled 'What I look like: what I feel like', that she alludes to her Indian origins by using her 'racialised' body as a subject.

Jawahirilal has always claimed to identify strongly with the African landscape and her abstracted works seldom focus on her Indian culture apart from the obscure reference to a Hindu goddess in *Oh Goddess of African Soil, Manasa the Serpent God Bothers Me Sometimes, Please Intervene*. Some of Dullay's earlier artwork and Seejarim's *Motherland* both refer to their Hindu origins and the experience of being Indian in South Africa, but in very subtle ways using the methods and language of contemporary visual art practises. Seejarim's video *Two rooms and a kitchen* is a vital record of how South African Indians have endured forced removals and discrimination. Chhiba's artwork has always centred on her

exploration of her faith and identity as a Hindu. The images of Indian dance and Hindu goddesses that are her subject matter may appear to be more typical of the art expected from Indian women but on closer inspection, her themes of sexuality and female empowerment reveal a less stereotypical approach. While the racial identity of artists should have no bearing on their output, all of these female artists have had to deal with the stereotypical notions that South African society has about Indian women.

Class is another factor that impacts on an artist's chances for success. In a paper titled 'Social stratification and inequality in South Africa at the end of apartheid', Jeremy Seekings concludes that "there remains a close relationship between race and class" (2003:48). The indicators of class such as income, education, family background, and geographic location or environment, were determined by race during apartheid with whites having had the advantage in all these areas. The majority of Indians were working class people with only a small middle class. In the case of Jawahirilal, her poor working class background was almost a deterrent to her dream of studying art. It was her single-minded determination that allowed her to work, leave Africa and study abroad.

In discussing the politics of class bell hooks states, "Often the black people who receive a degree of attention in the mainstream art world - whether as artists, critics, or both - come from privileged class locations within their ethnic groups" (1995:109). Hooks believes that the privileged classes always assume that those who are gifted will somehow triumph over hardships and deprivations and still remain committed to doing art (1995:139). For many talented students who do come from poor and disadvantaged class groups, the reality of survival means that

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art has to sometimes be abandoned in order to earn a living. Without outside help and financial support it is incredibly difficult to achieve any measure of success. Khan, for example, who grew up in a working class township had to rely on scholarships to fund her studies. Jawahirilal and Khan were able to overcome the obstacles of class and find a way to become professional artists. However there are hundreds of other young Indian girls living in poor townships where unemployment, drug abuse and poverty cause them to abandon their education in order to support themselves or their families.

"In South Africa, the politics of gender need to be discussed in light of race and class" (Malatjie 2011:11). This sentiment is echoed by Patricia Hill Collins who refers to race, class and gender as interlocking systems of oppression (2009:1). This is important to bear in mind when considering how gender issues have affected the five artists studied here. In the introduction, I discussed how positions of power in the South African art world such as gallery directors, university heads, gallery owners, art writers and publishers are dominated by white males. A survey conducted in 2010 of professional artists in South Africa found that "senior management and ownership of businesses and organisations continues to be largely vested in white people" (HSRC 2010:8). In 2011, Ruth Simbao pointed out that leadership of the top four art schools in South Africa was in the hands of white males and that white males appeared to be once again dominating the art scene (www.artthrob).[1] Simbao goes on to say that transformation has not really occurred in the South African art world.

All of the artists examined here have other sources of income to supplement the often meagre income from the sale of their art. While this is in keeping with the practises of other South African artists, finding employment, especially within the education sector can be difficult for black (Indian) women. In 2001, Jawahirilal was vocal about her disappointment at the lack of transformation at tertiary institutions and cited it as one of the reasons that she chose to leave South Africa. More recently Khan claimed that even though she has two Master's degrees she has struggled to get lecturing positions (Tadjo 2008:16). Instead she worked as an Events Coordinator at the WITS Humanities Graduation Centre for three years before being employed as a lecturer at UNISA (www.sharlenekhan.co.za). Initially Dullay was also unable to find employment in the art sector and worked temporarily as a lecturer in Gender studies at DUT. Khan maintains that it is not just a question of being female since white females are clearly at an advantage in their careers. However, despite the large number of white women in academic positions, the positions of power still appear to be held by men. There are a few Indian women who excel as academics within the arts, notably Avitha Sooful (VUT), Judy Peter (UJ) and Nalini Moodley (TUT) but they are a decided minority within their respective institutions.

Seejarim admits that being a woman of colour has worked to her advantage as is evidenced by the numerous public and private commissions that she has been awarded. Chhiba also admits that sometimes she has been included in certain exhibitions because of her race and colour. Although she finds this type of 'tokenism' insulting, it can be a way of drawing attention to one's work.

There are two aspects of gender that I have examined: one is the personal effect of gender on the chosen artists and the other is how they have dealt with issues of gender in their art production. Chhiba and Dullay have examined women's sexuality, abuse and empowerment in their work. Dullay has explored how colonisation has led to the exploitation and appropriation of women's bodies. Seejarim and Khan have questioned their identities as women, whether as stereotypical Indian housewives or modern westernised Indian women. The value of these works lie in their being records of the lived experience of Indian women artists and in them becoming a part of a South African body of artwork. In discussing the need for black feminist theories and discourses in South African art history Malatjie states that it is "critical that black women artists ....have a voice to communicate their black female experiences, ideas, identities, histories and desires. This can be done through their art. Their use of their individual experiences and the imprint of their personalities need to be acknowledged in the discourse around their art" (2011:17). This is the only way for black artists to fight against their marginalisation and become more 'visible'.

When examining the effects of the patriarchal systems within the Indian community, it is important to note that Seejarim, Chhiba and Khan had to challenge their parents in order to pursue a career in art. They are lucky that despite the initial resistance, they did have the support of their families. There are no doubt many other women who have not been allowed to follow a creative path. It is clear that the conservative Indian community can and must be challenged to embrace new ways of thinking. If there are several Indian female artists in the public eye, they can become role models for other young Indian girls aspiring to

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become artists. According to many black feminist writers such as Collins, hooks, Malatjie et al, this is the reason why it is imperative to document and write critically about South African Indian artists. As artists and academics all five artists have written critically about aspects of South African art and this ability to enter into academic discourse is as important as producing art is. In paraphrasing the ideas of Gayatri Spivak, Malatjie writes,

> The colonisers had the means and power to write themselves into history. The colonised were denied the power to write themselves into that same history and were ultimately (mis)represented by the coloniser. Autobiography, therefore, aims to include in history the voices of the previously colonised ...who suffered race and gender based discrimination. This strategy gives women the platform to write their own histories according to their own voices and perspective (2011:39-40).

In summarising the manner in which class, gender and race have affected the artistic practises of South African Indian female artists I believe that the artists that I have studied have been indelibly shaped by these oppressive forces. These five women have become a presence in the art world due to education, talent, determination and the support of those who believe in them.   Each of these artists have faced different challenges and all have responded to them in different ways - creating unique works of art that reflect their personal point of view. Although they are all part of the same race group and gender, the narratives and experiences of each reveal how different each is and negate the stereotypical notions of Indian womanhood.

ENDNOTE

1.Ruth Simbao does not specify which institutions she refers to in this article.

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