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1
THE CHOW-CHOW PICKLE JAR

On a summer's day in December 1947, a few months before the National Party's electoral victory, a young bride travelled by car from a town in the Transvaal highveld to her new home in the Indian Ocean port city of Durban. Her name was Zuleikha Mayat.

The wedding had been modest: about sixty family members gathered in the lounge of the family home where Zuleikha sat in a dress of white lace, her hands glowing with mendhi artistry, while the imam conducted the nikah ceremony at the local mosque. More well-wishers were invited to the lunch that followed, some arriving by train from Johannesburg. Many brought gifts and kunchas, trays of savouries and sweets, and wondered why the young woman had married a stranger from out of town and, alarmingly, from a different ghaam when there were eligible local men whose parents or grand-parents also hailed from the Indian village of Dabhel. A few took offence that Zuleikha had declined a relative's proposal. Back in Dabhel, her family, the Bismillahs, generally married other Bismillahs, Akhalwayas or Haffejees; and here in the Union, too, marrying within one's kutum was common to most Gujarati-speaking Muslims. This was the first opportunity for many of the guests to set eyes upon Dr Mahomed Mayat, who had recently been awarded his medical degree from the University of the Witwatersrand, and was a friend and contemporary of Zuleikha's brother, Abdulhak. Some knew the love story:

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that the couple had first encountered each other through a letter Zuleikha had written to the newspaper, *Indian Views*, to which Mahomed had publicly replied.

The letter, signed 'Miss Zuleikha Bismillah of Potchefstroom', had argued for girls to have access to higher levels of education. The style of its writing revealed not only a principled passion concerning this matter, but also the author's sharp mind and biting wit, betraying a more personal, frustrated desire. It also displayed political savvy, appealing to a range of sensibilities before pleading:

> Will not our parents realise that in these modern times we would prefer a good sound education which would equip us to face the future, rather than have them shower on us gifts of clothes or sending us to bioscopes or weddings as recompense? If the girl of today is given a chance, the woman of tomorrow will be able to bring up better Muslims and citizens.[1]

In his letter to the paper, 'MGH Mayat' agreed: 'The numerous articles on the education of girls is a healthy sign of the awakening of the Community to the importance of Learning.' Moreover, he continued, because educated men preferred to marry educated women, it would be 'politic' to ensure that there be appropriate ratios of educated men and women for the 'welfare of the Community'.[2] Clearly marriage, and the attractions of a clever woman, were on his mind.

This exchange, in English and in writing, with its public beginning and expression of modernist views, set the tone for the personal correspondence and courtship that followed. The would-be couple wrote letters to each other for almost two years. Through Zuleikha's brother, Mahomed learned that the determined young woman harboured dreams of becoming a medical doctor, that she was working to complete her Standard 8 through a distance-learning course and that she wished to strengthen her mathematics skills. As one of two Indian students to receive a first-class matriculation certificate at Sastri College in 1941, Mahomed was in a position to offer some chivalrous assistance. 'So this was his opening gambit,' recalls Zuleikha. 'He sent me some notes on algebra and so on. And slowly, then, I replied, and then he'd write [again].'

> [This was all] without the parents knowing about it. I mean, I used to tell our messenger, you know, who was the delivery boy, to go and get the

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Zuleikha Bismillah

Mahomed Mayat

> post. And I used to wait on the veranda. As soon as the post came, I'd collect it first, take my letters and then give [back] the rest. [*laughs*]

For Zuleikha, the exchange also provided an opportunity for her to practise the English she had learned through her correspondence courses. And writing, even in a third language, was easier than speaking for at least one crucial reason. On occasion, when Abdulhak returned home during breaks from his medical training, he brought Mahomed along with him. Yet opportunities for conversation were few. In response to Mahomed's frustration following such a visit, Zuleikha explained:

> Brought up in a society which thinks that a great sin is being perpetrated if a girl so much as looks at a boy, or displays slight signs of interest in him, can you wonder that I tried my utmost to concentrate on my studies and remained as silent as a sphinx? Believe me, I would have liked to talk with you and broach certain subjects, but under the prevailing conditions I was bound to submit to conventions…Does it not occur to you that I would have no scruples in talking with you were it not [for] this fear of being the object of local scandal mongers? Personally, I do not care overmuch for a dented reputation, if my own conscience remains

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> clear. But I must take into account my parents' feelings…I sincerely wish that they should not be hurt through me.[3]

The 'certain subjects' she wanted to broach included the ideas of Sigmund Freud, the study of medicine and the rights of Indian women. However, letter writing would be the medium for these discussions, a sharing of views on 'all *interesting* things. Not "I love you" and "you love me" and that sort of business. It was really at an intellectual level.' In letters addressed with formal correctness to 'Mr Mahomed Mayat', Zuleikha confessed the depth of her longing for education:

> For as long as I can remember, I have always craved to be educated and this I think has now become an obsession with me. To proceed someday to a varsity and become a doctor is my greatest desire. (All this not in order to rise in the estimation of the opposite sex – although this is Freud's contention – or if such thoughts are in existence then they are so far in my own subconscious mind that I am not aware of them.)

The young woman's aspirations to become a physician were closely connected with her concerns about the status of girls and women:

> I feel that an Indian lady doctor, especially a Muslim, is very essential towards the upliftment of our community. As a doctor, I can come into contact with Indian women of all kinds and needs and…if I can only make the women dissatisfied with their menial and subordinate position, I shall be satisfied. I want us women to realise that to gain freedom we must fight for our rights, since nobody will help fight for those who are too busy to fight for themselves. Man's supremacy must be erased for all times.[4]

Yet, despite these bold proclamations, Zuleikha was not convinced that the opportunity for further education would be presented to her: 'I have lived in hopes till now and I will do so till I pass my matric. Although my parents are determined not to let me proceed to university, I do not let this knowledge daunt me but try even harder to succeed.'

When Mahomed broached the subject of marriage, less than a week later, he could not have been unprepared for the concerns she expressed in her reply:

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'I have been pondering over your suggestion about getting engaged, but have not ascertained whether indulgence in that "disaster" can possibly enhance my chances of attending varsity.'[5] Still, the letter was encouraging. It ended with 'yours truly' and with the quip: 'No doubt, mother will welcome this since she has always feared an old maid on her hands for life.'

The couple's desire to marry was negotiated between themselves through letters and conspiring siblings: it was not an arranged union initiated by their respective parents. However, understanding themselves as members of a community, they were respectful of customary sensitivities. Mahomed's family was obliged to send a formal proposal of marriage through an intermediary. His father, GH Mayat, had business links to the well-known Mia family, who, in turn, were distant relatives but close friends (and fellow villagers) of the Bismillahs. In October of 1945, GH Mayat paid a visit to the Potchefstroom household with Mawlana Mohamed Mia. Once the parents of both parties had been properly introduced, Zuleikha was called in to meet her future in-laws, who enquired about her cooking and domestic skills. After that, conversation turned to the much more tricky matter of her professional ambitions.

In a seven-page letter to Mahomed a few days later, Zuleikha recounted this meeting in painful detail, describing the nuanced generational and gender politics conducted in polite but steely conversation. Her sister Bibi, her only ally, had 'strict orders from mother not to traverse the grounds from the kitchen to the lounge while I was there.'

> In the lounge, Maulana introduced me to your Daddy and then told me that Mahomed's parents and my parents were eager to enjoin me and Mahomed in holy matrimony. He only wanted my consent to proceed with the engagement. Maulana must have noticed my obstinacy in giving an answer, so he proceeded with his unwelcome advice: Two doctors in a family were one too many…Upon [my] inquiry that if two or even half a dozen shopkeepers were not too many in a family, how could two doctors be, Maulana replied that it was quite a different thing to be a doctor and a shopkeeper.[6]

The lengthy interchange that followed proved more than a nineteen-year-old girl, surrounded by moral pressure from six authoritative adults, could be expected to withstand.[7] Still, it is clear that Zuleikha held out with all the

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Dabhelian village culture was brought to South Africa by Zuleikha's parents and blended with local opportunities: Zuleikha's brother Abdulhak (left) graduated from medical school and later emigrated to Canada, while Abdul Hay (second from right) inherited his father's position in the shop.

considerable intellectual resources and determination she possessed, but 'being all alone to defend my case and no support coming from any corner' she felt 'helpless and despairing'.

> Opposite me was the awe-inspiring Moulvi with his magnificent beard. My unrelenting Unky [Uncle] glowering at me for my audacity. Your Dad at the gallery end, commenting time and again that youth were turning away from religion and were becoming unfilial. My mother on the one side who was a staunch supporter of the opposition and most energetically fought the case for them. My Dad lying unobtrusively on a settee, avoiding my gaze and refusing to enter into the controversy.

'All this hurts very much,' she confided to Mahomed towards the end of the letter, adding with bitter irony, 'Thank God for blessing women with the quality of inconstancy – I shall recover as soon as I have transferred my aspirations to other channels.' Still, she continued, 'as far as the engagement is concerned I am very happy.'

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Mahomed responded with sympathy and worry, pledging his own unwavering support for her and her education. He had experienced a similar familial confrontation in isolated circumstances and compared the power play of the elders to a military conquest, observing dryly that 'as far back as the late 18th century, Napoleon realised that to overpower an opposition the best tactic was to divide an enemy and deal with each subdivision individually. Maulana, your uncle, and my Dad appreciated this fully.' He asked her to promise him that she would attempt the matriculation examinations in November. Reflecting on these letters almost sixty-five years later, Zuleikha Mayat comments, 'You can see evidence on paper what kind of a man he was. How could I pass up such a chance?'

The marriage, which would be a passionate one that also energised their community life, took place over two years later. Like most Indian brides of her time and place, Zuleikha moved into the household of her husband's family. Life as a member of a new unit, with all the benefits and obligations, intimacies and tensions that circumscribe extended family relations, commenced immediately. The Mayats drove Zuleikha home to Durban in their navy-blue Dodge. The full day of wedding festivities, however, meant a late departure and the party made a stopover in Waschbank, where they could count on the hospitality of relatives, the family of Dr Daoud Mall, who was married to Zuleikha's sister Bibi. There, as guests observing proprieties, Zuleikha slept beside her mother-in-law on her wedding night, while the men shared the only other bedroom.

With its humidity, coastal vegetation and the smell of the sea, Durban was a change from the dusty streets and seams of bluegum trees that mapped out Potchefstroom's segmented communities. Urban segregation, too, was different from the kinds of divisions and multiculturalism Zuleikha had grown up with as the daughter of shopkeepers in the Transvaal.

The Bismillah shop had been open for business in 'Potch' since 1886. In 1881, her paternal grandfather, Hassim Bismillah, had risked a passage to South Africa, one among a generation of teenage entrepreneurs from the Indian state of Gujarat. Arriving in Durban, at that time a city of about ten thousand inhabitants, he worked packing parcels for several months before securing

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passage by coach to Johannesburg. Hawking there, among stiff competition, proved gruelling. A few years later, the discovery of gold stimulated a rush of immigration and commercial activity. Someone told Hassim that Potchefstroom, a farming community on the road between diamond-rich Kimberley and the gold reefs of the Rand, was a good bet for starting up one's own business. Within a couple of decades, about twenty-five Asian-owned stores, including four under Chinese proprietorship, were clustered on King Edward Street (eventually renamed Kerk Straat) all stocking the same goods. All of the Indian traders were Muslim, almost half of them Dabhelians, seven of them Bismillahs. Hassim changed the name of his own shop from 'Bismillah's' to 'Dabhel House' after several serious delivery mix-ups!

Men of Hassim's era seldom sought marriage partners in South Africa. They returned to their ghaam for wives who shared their linguistic, cultural and religious background. Hassim married Ogie, who remained in Dabhel while he travelled back and forth. In Dabhel, their son, Mohammed, was born in 1889. Around the time of the South African War (1899–1902), Ogie and her son made their way to the Transvaal to join Hassim. As soon as young Mohammed reached puberty, he was sent back to Dabhel to become a hafez and to find a marriage partner. There, in 1914 – four years after the Union of South Africa was formed – he married Amina Bismillah. After the birth of their daughter Mariam in 1916, Mohammed returned to South Africa to help his father in the Potchefstroom business. Such a pattern of movement was common among migrants of this social class. Strong family ties and long-term separations, mediated through a fluid conception of home, were resourceful strategies of livelihood and capital accumulation. A South African government commission, commenting in 1921 on the numeric discrepancy between married Indian men and women living in the country, noted that it was 'the custom among resident Indians of keeping their wives in India, where they are visited by their husbands at intervals. Thus a commercial or business domicile is maintained in the Union, but a domicile of home and family, that is, true domicile in such cases is retained in India.'[8] Yet, like Ogie before her, Amina also left her Indian domicile, joining Mohammed in 1920. In Potchefstroom they had six more children.[9] Zuleikha was born in 1926. Among her family and close friends, she was known as 'Julu'.

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Zuleikha's mother, Amina, arrived in South Africa in 1920.

Transoceanic waves brought other family members as well. Cousins, brothers and nephews were sponsored for economic ventures and, as was the case in many towns around the Transvaal, collections of agnatic households expanded into communities that could locally reproduce the familiar rhythms and practices, as well as culinary traditions, of faraway home. Political exclusions and social discrimination colluded early on in creating immigrant neighbourhoods with linguistic and ethnic, but increasingly racialised, identifications. By the 1890s, there were about fifteen thousand people of Indian extraction in the two boer republics, most of them in the Transvaal and a small number in the Orange Free State. Legislation curtailing rights for these immigrants began with Law 3 of 1885, which denied citizenship to 'the native races of Asia, including so-called Coolies, Arabs, Malays, and Mohammedan subjects of the Turkish Empire'. 'Asiatics' could only own fixed property in racially designated areas. Law 3 of 1897 prohibited the marriage of white people to Asians or Africans. Law 15 of 1898 stated that no person of colour could hold a licence for gold digging. The Transvaal Corporations Ordinance of 1903 authorised local authorities to designate contained residential locations (townships) for persons of colour. The Asiatic Law Amendment Act of 1907 (also known as the 'Black Act') compelled Asian males to be registered and fingerprinted, and to carry a pass at all times. As the Transvaal and, later, Union governments developed identity classification mechanisms and legal measures to exclude people of Indian ancestry from access to basic civic amenities, these diasporic communities mobilised their own resource networks and communal identities to look after themselves. They founded places of worship, schools for children and spaces where mutually supportive social circles could be nurtured.

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Yet, throughout Zuleikha's childhood, segregation and racial prejudice in Potchefstroom was not totalising and, though racialised boundaries increasingly hardened, it is still difficult for Zuleikha to identify a moment when apartheid could have been anticipated. Pondering this question in *A Treasure Trove of Memories*, she considers her grandfather's experience: 'He, the Arabier, as they referred to him, was a respected person and Dada could never pinpoint when that term had been replaced with the derogatory "koelie" which was a label his sons and grandsons would have to cope with.'[10] For the 19th-century merchant, cultural intermixing was intrinsic to success, and during his years as a hawker Hassim had applied himself to learning the local languages and folkways of his clientele. Even after geographically settling his business, he continued to travel to the farms of Dutch-speaking customers. While he still had his donkey cart, he sold flour and sugar and quantities of staples; upon his exchanging animal conveyance for a Hercules bicycle, Zuleikha remembers that he stuck to lightweight goods such as 'cotton, sewing aids, baking powder, little things that people would run out of'. Sometimes, if it became late, he stayed in their homes. He found that his skills as a literate person were valued by boere with limited schooling, and he would read and explain their correspondence to them and help to draft replies. In Bismillah family lore, it was thought that 'Afrikaners could not count' as it was not uncommon for these farmers to give Hassim their money and ask him to take what was due. Zuleikha recalls:

> The Afrikaner people had gone through the war times and they really were deprived of education. The father of the family could maybe read the Bible, but in so far as arithmetic was concerned, they were really very poor, you know, compared to Indians. They used to have preachers going around the farms teaching them a bit of the Bible and so on, and that was the extent of the education of that generation of Afrikaners. So when my grandfather would go to these places…they would just take out a chamber pot [full of money] from under the bed, and put it on the top, bang it on the table – so he had to take the money from that, count what belonged to him.

Notwithstanding any chauvinistic views of the 'other' likely to have been privately felt by both parties on such occasions, the relationship between

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An Indian shop in Potchefstroom – many such shops were lost as a result of the Group Areas Act.

shopkeeper and customer clearly invited some concrete expressions of trust and social intercourse. As new formulas of power emerged in the early 20th century, however, existing stereotypes and economic anxieties held by white people about 'Abram the shopkeeper' developed new legal and political teeth to undermine earlier forms of respect and tolerance. Yet its impact was uneven. It was not until the 1970s that the implementation of the Group Areas Act removed Asian retail competition, including Dabhel House, from Kerk Straat into a racially segregated ghetto.

Meanwhile, third-generation immigrants of Indian origin like Zuleikha were part of a plattelander multicultural mix. Potchefstroom, which she would later fictionalise as 'Pampoensville',[11] had its own, modest brand of cosmopolitanism in which a Muslim trading store figured as a fulcrum of activity by offering low prices, tolerant credit terms, courteous service, odd-job employment and tasty snacks. Small-town politeness and different minority groups contributed to relations that Zuleikha remembers as 'always friendly and respectful, an amalgam of race, creed and colour that was forced to share the limited space and yet contrived to live harmoniously.'[12] The Bismillah shop was located between the white Afrikaans-speaking centre of town and the African locations, and it was 'surrounded by aaprawalla neighbours whose financial positions differed' as well as Malay, Christian and Hindu families. Their next-door neighbours were Chinese, their customers of all colours and languages. Children who

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grew up in Gujarati-speaking households, who studied Urdu at madrassah and English at school, also spoke fluent Afrikaans as well as some Sotho.

Like sons, daughters became part of shop-based community interchanges. Business and household were intertwined, leaving little distinction between public and private life and little room for gendered seclusion. Zuleikha's mother, Amina, worked such long hours in the shop that it was known locally as 'Amina se winkel'. She cooked food as much for visitors and customers as for family. Growing up, Zuleikha developed an interest in sport, generally a more masculine preserve. For boys, there were afternoons of cricket and soccer on nearby pitches, while girls learned to cook and honed their domestic skills. Zuleikha's brothers played golf in the open veld behind their house, but 'whenever they were short of a player when informally indulging in these games, my sister and I were always called in to join', and 'there was little chance of being caught out unless Maggie, our domestic worker, squealed'. Zuleikha thinks she developed some of her strong will and personality through sport and by 'always fighting with the boys'.

> I used to play more cricket and soccer…Whenever the boys were short of somebody, they would call me in to even be the wicket keeper or be in the goals or something. My brothers, too, would just, you know, drag me out 'come on, help us out'. So that also put a bit of fight in you.

Outside of school, though, most of young Julu's hours were spent assisting in the shop. 'Nowadays,' comments Zuleikha, 'this is termed child labour. We, however, saw [ourselves] as essential cogs in a family enterprise wherein there was teaching and guidance by adults.' Valuable lessons included:

> restraint in the face of irate customers; ability to carry out instructions; book keeping; developing business sense; learning to order what would sell; what was not profitable; but above all how to get to know different races, find out their concerns, empathize with them, compare their values with ours and detect differences: all these were factors that bred awareness, led one's mind to find more about others. The Qur'anic verse, 'We have made you into different races so that you can know each other' is now in adulthood ever so meaningful. What we gained through those years was valuable knowledge of other peoples.[13]

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This 'valuable knowledge' certainly assisted in the family economy, but Zuleikha would in later life draw upon these formative lessons and experiences when fashioning a working definition of South African multiculturalism. Community was both diasporic (made up of aaprawalla) and local (a collection of distinctive 'peoples' whose interactions were simultaneously fraught with power differentials and humanitarian impulses). Her memories of the space of the shop, recounted in *A Treasure Trove of Memories,* are full of vivid characters and quirky encounters. There was, for example:

> Mrs Labuschagne, an Englishwoman, [who] had married an Afrikaner soon after the second Anglo-Boer War…Mrs Labuschagne always spent some time discussing news and events with father when she came to the shop, and each Christmas, she presented father, who only wore hand-knitted socks, with a pair she knitted with mercerised cotton.[14]

A trader's shop, even in a small and formally divided town, was a space of daily mixing and exchange. But by the 1930s, there were some institutional lines that could not be crossed, especially when Zuleikha and her brothers and sisters reached their teens. The Bismillah children, like others in the community, attended the local school for Indians up to Standard 6. There was no high school that Indians were permitted to attend. As Zuleikha explains:

> Potchestroom was the hub of education for the whites. Name it, they've got colleges there for arts, music, gymnasiums, handicrafts. But none of them would let me in. My father tried very hard to get me into one of them, maybe as a part-time student. The only people who responded positively were the Roman Catholic nuns. They said, 'Look, we will gladly take her, but she will have to come after hours, because there will be an outcry.' Now, 'after hours'! What? I'm working! And they have their evening mass and so on. So that didn't work out.

Families who could afford to sent their sons to live with relatives while they received further schooling at Waterval Institute in Johannesburg or Sastri College in Durban. Medicine and Law were preferred professional degrees. But the idea of sending daughters away was rare indeed, and almost unheard of in the days of Zuleikha's childhood. Despite the fact that her educational aspirations were cut short upon her engagement to be married, she believes that her

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desire to be a doctor was sufficiently powerful that her mother might have, early on, approached an uncle in Johannesburg, but

> there were no girls' schools; there was nobody who would board a daughter. I had an uncle in Johannesburg – my mother must have just tentatively suggested to him [that I go there to school] so Mamajee [uncle] said, 'Behn [sister], send the sons anytime, six, seven (we had only three brothers!) but *poiree tho pothe hachawanu* [the daughters you must take care of yourself] you understand?' Okay. So there was no place that I could be sent and I could only finish Standard 6 in our school.[15]

Of the four daughters in the family, Zuleikha was the only one to further her studies. She had developed a love of reading, nurtured by the enthusiasm of her Chinese friend Pengy, a teller of superb adventure stories who loved to discuss literature and who read aloud to the Bismillah daughters, keeping them perpetually supplied with magazines and books. Pengy 'was an elder sister to all of us and she used to buy lot of books and my [eldest] sister used to, you know, join with her to buy books. So we read everything in her library – lots of novels [like] *Gone with the Wind* and *When the Rains Came*.' Zuleikha's sisters and brothers pooled their Eid money one year, 'fifty cents, five shillings each, you know, all us children together', to buy a thick volume of Andersen's and Grimm's fairy tales. Understanding Zuleikha's special ambitions for education, her sisters were supportive, sometimes taking on her chores so that she had extra time for studying. She studied through correspondence courses, working mostly in the evenings when her other responsibilities had been attended to:

> I had to work in the shop with my parents all day. In the evening my mother had to see that I did some of the housework, not leave it to my sister, because that would be unfair. And then no mother would marry a daughter off without her knowing something about cooking. And then after that you sat with your books. By this time you really are tired. And I must say my one sister really helped me in this, she would say 'Get off, I'll finish this work'. So she would take over my portion and try and conceal it, even from my mother, because here's a daughter who's not trained for domestic chores.

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The friendship and alliance between Fatima Meer and Zuleikha Mayat helped build bridges between public and private spaces and opened up many opportunities for women in Durban.

As Zuleikha worked to complete her high school education she discovered that she had a gift as a writer, an intellectual orientation and a capacity for expressing strong views. These were talents she would develop. Through the medium of writing – pen and paper – she opened up a larger world for herself. She sent three opinionated letters to *Indian Views*, including the one that brought her into correspondence with her future husband. Through letters also, she developed an early but important contact in Durban. A girl named Zohra Meer was an only child in the family with whom Abdulhak Bismillah resided while attending Sastri College and, knowing his sister's passion for writing, he suggested that the two girls become pen pals. The epistolary friendship that developed afforded Zuleikha an independent link with Durban – and her first opportunity to perform a community service in the city where serving the community would one day become her life's work.

> Zohra was collecting subs for the *Guardian* which was a [news]paper I had not heard of and I immediately subscribed. She also wrote [about] collecting funds for the Indian TB association, Friends of the Sick, and I responded by digging into my pocket money and cajoling parents and siblings to add to it.[16]

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Indian VIEWS

WEDNESDAY, APRIL 9, 1958 Vol 44 No 39

ENGLISH SECTION

Women's Column

Fahmida's World

A RAMADAAN STORY
(OLD THEME: CONTEMPORARY SETTING)

(Continued from last issue)

PART II

Hardly were the words gasped out when Fatima felt her breathing easier, the palpitations of her heart slowing down in tempo and the curtains of fog lifting from her benumbed brain. Soon she felt herself regaining vigour and it was like someone rejuvenated — like a little puppy shaking off water after being dumped in a tub and she felt it once more wonderful to be alive.

All this, if calculated in time as we know it, was no more than a few minutes duration but in the state and the world in which Fatima was it seemed like eons. Perhaps that is what is meant by eternity.

Hardly had she appreciated the rest when she felt herself to be in a courtlike room — or so she imagined a court room to be since in her sheltered life on this earth she had never been within the precincts of one. Her companion of the spirit had now assumed human form and in fact the whole court was full of human officials, some in the role of prosecutors, some defenders, others who had just come out of curiosity to listen to the sensational. The psychiatrist would explain away that as Fatima was now in a lighter sleep, because her mind was now more conscious, therefore the phenomena of dreams had taken on more of a material aspect; that the dream was now based on the experiences of her rational mind, an not on the supernatural. But we know that it was so near Sehri time that habit was claiming good old Fatima.

There was an air of expectancy and most eyes were focussed on her and already she had a feeling of deep guilt which she tried her utmost to fight off. In all her life she could not remember that she had ever physically harmed any one, neither did she owe a penny which she could not pay off, all her religious commands such as the prayers fasts, etc, she performed with diligence. She could not imagine what possible charge could be levelled against her.

As though reading her thoughts she saw a dark, moron like character reeling off the charges and her immediate reaction was to recoil and cringe, but after a brief interval she got angry and in her mind she protested vigorously at the injustice of it all. She, a God fearing Muslim, to be called indifferent to faith, a panderer to society, its customs and superstitions, insincere and a gossip monger!

She looked around her to see whether there was anyone who would uphold her in her protests. It was with mounting anger that she saw the vigorous nodding in acquiescence to the charges by the silly gossip mongers, the sadists sitting in the public gallery, who had come to view her discomfort; the accusing looks on the faces of the accusers, and the meek, subdued attitude of her companion who to all intents and purposes was to be her sole defence.

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"W... that ... for y... Yes, ... again... Khat... not o...

We re... break d... the En... be ... Ha...

derstand the Quran. Did we send down the Quran to you as a jewel to be guarded, or some-

Women's Column

Fahmida's World

Business acumen, ability or those qualities which raises a person just above the ordinary is not the prerogative of any race, and whilst education is a great help to enterprising people, it is not completely essential. This statement can be born out when I give you pen-pictures of personalities I have come across here and there.

OUMA KOOL

Literally in English this means "Grandmother coal", but what a world of meaning this Pseudonym holds. It speaks of enterprise and acute business sense in times when women were only associated with domestic service in her particular society.

This truly black as coal African woman, looked most dignified as she went sitting primly on the seat, next to the driver of her cart, pulled with two horses. In a spotless white blouse and a denim overall beautifully starched and ironed she went around the 'native location' selling coal by the half and full bucket lots. A small piccanin sat in the back amongst the coal bags filling the parrafin tins as soon as they were sold by the sharp eyed old woman. He could feel her round marble eyes boring his back if by as much as one little piece he gave overweight.

Legend has it that she was a washerwoman under contract to one of the European schools, and found it most irksome to haul the coal home from the Indian shops herself, as they were not interested in selling and delivering small amounts of coal. There were many of her people in the same plight as so many of them did the washing of the white and Indian citizens of the town. Ouma therefore with money carefully accumulated from her toils of some years, ordered a bulk of coal from the coal merchant and had it dumped in her small yard. From there as she did her washing she started selling coal to the other washerwomen of the neighbourhood who found this a very convenient distance from their homes. The procedure was that they came and filled a bucket or half a bucket (four - gallon paraffin tins neatly cut in half served as measures) full themselves, showing it to Ouma and paying the shilling or sixpence, empty the amount in their own tin and carry it away home. A bag of coal cost Ouma two shillings (Bulk prise) which brought in four shillings when sold. This hundred percent profit and no expenses put Ouma into a flourishing business and soon she bought the cart, the horses, engaged the driver and the little boy, and went house to house selling coal in small lots to her people. Later in years a daughter took over this task whilst Ouma remained at home selling and receiving coal and in addition she had added a little room to her mud house from where she sold in addition to the coal such commodities as matches, candles, paraffin, sugar etc; etc; Whilst she did not make millions in this venture, she was the first African storekeeper in her town, whose children were given the maximum education available to them then, and who could afford most of the comforts necessary for a civilised way of living. When she died the town came out to mourn her, and right at the back of the funeral procession came the little coal cart minus the coal for this solemn occasion, but from which the grit and dust of years could never be rubbed off. Her death was the end of an era but in it's wake it brought to life slowly but inevitably other African business men who by her example established themselves.

KRISTAMA

I phoned several times at the Aryan Benevolent Home and the cheerful efficient voice at the other end would take down details and reply to queries briskly. I had imagined it to belong to a social worker of at least thirty years of age, so when later I had occasion to meet her was surprised that it belonged to a young girl just out of her teen and who is an inmate of the home, but who assumes the res... taking charge ... whenever the ... away, which is ... he has to atten... things. Showing ... and explaining ... one admire this ... has assumed so... bility, but at t... makes one a... society that i... great a burde... shoulders.

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By the time she arrived in Durban in 1947, Zuleikha's reputation as a writer was known among the extended Meer family, including Zohra's cousin Fatima[17] – and Fatima's father, MI Meer, the editor of *Indian Views*.

'She was part of everything so she had to write'

Through additional correspondence education, Zuleikha Mayat completed a course in journalism through Union College. In June 1956, now a resident of Durban, she was invited by MI Meer to write a weekly column for the newspaper *Indian Views*. For six years, under the heading 'Fahmida's World', subscribers all over southern Africa read Zuleikha's column. The name 'Fahmida' means 'intelligent' or 'wise' in Persian, and Zuleikha thinks she 'must have read an Urdu novel around that time. Actually, when I started, Mawlana Mia from Waterfall Institute, Johannesburg, sent a message that the spelling… should be 'Fehmida', not 'Fah', but 'Feh', but I never changed it…I liked it very much.' Writing under her nom de plume, she developed an outspoken public voice. Despite the subtitle 'Mainly for Women' that an editor added a few years later, Zuleikha did not think of 'Fahmida's World' as an exclusively women's space. 'Fahmida lived *in* the world and she observed everything and she was part of everything so she had to write – this is why it is such a mixed column. You don't find me sticking to any one subject.' Despite catering to a generally conservative community, MI Meer, did not censor her thoughts:

> Of course my English was not so good at that time. Come on, man, [learning it] through a correspondence college in an Afrikaans-speaking town! So the compositor would sometimes pick up mistakes and go and tell the old man. He [Meer] said if it's a spelling mistake or something you do it, but her ideas don't change!

Zuleikha sometimes worked with a mental image of her readership, fixating on her uncles in the Transvaal, as she wrote down thoughts and assertions that she knew might stir things up, but 'I had to get through what I wanted to say'. Not surprisingly, a good part of what she had to say concerned women's lives, both domestic and public.

> I knew [my writing] was going through to the community because lots of people – not only the young girls – the older women would comment on

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> it. [Then they would] tell me 'you know, *this* is not right'; maybe trying to tell me also, 'you can focus on it'. You see the ulema in those days and even now, when they stand on the platform the first thing they attack are women – their dressing, the hairstyles and 'they are going out' and so on. So one very old lady, [who] was my father-in-law's sister, mentioned one day when we were all sitting together, she says, 'You know, why don't somebody tell the mawlanas that there are other people that they can lash, why do they just pick on women all the time? We are tired of this issue.' Obviously they wanted their views expressed, so I would pick this up and try and get it some way into the columns…I think ['Fahmida's World'] was really a conduit, you know, of concern to the community.

Fahmida's textual musings advanced a particular ideal of community. The column celebrated progress and modernity, was critical of public and private hierarchies that made up social life in South Africa, and reflected on the ethical triumphs and moral transgressions of daily life. In Potchefstroom, community had meant a compilation of transnational heritages and street-level interchanges, incorporating both the local and the diasporic. Through 'Fahmida's World', Zuleikha brought these formative experiences of community to bear as, weekly, she scripted her own vision of the good society against the dividing forces of apartheid, with women playing a more meaningful role in civic life. South Africa, Fahmida poetically asserted, was like 'a bottle of chow-chow pickle' – a spicy, domestic concoction in which something new is made out of diverse ingredients (onions, chilli peppers, celery, vinegar, salt, sugar, and even cabbage, garlic, and carrots). It was cultural mixing and exchange that made the nation a rich and interesting place to live. In a series of columns written in June 1957, as the Group Areas Act began to take effect, Fahmida fancies herself on a psychologist's couch and describes a troubling nightmare: in her dream, a worried gentleman who had willingly moved into the new 'Indian Group Area' of Lenasia gave her a warning:

> Do not go and reside in any of the areas set aside for your own group or you will rue the day as surely as I do, both economically and socially. God intended South Africa to be a stew pot of many races and cultures and in that way it retains the tang and piquancy of the chow-chow pickle. Dividing it into unnatural barriers makes it insipid.

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Fahmida continues:

> In this inexplicable dream, I stood helplessly watching as Lenasia turned into a huge bottle of pickle. The gentleman was hunting at fever pitch in the bottle, but it contained not the delicious little varieties usually associated with chow-chow pickles. Instead there was an endless number of mangoes, ripe mangoes, small mangoes, big mangoes, mangoes, mangoes, mangoes…

With this striking culinary metaphor, Zuleikha Mayat brought political narrative into association with the world of kitchens, home life, and women. As a housewifely vision of demographic pluralism, the chow-chow pickle jar expressed a value that opposed the apartheid dream of purity preserved in separate containers. While, across the Atlantic Ocean, Sylvia Plath was using the image of a bell jar to express the confinements of gender ideology,[18] Fahmida's pickle jar was laden with a local, diasporic 'feminine mystique'.[19] Far from rejecting the role and status of the modern housewife, Zuleikha's pen harnessed its power – its rootedness in discourses of progressivism. Gendered modernity offered space for a woman to speak authoritatively about politics, religion, community values and identity. Gastronomy, a woman's art, would prove fundamental to opening up an enduring public life for Zuleikha and her many female associates when they created their own community organisation, the Women's Cultural Group.

Durban pickle

Zuleikha Mayat arrived in Durban in 1947, a time when South Africa was on the cusp of events that would transform the various notions of community that existed within the broader national conception of the Union. The larger Durban area was a racially segregated city, full of class and cultural complexities. According to the housing surveys that documented residents as belonging to four 'races' in 1951, it was home to 123 165 people of Indian ancestry out of a total population of 373 671. The survey indicated that there were 129 683 white residents, 109 543 Africans, and 11 280 coloured people, revealing that the urban population had increased rapidly during the Second World War's booming wartime economy. Just fifteen years earlier, Indian and African residents had been counted at 80 384 and 63 762 respectively.[20]

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Modernity in mid-20th-century Durban was born through a mix of influences and traditions that did not easily correspond with the segregationist vision of town planners.

Official racial classifications concealed the commonalities and differences that shaped life for most Durbanites. The designation 'Indian' masked a multitude of identities. People from the Asian subcontinent had arrived in southern Africa in two broad streams. Just over 152 000 came as indentured migrants between 1860 and 1911 to work on Natal's sugar plantations, railways and coalmines. Of these, between ten and fifteen thousand were Muslim.[21]

Free migrants like the Bismillahs – who were called 'passengers' because they came at their own expense and were supposed to be subject to the ordinary laws of the Colony – arrived from the 1870s from different parts of Gujarat (Kutch, Kathiawar, Gujarat proper). They were of different religious faiths (Hindu, Parsee, Christian, and Muslim), spoke various languages (Hindi, Gujarati, Memonese, Marathi, Konkani, Urdu) and were divided by class (from wholesalers to hawkers, farmers to farm workers). Gender and marital status further complicated each axis of identity. Many passengers tried to obtain equality with white colonists in terms of Queen Victoria's 1858 Proclamation asserting the equality of British subjects. This, however, was to prove futile because they did not conform to the imperial imaginary of civilised social order.

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Distinctions among Indians in South Africa shaped life well into the 20th century. A Tamil-speaking man cutting sugar cane just north of the city since his term of indenture would have had a very different set of prospects and urban sensibilities to that of a downtown Muslim clothing retailer; and that same retailer might find that his Gujarati language allowed him to have more in common with Gujarati-speaking Hindu traders than with fellow Muslims who were descended from indentured workers (known locally as Hyderabadee). Passenger migrants from Rander who spoke Urdu (known as Mia-bhai) and Konkani-speaking Muslims (Kokni), although smaller in number, practised endogamy; and it would be frowned upon for a Memon Muslim from Porbander to marry another Memon from one of the smaller villages around Porbander, who were known locally as Jodhya. Class, language, ethnicity and ghaam all weighed heavily on status and social practice.

Upon arrival, this diasporic collection of people proved a challenge to settler statehood which attempted to unify and manage them as 'Indians' or 'Asiatics' or, in common parlance, 'coolies'. When, for the first time, in 1894, the Indian population of Natal (at 46 000) exceeded the white population (of 45 000),[22] the prospect of being swamped by 'coolies' heightened white racial hysteria. Upon achieving self-government in 1893, Natal – like the Transvaal at this time – passed a series of discriminatory laws to restrict Indian immigration, political rights and trading rights.[23]

It was, in part, the state's failure to differentiate between Indians that inspired organised resistance. Protests were led by the Natal Indian Congress (NIC), which had been formed in 1894 by Indian traders led by Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi. With a few exceptions, Gandhi was slow to take up the grievances of indentured Indians and the NIC focused rather on the trade, franchise and residence rights of merchants.[24] From 1906 to 1910, Gandhi organised passive resistance in the Transvaal against a law requiring Indians to register and to provide all ten finger-impressions. By 1910 the movement had lost steam and, for the following three years, negotiations took place between Gandhi and the Smuts government. In Natal, meanwhile, Indians were labouring under a £3 tax, imposed on free Indians in 1901, effecting perpetual indenture for many.[25] In 1913, Gandhi (perhaps opportunistically) added this tax to a list of grievances, which included restrictions on inter-provincial migration, denial of entry to the Orange Free State, onerous trade-licensing laws, non-recognition of Indian

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marriages, and restrictions on the entry of wives and children from India.[26] In mid-October 1913, Gandhi initiated a strike by four thousand Indian workers at the coalmines in northern Natal. By the end of October, fifteen thousand coastal sugar workers had joined the strike. Mass action drew both merchants and workers, as the government's use of violence and its system of racial classification unified disparate groupings as 'Indians'. Communication between Smuts and Gandhi, and the press coverage of the strikes in India and England,[27] led to the Indian Relief Act of 1914, which abolished the tax but left many restrictions directed specifically at Indians in place, including inter-provincial mobility.[28]

In Durban, being 'Indian' was reinforced, day to day, by de facto residential segregation.[29] By the 1940s, the city's racial mappings showed Indians to be geographically concentrated in various pockets in and around the city: around three thousand working-class Indian families resided in the wetland areas just north of the city in the Magazine Barracks, which was adjacent to the partitioned location of Baumannville, the 'native married quarters' and the Msizini migrant worker hostels that accommodated Zulu-speaking men.

Indian market gardeners, hawkers and the generally poorer descendants of indentured migrants, as well as a few rural traders, settled in places like Clairwood and Merebank in the south; Sydenham, Overport, Clare Estate, Mayville and Cato Manor in the west; and Riverside in the north.[30] A striking feature of these areas was that the rich and poor lived side by side. HR Burrows has recorded that high- and low-income family units lived near each other and that there was no distinction based on income.[31] The 1952 *Durban Housing Survey* noted that 'Indian families in all areas are of widely differing economic standards', and that a distinctive feature of Mayville, for example, was 'the mingling of well-constructed houses and small clusters of shacks'.[32]

Outside of the city, white families established residences along the expanding railway line in Westville, Sea View and Malvern and, inside the city, they had settled on the sea-facing slopes of the Berea ridge from the 19th century. Although there was some integration at the bottom of this ridge, Indians of a passenger background settled mainly in three zones around Durban: a business and commercial area bounded by Pine Street, Albert Street, the railway line and the West Street cemetery; an area around Garnet Road and bordering Umgeni Road; and the Warwick Triangle between Alice Street and the Greyville Race Course.[33]

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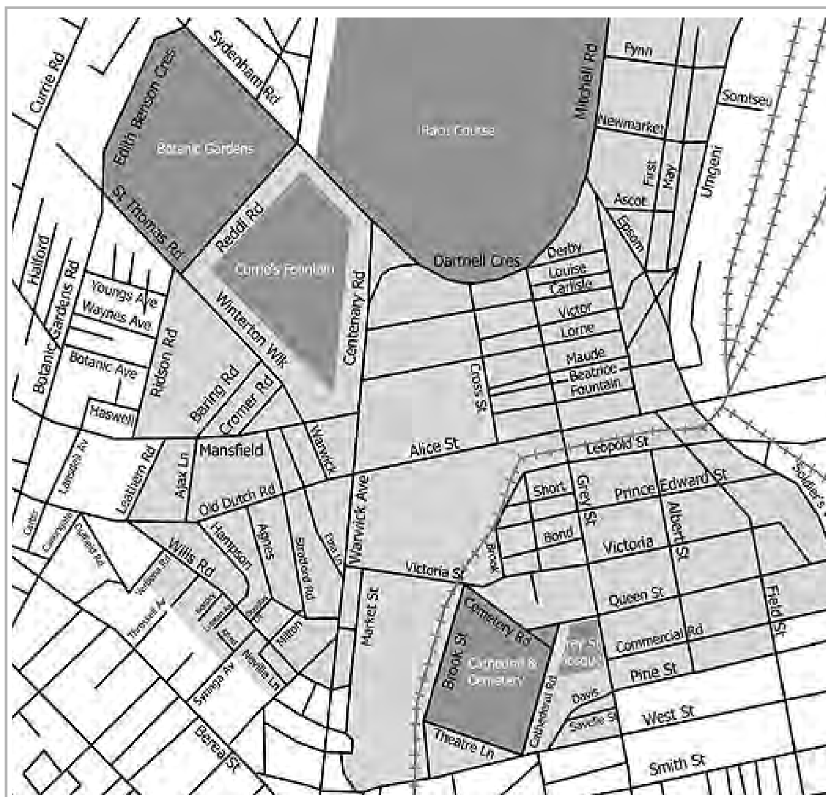

Zuleikha and Mahomed, his parents, his brother and his brother's wife and children occupied a house on the corner of Mansfield and Cowey roads, in a relatively mixed area near the Warwick Triangle. It included some important landmarks: Sastri College (the first Indian high school in South Africa) and Currie's Fountain (the mecca of non-racial sport and arena for political rallies organised by the NIC in the 1940s and 1950s). In addition, the Indian Market, Scala Cinema, St. Aidan's Hospital, the bus rank, Greyville Race Course, the fire station, Natal University's Non-European Section, and the presence of the notorious Ducheen gang all made for a vibrant neighborhood.[34] Phyllis Naidoo recalled that when the poet TS Eliot visited South Africa, he told students of the 'non-European' university that the only thing missing from the area was a graveyard.[35]

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The home in Mansfield Road that the Mayat family lost under the Group Areas Act.

Zuleikha's father-in-law, GH Mayat, was of passenger background, running a small retail store, AM Mayat & Sons, eponymously established by his own father at 130 Field Street.[36] As small traders, the Mayats of Mansfield Road were relatively well placed on the social ladder but not on a par with the some of the Gujarati-speaking Muslim social elite in terms of economic and political clout.[37] Living in the wider Warwick Triangle, however, were figures influential in shaping the period's political and intellectual life: Dawood Seedat, George Singh, George Ponnen, Hassen Mall, IC and Fatima Meer, Radhi Singh, Ahmed Bhoola and others. Dhanee Bramdaw, proprietor of the *Leader*, a popular Indian weekly launched in the 1940s, also lived here. MI Meer, editor of *Indian Views*, lived around the corner in Ritson Road. Some of the neighbours, such as Zubie Asmall, Nafisa Jeewa and Tehmina Rustomjee, would become Zuleikha Mayat's friends and peers in the Women's Cultural Group.

Zuleikha moved into her new home on Mansfield Road mid-way through a new campaign of passive resistance, this time to the Asiatic Land Tenure and Representation Act of 1946 (widely known as the Ghetto Act), another initiative by the white establishment to redesign the city on racially exclusive lines.[38] Between June 1946 and June 1948, two thousand people were arrested for

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protesting the Act's new restrictions on Indian land ownership and residence. The Mayats' house was a stone's throw from Currie's Fountain, where many of the rallies were held. The same site hosted the British royal family during their visit to the city in July 1947, when (despite a call by the NIC to boycott the event) sixty-five thousand Indians filled the stadium to honour King George VI, his wife and their two daughters, Princesses Elizabeth and Margaret, who were seated on a platform that was a replica of the Taj Mahal.[39]

Clearly, it was a creolising and politically complicated idea of 'Indianness' that operated in Durban, with a multifarious set of references, material resources and often contradictory symbols both binding people together and separating them in onion-like layers of identification: locally, regionally and in relation to the 'mother' nation across its namesake ocean, which – at the time Zuleikha was beginning her Durban life – was heading towards independence from British colonial rule, led by Mohandas Gandhi and Jawaharlal Nehru.

Other bottles and other blends

The Mayats lived in a double-storey house. Each couple had a bedroom on the top floor. The shared lounge, dining room and kitchen were downstairs. For a young woman living in a patrilocal, extended family, there were inevitable challenges but the most immediate one was cooking. The two sisters-in-law shared this daily responsibility, but 'my mother-in-law would occasionally come in and supervise'. Zuleikha was conscious of her small-town roots, which, in the eyes of many urbanites, made her a ghaamariya – a villager or peasant.

> Here [in Durban] the cooking was much more sophisticated but I learnt under them…In the beginning I was really a rookie. I didn't know much of cooking, not their standard…My sister-in-law was really an excellent, a *par excellence*, cook, and so was my mother-in-law…A bit of humiliation, a bit of embarrassment, because you had to ask and then try and show that you knew a bit. You couldn't show that you were absolutely, you know, ignorant or something. So it was a bit of a challenge…there were tensions. Our home, now you must know, was a [replica] of the whole area. This sort of tension went on in every home. The one had to show that 'I know much more than her', and the other had to now pretend that she also knows something, and that sort of thing.

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This could have proved difficult for someone of Zuleikha's independence but Mahomed was

> a determined husband who wanted a companion, so he saw to it that I met interesting characters: he took me to an old uncle in Verulam who narrated lovely incidents of the past; he took me to lectures and cinema when in those days ladies from 'good' homes didn't frequent such places.[40]

He 'was a person who wanted a wife to walk alongside him, not behind him. Wherever he went he wanted to take me and that was breaking a lot of ground in Durban,' Zuleikha remembers.

> You know in Indian society, once you get married you're not your husband's wife, you're the daughter-in-law…look, I don't blame the old people, that was how the tradition was. You are the ornament of the house, right, and you do exactly what they tell you. And Mahomed had to fight to get me, you know, wherever he wanted to go to. He wanted me to be a companion, not just a wife and that is what I wanted too.[41]

As a new couple in Durban in the 1940s and 1950s, however, their movements were somewhat constricted by conventions of gender. When they attended public events together – films, sports events or meetings – they found themselves continually testing boundaries. While Mahomed was filled with the confident zeal of a young man with movie-star good looks and the standing of a professional occupation, Zuleikha the daughter-in-law and wife was compelled to be more diplomatic. She remembers her in-laws as 'a very caring family who went a long way in catering for my views and hobbies, but that was not enough for one who was still on a learning curve!'[42] It was clear that they, like other families, were concerned with reputation and suggested as much to Zuleikha. Mahomed, in some anger, hinted at a gendered double standard within 'community norms' (his strong view was that the reason husbands did not want their wives at the cinema was because they were frequently accompanied by their mistresses).

Mahomed would, throughout their marriage, insist that Zuleikha accompany him wherever he went: to medical conferences in India, Afghanistan and Russia; on trips to Nigeria, where they entered without a visa; and, in the 1960s, to London when he worked at the Royal College of Obstetricians and

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Sightseeing in Cairo: in a world becoming more accessible via air transport, the Mayats travelled extensively, returning to entertain their friends with slide shows of their trips.

Gynaecologists in Hammersmith as a trainee. Experiences of travel opened up a world of discovery for Zuleikha, as well as opportunities for further education. During their nine months in London, she enrolled for two semesters at the University of London's School of Oriental and African Studies, taking courses in Urdu and Islamic Studies. She also 'tried to do Indian Music but the professor – it was winter – we had to go into his little room and there will be a heater and he will put the music on and I would be asleep'[*laughs*].

Back in Durban, the young couple crossed into spaces that were (by law or by custom) exclusively male. The 'magnificent' Orient Club, for example, situated on thirty-five acres of land in Isipingo about twenty kilometres south of Durban, was one such space.[43] Since 1927, it had provided for hospitality and formal meetings in exclusive opulence. A visitor in 1936 remarked that 'having seen great parks with their fascinating fountains playing at London, Cairo, Versailles, and Constantinople, I can assure you that this club in its beauty, layout and approach, can compare well with any of the gardens'.[44] GH Calpin, friend and biographer of AI Kajee, observed that the luncheons for white guests were so lavish that 'I fancy that the majority of Europeans…have left wondering what Indians have to complain about, so pleasant are the surroundings and so obvious the signs of hospitality'.[45] By the 1950s, the club was a meeting ground for Muslim professionals and businessmen. It was abuzz with activity on Sundays when the men were treated to a film show and swam or played tennis, snooker or cards. When Mahomed brought Zuleikha with

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him to a meeting, it upset decorum and caused excitement. And, as if being the only woman in a room full of astonished men was not sufficient discomfort for his brave wife, Mahomed iced the cake with his signature wicked humour. Zuleikha laughs, recalling that she had gone in and 'sat right at the back. Now, [when] Mahomed had to pass the vote of thanks, he began, "Gentlemen and the lady at the back". You know, I could have throttled him!'

The strong relationship between the couple made room for Zuleikha to be active in her own right. In a clearly well-used turn of phrase she declares that 'one often hears that behind every man is a woman. Well, behind me, there was Mahomed.' Her husband, then, was an enabling male figure, using his status in the community to open up a space of social legitimation along with the advocacy he offered privately. He had confidence in his wife's abilities and a desire to see her use her talents. '[Mahomed] would tell me, "Don't hang onto me. You're my wife, fine, but…do something for yourself, right?" And this is why I got so involved in so many things.'

The support was mutual. Nafisa Jeewa, a long-time family friend as well as a former member of the Women's Cultural Group, reflects on the match:

> Dr Mayat was tall and handsome…fair, blue eyes…so if he entered a room he was that kind of a, a very commanding person. If he entered a room, he'd make an impression…And then Julu was quite a backbone for him as well, you know, she had his support in a different way but she urged him on too…Julu's got a very strong personality. When [Mahomed] became a gynaecologist it was 'wow', right? And then, if your husband is a 'wow' you had to live up to that expectation in those days. But if you are [also] a strong personality from the outset, then you are your *own* personality, then you are not under his shadow.

Zuleikha's experience highlights some of the ways in which gender and marital heterosexuality shaped life for Muslim women in mid-century Durban. If the institution of marital partnership could be a vehicle for crossing over customary gender lines, it also played a role in shaping society across the boundaries of race among the city's liberal and professional classes.

Pockets of Indian-white inter-racial co-operation originated in the Round Table Conference between South Africa and India held from December 1926 to January 1927, when the Indian government agreed to a voluntary repatri-

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ation scheme for Indians and the Union government promised 'upliftment' for those who remained. An Indian Agent-General was appointed to monitor the workings of what was known as the Cape Town Agreement. The first Agent, Sir Srinivas Sastri, formed the Durban Indo-European Council in 1928, which saw Indians and white liberals working together on social services, education and child welfare. Agents placed great store on contact with whites. Kunwar Maharaj Singh, Agent-General from 1932 to 1935, told a white audience at the Durban Rotary Club that

> very few of the Indians know you individually, they only know you as a community and they are apt to regard it as a hostile community. If only they would know you as individuals, as I have known Europeans from the time of my youth, I am perfectly convinced that a great deal of this suspicion and mistrust [would] diminish.[46]

Some Durbanites of European ancestry had a similar view, believing in assimilation and an idea of progress in which good 'race relations' were essential. The institution of marriage had a role to play in expanding social networks, and husband-and-wife teams formed a gendered unit of action. Civic manners and middle-class etiquette were joined in polite, home-based hospitality: dining and conversation could expand acquaintances of similar opinion and taste. White, English-speaking men such as Maurice Webb and Edgar H Brookes were involved with Indians through the South African Institute of Race Relations (SAIRR). Their wives were sometimes involved through the Black Sash. Miss Dorey, principal of the Durban Indian Girls' High School (Girls' High), asked Zuleikha to participate in the SAIRR's literacy campaign. Together with Amina Butler, the first Muslim Indian teacher in Natal, and Radhi Singh, a teacher at Girls' High who subsequently became a lawyer, they compiled a number of books to teach literacy. Through this work Zuleikha met Mary Grice, wife of Duchesne Grice of the law firm Shepstone & Wylie.[47]

For Zuleikha, another conduit for inter-racial co-operation was Fatima Meer, who was then a research assistant to the well-known anthropologist Hilda Kuper at the University of Natal. Hilda and her husband, Leo Kuper, had moved to Durban during the Defiance Campaign of 1952 and were active in the Liberal Party. Through Meer, acquaintances were made with others associated with the university: Violaine Junod, a university lecturer and daughter of writer

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and missionary Reverend H-A Junod; Devi Bughwan, from the university's Drama Department, whose husband, Dennis, was a well-known photographer; and Doris Wallace, wife of Professor HL Wallace of the university's medical school. In the home of Fatima and Ismail Meer, Zuleikha and Mahomed dined with Chief Albert Luthuli, Alan Paton and his wife, Dorrie, and JN and Radhi Singh, among others.

For his part, Mahomed had a close association with Dr Alan B Taylor at McCord Zulu Hospital, and the professional arena of medicine and healthcare services provided a range of contacts across solidifying lines of race. When Zuleikha and Mahomed moved into their own home, about six years after their marriage, it became a standard practice for Zuleikha to prepare a big supper on Wednesdays, open to whoever Mahomed would bring back to dine. This arrangement unquestionably assisted Mahomed's career and also provided Zuleikha with some key contacts who could be invited to the Women's Cultural Group as speakers, funders or members. Chief Mangosuthu Buthelezi and his wife, Irene, were early dinner guests. Mahomed had delivered their babies at McCord Hospital and Buthelezi later delivered a keynote address for the Women's Cultural Group's 18th anniversary celebration in 1972.[48] As a couple, the Mayats hosted many visiting dignitaries who gave lectures on Islam and other topics both for the Arabic Study Circle of Durban, founded by Dr DS Mall, and for the Women's Cultural Group. Their household was also the site of evenings of culture, musha'iras and musical events. Occasionally, too, the Meers used their home as a safe-house for activists from the African National Congress:

> Like Nelson Mandela, if he came, he couldn't stay in any of the very [politically] active homes. Ismail Meer would quietly get a message to my husband that he would be coming, and my husband would pick him up at a certain garage. He would be dressed in overalls and cap like a petrol attendant. Pick him up, bring him home, he would sleep the night there. In the morning after breakfast, very early, even before my children woke up, he would be ready and, you know, a little packet of sandwiches or something for the road and a little satchel, and then we would drop him at some other garage, where he would be picked up. It was always different garages, not the same garages and so on. And then somebody else would

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> pick him up. And this went on for quite a few visits, four, five visits or so, and soon after that he was picked up [by the police].

As the 20th century reached its midpoint, state politics imposed legislation to bring apartheid notions of race, community and space into alignment. Middle-class, liberal, civil society in Durban provided some basis for resistance. Meanwhile, in Durban's working-class and impoverished sectors, alliances across social divides were made not around the supper table or in the board-room, but rather in the street and on the shopfloor. And while trade unions and national political activism attempted to suture divisions between 'non-Europeans', local tensions and fractures of prejudice created by differential discrimination were showing themselves.

The year 1947 witnessed an important development in non-racial coalition building for political struggle against the racist state. In March, South African Communist Party member Dr Yusuf Dadoo, with Dr Monty Naicker of the NIC, signed a joint declaration of co-operation with Dr AB Xuma, president-general of the African National Congress. This was facilitated by the unfolding passive resistance campaign and Dadoo's growing links with the African National Congress through his participation in the 1946 African mineworkers strike. The so-called Doctor's Pact pledged 'the fullest co-operation between the African and Indian peoples'.[49] The alliance was, however, largely constructed among political elites while, in some sections of 'grassroots Durban', identity was becoming a flashpoint for conflict.

Relative to Indians, many Africans were late entrants to the city of Durban and began to occupy nearby Cato Manor from the mid-1930s. Their unequal incorporation into the city created competition over housing and jobs. On the afternoon of 13 January 1949, large-scale rioting erupted in various sections of Durban. Details of the incident that sparked the riots remain hazy and disputed, but it is generally accepted that the catalyst was an argument between George Madondo, an African youth of fourteen, and a sixteen-year old Indian shop assistant, whose employer then assaulted Madondo. The assault took place at the Indian Market, where every day thousands of Africans and Indians jostled for space as they waited for buses to ferry them in and out of the city at the Victoria Street bus rank. Rumours of the incident set off a spate of attacks by Africans on Indians, starting in Victoria Street but quickly spreading to Grey

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Street and Warwick Avenue, and outwards, up and over the Berea Ridge, to Tollgate, Musgrave Road, Mayville, Cato Manor and Overport. When the riots were forcefully subdued three days later, 142 Indians had been killed and 1 781 injured.[50] In the days that followed, 44 738 Indians were moved into refugee camps, as many Indian homes were looted and partially destroyed or burnt to the ground. Damage to Indian-owned vehicles totalled £49 980.[51]

Zuleikha's ability to recount the detail of events indicates how the violence created a fear that solidified around an awareness of identity, an awareness of 'being Indian'. Her mother and a few family members were visiting from Potchefstroom for a holiday. Zuleikha's sister Bibi Mall was in hospital delivering her second child and Dr Mall brought their older son along with their African domestic worker, Pauline, to Mansfield Road.

> Then the rumour went that they were now coming onto the Berea [towards Mansfield] – the gangs of the Zulus. Victoria Street was where the big branch of the Mayat family was…They phoned and said, 'Everybody together, we don't want anybody isolated', so we had to pack up there and we went to Victoria Street. My husband refused to move from the house. He says, 'I will not move. There are neighbours on both sides remaining so why will I move?' So Mr Bobat from next door said, 'I've got a gun, I'll give it to you'. Of course the family was very upset that he stayed behind but he wasn't going to move. My mother-in-law said, 'Come', so I had to go, and actually [Mahomed] was quite happy that I went…so we all went to Victoria Street and there we stayed. Now, my husband then put on a felt hat and went with his car to Camperdown and fetched a rifle from there. The Malls in Camperdown were people who went out hunting and so on, so he brought it here and kept that with him. But there was no need…[Then] there was a response group from the doctors, from the nurses, from people trying to help in the hospital and so on. So he was fully occupied in that.

As raised by the figure of Pauline in this account, the presence of Africans working for wealthier South African Indians placed the reality of the racialised economic gap between communities up against personal dependencies and loyalties. For example, when SI Mahomedy sent a car for Zuleikha's sister-in-law, a woman who had green eyes and light skin, in order to rescue her from a

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holiday cottage at Brighton Beach which was about to be under attack (and which was indeed looted and set alight), their 'African driver who'd been with them for years…told my sister-in-law, "Take off your scarf, put on a hat, because I can't drive with you as an Indian woman".'

Studies analysing the riots point to the fact that Indian, African and white people were incorporated separately into the local economy.[52] Indians were disadvantaged relative to whites, but better placed than Africans. They dominated trade in the 'non-European' sector of the city, including the African areas, and, as inflation cut real wage levels after the war, the rising prices of goods in Indian stores were the most tangible index of declining living standards.[53] Furthermore, Indian bus owners controlled transport to African areas, and many Africans rented land from Indians in Cato Manor.

Patterns of domestic servitude also revealed the economic disparities of the racial hierarchy. Like many white householders, wealthier Indians could afford domestic help – African or Indian cooks, maids, drivers, and gardeners – but few Africans were in a position to hire Indian or white staff.

From the 1940s, middle-class Africans launched a number of protest actions around work, housing and transport. Many believed that ethnic mobilisation had been responsible for the success of Indians and they proceeded to use the same strategy. The stereotype of the 'trader' became useful for mobilising against Indians. In evidence put before the Riots Commission, the principal grievances of Africans were stated as: insolent treatment by Indians, overcharging by traders, ill-treatment and incorrect change given on buses, sexual relations between African women and Indian men, exorbitant rents by Indian landlords, competition between Africans and Indians for bus certificates, the superior position of Indians in industry, and general economic competition between African and Indian traders.[54]

Indians denied these allegations. In a statement to the Riots Commission, the conservative Natal Indian Organisation tendered evidence to argue that Indians were targeted because the African 'knew that his oppressor was the European, but he also knew the might of the European...He was afraid to show his hostility to the European. He found in the Indian a convenient scapegoat.' The Natal Indian Organisation also suggested that inflammatory anti-Indian speeches by white politicians 'have tended to single out the Indians in Natal as an unwanted entity. These must inevitably reach the ears of the Africans...The

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Native would not fail to observe that the general attitude of the European is to send the Indians back to their country, lock, stock and barrel.'[55] The NIC and the African National Congress boycotted the official commission that investigated the riots. They considered it 'unrepresentative', since white men who were seen as partial to the state dominated the process.

Racialised violence in 1949 fed the political agendas of the power emerging in Pretoria. During the 1948 election, the 'purified' National Party had run on a ticket warning against the dangers of racial assimilation and mixing. South Africa, it argued, was a land of distinctive 'peoples', of separate 'communities'; assimilation both compromised the distinctiveness of each group and created discontent and competition. Minister of Interior, TE Donges, would later cite the riots in Durban as evidence that the policy of apartheid was the only feasible one for ensuring racial harmony in the country.

'Every day was a historical day'

Apartheid policy developed from the Sauer Report of 1946, which advised that 'non-Europeans' be relegated to ghettos and reserves, and their mobility more heavily controlled. Apartheid aimed to 'maintain and protect the purity of the white race' through territorial segregation, labour control, Christian National Education, and separate political representation. The report was unequivocal on the so-called Indian Question: 'Indians were temporary sojourners in South Africa and should be repatriated as soon as possible.'[56] This was incorporated into the National Party's election manifesto:

> The National Party holds the view that the Indians are a foreign and outlandish element which is inassimilable. They can never become part of the country and must, therefore, be treated as an immigrant community. The party accepts as a basis of its policy the repatriation of as many Indians as possible…No Indian immigrant will be allowed to enter the country. In view of the seriousness of the problem, South Africa must be willing to make great financial sacrifices for the achievement of the aim. So long as there are still Indians in the country a definite policy of separation will be applied.[57]

Between 1948 and 1954, Prime Minister DF Malan laid the basis for the new order with a series of laws that classified and registered all residents into racial

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groupings; outlawed marriage and sex between differently classified people; entrenched and created new racially separate residential areas; and removed people designated as coloured from the common voters' roll.[58] In fulfilling his party's manifesto, Malan insisted that Indians be forced out of homes that threatened the exclusivity of white suburbs, that their trading opportunities be radically curtailed, that job reservation be more systematically policed, and rights to citizenship and political representation be denied to Indians who should be 'repatriated' from the land of their birth. No representation would be given to Indians in the legislative bodies of the country.[59]

For Zuleikha, apartheid meant that 'every day was a historical day, really. There was not a day when you were not somehow affected by the laws…[And] you had no dignity. You were just – anybody would come and say "Hello, Mary". You're a "Mary". You are "Mary"…you didn't have another name.'[60] While acknowledging that African people endured the greatest suffering under apartheid, Zuleikha explained some of the humiliation that Indians faced daily:

> I mean a simple journey, like me wanting to go from here [Durban] to Potchefstroom to visit my parents…you would have to go and get a two-and-six-penny sort of permit…And once we were asked, 'Where's your permit?' Fortunately we had it too and, I don't know whether it was my husband or my brother or something, he said, 'Supposing we didn't have it?' 'Oh, we'll lock you up, you can bail yourselves out the next day.' So every policeman was just targeting you...And once [at a petrol station]… Mrs [Mariam] Motala was with me – she was pregnant at that time. When we opened that toilet it was so dirty, she recoiled, so I said, 'Let's go into the white toilet', and we went there and we did what we did. One of the Indian attendants saw us coming out and reported to the white woman inside. The white woman comes out, rushing, 'You're not allowed to go there.' So Dr Motala said, 'We're allowed to fill up petrol here and there's a toilet and they went in, and if you clean up the other one, we don't mind going there.' And – but, you know, ugly little things like this.

The politics of race and colour intervened in an intimate way for Zuleikha and Mahomed as a couple, creating a distinctive set of 'ugly little' experiences. Mahomed could pass for 'white'. However, when paired with Zuleikha (who, in a letter to Ahmed Kathrada in 1986, described herself as unable to be

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mistaken for 'anything but a child of Indian parents'),[61] racial confusions and exclusions often trailed them. On one occasion, an obstetrician at Natal University organised a medical conference at the Kruger National Park and invited Mahomed, who could enter the Park, but not Zuleikha. Mahomed insisted that the meeting be moved to a different venue. That did not happen and the Mayats chose not to attend.

Another anecdote reveals how the visual cues by which 'race' was off-handedly determined both failed and succeeded in effecting intended exclusions while causing other complications among friends and within the complex gender make-up of a single household. A light-skinned Indian Muslim professional colleague of Mahomed's, who had anglicised his Indian name, Dawood, to David and was married to a British woman, arranged for tickets to a local cricket match. They invited Mahomed, who did not realise that they had bought three tickets in the white section. When Mahomed proposed that Zuleikha come too, the friend panicked. He showed up at the Mayats' house and suggested to Zuleikha's mother-in-law that cricket was perhaps 'not the right place for women to go'. As a gendered exclusionary tactic to remedy a racial exclusion, the strategy almost worked:

> So, after that when Mahomed comes in, he says, 'Come.' I said, 'No, I'm not coming.' 'Why not?' Because he could see the mood had changed. My mother-in-law didn't say anything. I said, 'No, I just don't feel like it.' Now he's angry, and he goes off with [his friend]. When he comes later that night, he says, 'I know now why you did not go. When we got there, [my friend] was trying to take me into the white section. I said, "No… we can't go in there." He says, "[But my wife] is already inside there." "Sorry, I'm not going there." So his friend is in a quandary! He says, 'Alright then, let's go.' Now they're trying to get into the Indian section and that [ticket-vending] chappie says, 'You pay proper tickets and go into the white section,' [*laughs*] because they thought it was for cheaper tickets that they were going [into the Indian section]. So, they start talking in Gujarati. Then they were let through [as Indians].

While uncertainties sometimes enabled negotiation, the lines of identity had material consequences and the visual cues of racial perceptions could rapidly freeze into rigidity, creating conditions in which individuals were rendered powerless.

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Zuleikha's early life in Potchefstroom, with its zesty blend of cultural flavours and timbre of different languages, the comings and goings, the buying and selling, the variety of colours and creeds, greatly shaped the understandings of diversity and community that she brought with her to Durban. With this pickle-mix of pluralism, a sense of community informed her social interests and involvements, as well as her views of political change. It is not surprising that, initially, she found the social circles of married, middle-class Muslim life in Durban to be insular and confined compared with the interchanges in the family shop of her childhood.

> You knew that there were different people with different histories and all of this made life very interesting for me, and when I came to Durban and I was in Mansfield Road, in a family, just Muslims, I felt cramped, you know – you miss that cross-cultural mix of people that you used to mix and talk and interact with. And this is why I really started the Women's Cultural Group. Because I wanted different people to be in the Group so that they could know of each other. I mean, you live in the same country!

Diversity would not come looking for her: she, her sister Bibi, and her friends and associates would have to seek it out and labour to create a space for it. A women's group would also be the way in which to realise those civic aspirations that were nurtured in Zuleikha's early dreams of becoming a doctor: the upliftment of women's status and the service to the community she had aspired to as she studied English and mathematics through correspondence courses. In Durban, she found intellectual kinship and a faith community that shared many of her views, and she was encouraged to express herself through writing and activism. While at least two women's societies existed for Muslim and Indian women in Durban, there was more than enough work to be done, as well as space for new leadership with new ideas to emerge. Additionally, there was a desire among Zuleikha and her peers for a space over which they could preside without deference to the control of senior women. In the venture to create a civic group of their own, many participants enjoyed the enthusiastic support of men, husbands or fathers who were eager to promote an ethos of progressivism.

Zuleikha's story – her family history and her move from Potchefstroom to Durban – highlights some of the intricacies of South African public and private life, a chow-chow pickle mix of family, class, gender, ethnicity, religion

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and race politics. Her early life shaped the vision she brought to the Women's Cultural Group as a founder member and long-time leader. Her biography also sketches a picture of how the legal contours of South African politics and the customary practices of family and religious life could be experienced, resisted or transformed by individuals. The Women's Cultural Group was founded and nurtured within the tension between constraint and agency.

For Zuleikha Mayat, citizenship meant rights and responsibilities. Apartheid was an unjust denial of both, with social inequalities that were nothing less than lethal. Writing in the 1990s, after apartheid's end, she observed:

> Apartheid, defensively labelled by the authorities as Separate Development and sold to the world as being parallel and equal for all groups, was anything but equal. All facilities, whether educational, medical or recreational, were minimal among us blacks and mostly what existed had been put up by ourselves…A child is the most valuable asset a family possesses. A citizen similarly the most valuable asset of a country…In South Africa, black lives were cheap.[62]

These words were no abstraction, no mere social comment. They were deeply personal, an attempt to make some sociological sense of the greatest tragedy of her own life. Mahomed and Zuleikha enjoyed many years of marriage together after arriving in Durban in the summer of 1947. Their partnership was heartbreakingly shortened in April 1979. The couple, along with Zuleikha's sister Bibi and their niece, was driving from Johannesburg to Potchefstroom for a family reunion. There was an accident. Bibi was killed instantly. Mahomed 'died in my arms in the ambulance'. In her memoir, *A Treasure Trove of Memories*, Zuleikha recounts the confusion about the seriousness of his injuries and the question of where he, a man whose life had been dedicated to professional medicine, should be transported for emergency care. Instead of being taken to the closer and better-equipped 'white' hospital, he was taken to a 'non-white' medical facility much further away and did not survive the journey.

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