7
IN THE FAMILY OF HUMANITY

Hast thou observed him who belieth religion?
That is he who repelleth the orphan,
And urgeth not the feeding of the needy.
Ah, woe unto worshippers who are heedless of their prayer;
Who would be seen (at worship) yet refuse small kindnesses![1]

By any measure, the work of the Women's Cultural Group has been impressive in its reach and impact. *Indian Delights* has rippled over oceans and across national and ethnic boundaries. The Group has engaged in fundraising, providing bursaries and services and, on occasion, advocacy. Members have been involved in a range of philanthropic activities, from establishing schools and participating in the running of an orphanage, to assisting in setting up an old people's home, implementing programmes to teach skills such as sewing and cooking, and providing assistance during emergencies such as floods and fires. For the Women's Cultural Group, civic participation has meant that community welfare and charity are the foundation of its activism, something that Zuleikha Mayat continually advocated. In 'Fahmida's World' she admonished her readers:

> Have you ever wondered why there is such a lack of public spiritedness amongst us Indians and virtually no civic pride? Is it that not being entrusted with civic responsibilities we have let this talent atrophy through disuse? One often sees Europeans going around with petitions to remedy any existing or threatened inconvenience. We Indians on the other hand seldom lift a finger to help ourselves, and those few that do venture to do so are regarded as general nuisances.[2]

Mayat was urging her mainly middle-class Muslim readership to involve themselves in voluntary actions that would improve the life of the 'community'.

Robert Payton has defined philanthropy as 'voluntary action (giving, services and association) for the public good' that goes beyond one's immediate family.[3] Voluntary associations, in this instance the participation of members in the Women's Cultural Group, help, from Payton's perspective, to 'organise gifts of time and money to accomplish public purposes'.[4] Payton divides philanthropy into 'acts of community' aimed at improving the quality of life and 'acts of mercy' that relieve immediate suffering. The provision of bursaries and the teaching of skills, for example, were intended to improve 'quality of life', while the provision of blankets and the settling of utility bills that were in arrears aimed to relieve immediate suffering.[5] Philanthropy manifests in both intention and action; action that 'must have some public purpose – to achieve some vision of the public good…or at least *a* public good'.[6] While the previous chapter focused on money – the money that was crucial for the Group to implement its many programmes – underlying their activities was the promotion of a public vision of the social good that included expanded access to education for women and a more equitable and tolerant society.

To a significant extent, the philanthropic ambitions of the Group drew these mainly Muslim middle-class women into a much broader circle of relations, and into wider definitions of community, than many had before experienced. The humanistic and religious orientations that inspired concern for 'less fortunate' residents in the Durban area saw the Group firmly committed both to existing charity organisations offering care and comfort, as well as to developing new projects and institutions. A determination to cross racial and cultural boundaries saw them working with 'parallel' civil society groups such as the KwaMashu Zamokuhle Women's Welfare Society (known as Zamokuhle)

and the South African Institute of Race Relations, which meant working with people of African and European descent. Some women from these groups became members of the Women's Cultural Group; others worked in tandem with the Group and helped organise co-ordinated events. In this way, the Group cultivated a limited but important level of racial and cultural integration within its own membership, proactively pursuing its original aim of existing as a society open to 'all women'. While officially 'non-political', the 'inter-racial' character of the Group in the context of apartheid rendered it political by default. A few Group members cultivated personal ties with more activist organisations such as the Black Sash or with members of the African National Congress, but the Group was determined to maintain its non-political profile, careful to protect its welfare work. It did not identify with movement politics or pursue 'radical' actions more than occasionally. Its leadership was keen to ensure that the Group remained a viable involvement for 'ordinary' housewives who might otherwise have had no civic outlet. Nevertheless, in addition to philanthropic work, the Group and its members were involved in lobbying and petitioning in support of democratic processes at various times.

The Women's Cultural Group was formed in 1954, at a time when the economic position of many Indians was dire. Rapid urbanisation during the 1930s and 1940s brought large numbers of Indians into the city. The Indian population of Durban increased from 16 400 in 1921 to 123 165 in 1949 and the African population from 29 022 to 109 543 during the same period.[7] Burrows noted that the flow of Indians to the city was 'due less to the offer of attractive employment or even of any employment at all than to economic pressure driving them off the land'.[8] Before the 1930s, market gardening had been important because land was available for lease, it required little capital to start, and it allowed Indians to create diverse household economies in places such as Clairwood, Springfield, Mayville, Sea Cow Lake, Riverside, Umhlatuzana and Bayhead.[9] Land became scarce by the 1940s and market gardeners had to give way to industrial expansion at South Coast Junction, Lamont Industrial Estate, and Umgeni; to the airport at Isipingo; and to roadworks at Wentworth.[10] In the 1950s, Indian-owned land was also expropriated in Riverside, Merebank, Wentworth, Sydenham, and Springfield because of the Group Areas Act.[11]

From the early 1920s, Indians entering the industrial workforce had been handicapped by the White Labour Policy, the Apprenticeship Act of 1922, the

Industrial Conciliation Act of 1924, and the Minimum Wage Act of 1925, which gave preference to white workers. Thus in 1951, per capita income was £40.02 for Africans, £45.00 for Indians and £282.74 for white people.[12] CS Smith, a visitor to Durban, reflected on Indian poverty in a letter to the Town Clerk in 1940:

> As a stranger to Durban from overseas, one of the first things that struck me was the appalling condition of the majority of Indians here, malnourished and housed in hovels, without any sanitation. Just before Xmas I was working at Hulett's in Rossburgh and had to give out the meagre Xmas boxes to the Indians. I have never seen such hopeless, emaciated specimens of humanity. Some were too dazed to say 'thank you' and had the apathetical look of the half-starved.[13]

A University of Natal study in 1943/44 reported that 70 per cent of Indians were living below the poverty datum line and that 40 per cent were destitute.[14] A six-year study of the clothing industry reported on in 1944 indicated that 90 per cent of Indians suffered from malnutrition and 60 per cent from amoebic dysentery.[15]

There was little state assistance for black citizens and private welfare organisations were crucial in assisting the poor. The state took on part of this responsibility after the publication of a report by the Social Security Committee in 1944 which underscored the lack of social services for Indians, who subsequently became eligible for old-age and blind person's pensions in 1944 and disability grants in 1946, though the amounts were considerably less than those paid to white and coloured people. A family allowance was instituted in 1947 to provide assistance to families for their third and subsequent children. However, this was stopped within a year due to propaganda that it would lead to an increase in family size.[16]

Given the extent of the poverty, Zuleikha Mayat chided those in her community who spent large sums of money on lavish weddings in the midst of poverty:

> Why should we indulge in needless expenditure when the crying needs of our community assail us on every side? Shall we never learn to spend wisely? We have in our midst people who are only too willing to waste £500 or more on a colossal nuptial ceremony – but approach them with a bursary or social welfare proposal and the miser in them is quick to

> assert itself. What can't we do with funds? Perhaps there is no community other than us which is in greater need of bursaries, scholarships and funds for the proper administration of our religious and social institutions. How can such a pathetic and anomalous situation be remedied? The answer lies in Youth. The elder people are too accustomed and grown in their useless veteran customs to do a thing. Wherever opportunity arises Youth must protest against such inequities.'[17]

In 'Fahmida's World', Mayat regularly questioned how material wealth was being spent. She believed that the values and priorities of many of the wealthy in her community were distorted. Instead of helping to expand education and establish proper institutions, they were using their wealth in pursuits that she felt were frivolous and unacceptable under the prevailing economic circumstances.

Many Indians relied on private alms-giving by individuals and organisations for their very survival, notwithstanding Mabel Palmer's description of the system as 'still run on mediaeval lines'. Palmer wrote in 1957 that 'it is often asserted that the wealthy Indians do very little for their own people and nothing at all for the Africans. Both these statements are false though on the whole it is true to say that much of their charity is still indiscriminate.'[18] Palmer was only partly correct, as several organisations co-ordinated their charitable efforts at that time. These included the Aryan Benevolent Society (est. 1922), the Durban Indian Child Welfare Society (est. 1927), and the Natal Indian Blind Society (est. 1937). Those who could afford it were urged to support these organisations and, indeed, all of them were liberally supported by Indians. *Indian Opinion* in 1922, in an editorial which highlighted the efforts to cast Indianness as an ideological given, stated that 'for a nation that wishes to be independent it is the primary duty of the rich to look after the needs of the poor…We can only obtain just and fair conditions by being generous to our own flesh and blood. Let us, to put it another way, be patriotic.'[19] Assisting fellow Indians was seen as politically loyal and socially ethical. Where the Women's Cultural Group differed was in seeking to move beyond this narrow notion of a racially defined nationhood.

What was distinctive about the former organisations, however, was their co-operation across religious lines. Although the Aryan Benevolent Home was founded by Hindus and adhered to Hindu rituals, AI Kajee, a Muslim and grandfather of Group founder-member Zubeida Barmania, collected £229 for

its school building.[20] The Administrator of Natal, G Plowman, observed in 1921 that among Indians there 'was a strong disposition to look after the needs of their own people…It was well known that the Indians had a large number of castes and distinctions and, while in their everyday life these might obtrude, they all combine in works of charity and philanthropy.'[21] MA Motala, also a Muslim, and maternal great-uncle of another Group founder member, Zubeida Seedat, arrived from India in 1903. He started out as a small retailer and was a wealthy merchant by the time of his death in 1957. In 1922 he founded a school for the children of (mainly Hindu) employees of the Durban Corporation. In 1939 he established the MA Motala Boys' Hostel near Pinetown for delinquent boys between the ages of twelve and eighteen. He was also the second-largest contributor to Sastri College and donated land to the Natal Indian Blind Society in 1945 to build its Home and Vocational Training Centre.[22] Zohra Moosa's husband's family trust, the Moosa Hajee Cassim Charities Trust, contributed widely to community projects such as the Pathan School in Cato Manor; the Fannin Government-Aided Indian School in Wyebank; and AI Kajee Government-Aided Indian School in Mooi River. The fact that women such as Barmania, Seedat and Moosa came from families with a tradition of involvement in philanthropic work suggests that, like Zuleikha Mayat, who watched her father daily set aside money for charity, patterns of socialisation probably inculcated a tradition of involvement in community affairs.

Another feature of charitable work among Indians was that most of it was carried out by men. Writing in 'Fahmida's World' in 1959, Mayat referred to criticism that Muslim women 'tend to fritter away their energies in trifling activities but will not put their shoulder to the wheel when it comes to the real hard heave.' She blamed this partly on hovering menfolk who 'shelter and pamper women to a state of invalidism' and the Muslim social scene which 'requires a lot of dissipation of women's precious time in such frivolities as entertaining, attending functions, and the replenishing of her wardrobe for all these activities.' However, continued Mayat, women were no longer 'content to slumber on her menfolk's shoulders…she desires only that she be allowed to function as the second wing of one craft flying the same route.' Mayat believed that men and women had complementary skills and could work together effectively, combining 'his business acumen, his discipline, his strength, and

her eye for detail, her motherly sympathy, womanly intuition'.[23] Caring for the family of humanity, in this construct, was an ideal expressed about (monogamous) marital partnerships.

Given the extent of the need, and the lack of state assistance, charity was important to many families for their very survival. The Women's Cultural Group helped to fill an important vacuum even though many social and economic problems persisted. Over the years, some of the Group's members have been invited to serve on committees and boards in male-dominated institutions, such as the Orient High School, Darul Yatama Orphanage, Al Baraka Bank and Iqraa Trust.

Three women – Zuleikha Mayat, Khatija Vawda and Bibi Mall – were included on the board of trustees of Darul Yatama in 1958. Darul Yatama was founded in 1934, when Mawlana Mukhtar Siddique, the paternal uncle of Group founder-member Sayedah Ansari, was visiting Durban and helped locals establish a home to provide shelter and care to Muslim orphans and destitutes. The first home was in a wood and iron cottage in Sea Cow Lake provided by the EM Paruk family. When that property was condemned as 'a health hazard' by the city health authorities in 1937, a cottage was purchased in Westville. It was called 'Westhaven' and was officially opened on 15 August 1937 by the then Agent-General Sir Raza Sayed Ali. When Westville was declared a 'white' area under the Group Areas Act, Westhaven was expropriated in 1963 and the home moved to La Mercy. The new home was officially opened by Essop Randeree on 23 November 1974. Mayat commented in 1958, when women were invited to serve on the board, that the 'work done at the orphanage seems to be showing results and no doubt now that women have been taken on the committee, the progress will be more evident. It is sincerely hoped that when these women approach the public to help them in their task the response will be forthcoming.'[24] Khatija Vawda and Bibi Mall were appointed trustees, with Mayat replacing her sister Bibi Mall in 1980 after the latter's tragic death.

The theme of women being practical and getting things done is one that Mayat picks up over and over again. On another occasion she criticised the fact that Advocate RK Khan had bequeathed £40 000 for a hospital for Indians when he died in 1932 but, more than two decades later, the trustees were still searching for a suitable site. She wrote in 1958 of 'this pitiful story' and asked rhetor-

ically, 'Do my sisters agree with me that two women on the board of trustees will be successful in bringing results?'[25] Mayat observed that the success of the missionaries was due to the fact that they began their 'institutions from scratch and built it up over the years'. McCord Hospital, Adams College, Marianhill Monastery and St Anthony's School were testimony to this.

> On the other hand think of any Indian project. First of all there must be a pompous committee where some of the members apart from the giving of an over-publicized donation will not do a stitch of work on behalf of the project. Next, thousands of pounds will be collected from an already over-taxed community, then elaborate plans are drawn up, every detail for the future years thought of in this gigantic scheme, and then phizz goes the damp squib. Either they cannot obtain the land or the personnel is inadequately qualified, but in any event stagnation sets in. Why can't we get started on any tumble down building?…Elect a committee of genuine workers who will give their time and labour. Let there be plaques for the donors who so desire but do not have puppet committees. Prove to the public the worth of the institution before we clamour for perfect buildings and equipment.[26]

This is where, Mayat argued, women differed from men.

In disbursing funds to the needy, members initially adopted a 'hands-on' approach that saw them get personally involved where assistance was required. Involvement in fundraising and community welfare schemes brought them into spaces that were traditionally the preserve of men. In her presidential address on the occasion of the 18th AGM of the Group in June 1972, Mayat reflected sarcastically on the perceived intellectual differences in the ability of men and women, and how this affected the manner in which they reacted to crises. It also succinctly captures the personal involvement of members in crisis flashpoints:

> For any organization to remain in the limelight for two decades is something to crow about. Here we attribute our success to our unerring women's intuition. Not having that much bulk in brain matter to play with we do not feel inclined to sit for hours deliberating matters. I can quote one instance where there was need for urgency in collecting money. Whilst the men were still dialoguing over the setting up of a

Packing for Pakistan: Group members sort blankets for disaster relief.

> grand committee our cheques and our crates were all on their way to the disaster area.[27]

The Group saw itself as positioned in the 'underprivileged section of South African society', according to the brochure commemorating its 35th anniversary in 1989. As such, it was frequently called upon to 'handle a crisis within the community'. Community in this context was not necessarily confined to Muslims or Indians but included anyone in need, especially as a result of calamities such as floods or the sudden loss of breadwinners through death or unemployment. Assistance was also given abroad on occasion. For example, £3 000 was remitted to the Red Cross in Bangladesh, while clothing and a thousand blankets were shipped on the *SS Karanja* in December 1970. Cash, clothing and medicine have been provided over the decades for various disaster relief operations (mostly in the Islamic world) such as the Turkish Relief Fund (1976), the Maputo Relief Fund (1984), flood relief in Pakistan (1989), refugee aid in Afghanistan (1990), cyclone relief in Bangladesh (1991), earthquake relief in northern Iran (1990), war relief in Iraq (1991), flood relief in Sudan (1991), the Indian Earthquake Fund (1992) and the Pakistan earth-

quake (2005). Following the tsunami of December 2004, an 'extraordinary meeting' was convened on 3 January 2005 and a committee formed to raise funds: R56 576 was handed over to the Al Imdaad Foundation and the Gift of the Givers, two organisations that were active in Indonesia. According to members, Mayat always emphasised accountability in all her dealings. If money was collected from the public for a particular project, Mayat insisted that it be used for that project only. For example, the Group collected almost R14 000 for the Iran Earthquake Fund in July 1990. Mayat wrote to the fund administrator on 20 July 1990 that she

> was most disappointed to learn that weekly amounts were not forwarded for purchase of medicines as originally agreed upon. To me it is most important that any decision taken at committee level to be carried out explicitly. Should this not be possible, then everyone concerned should be informed accordingly. After several calls to your office, at last information was available that instead of medicines the money was to be forwarded to Iran for purchases on the spot. This placed me personally in a spot (excuse the pun) with the different women who at my request collected this large amount in so short a time – despite the fact that their menfolk had already contributed.

In the local context too, the Group has attempted to provide relief in times of crisis. When a fire in Sea Cow Lake left thirty-five people destitute in 1971, Durban Child Welfare contacted the Group: 'Although we are not a welfare organization, such appeals are impossible to ignore. Help to those affected would eventually be given by others we knew, but here, there was an urgency calling for immediate relief. The official who received the phone call, phoned three other members and so a ball was put into motion.'[28] Members contributed blankets and mattresses. During the 'Inanda Fire tragedy' of September 1984, the Group provided assistance and formed a 'relief committee' to co-ordinate collections from different areas. The committee consisted of Gori Aapa Mahomedy (Westville), Gori Patel (Durban Central), Nafisa Jeewa (Asherville), and Khatija Vawda (Reservoir Hills). This was the pattern whenever crises arose.

Over time, however, as other organisations were formed, the Group did not 'rush to every scene', as Zohra Moosa put it, but provided funding to organisations already involved. According to Zuleikha Mayat, 'when we perceive that

others are doing a good job we fade out for we are loathe to duplicate services.' Around fifty organisations have benefited financially from the Group over the years.[29] As Shairbanu Lockhat wrote in 1979, 'we lend a sympathetic ear to any request. We try not to turn down anybody. Sometimes there is a delay, but in the end we get around to everybody.'[30] This pattern continued down the years.

Education and the wellbeing of those who were physically and mentally challenged were of special concern for members. One project that married these concerns was the opening of Tiflaneh (Urdu for 'child'), a pre-school for children with Down syndrome. Members felt that the absence of a special school deprived children of social interaction and education during a pivotal phase of their lives. The decision to establish the school was taken formally in October 1979. Nafisa Jeewa, an active member at the time, explained that the attitude of many parents caused them to embark on this project:

> Basically, if you had a disabled child amongst the Indians, the child was left at home. Nobody ever thought of educating the child. The mother was too busy, right, besides her domestic work and other children. The child was left at home, you give it meals, bath it, dress it, but no motivation. There was no such thing as 'let's do some colouring, let's do some learning' in any basic form.

In November 1979, Zuleikha Mayat sent out letters to potential donors outlining the aims and objectives of Tiflaneh.[31] The school was registered and opened with fifteen children at the Truro Hall in Westville on 5 February 1980. While parents welcomed the school, which filled a huge gap, the logistics created a problem. One was the venue. The teacher, Rashida Vaid, had to set up the classroom each morning and pack things away in the afternoon, which was tedious. Transport was another problem as Westville was out of the way for most parents. The Spes Nova School in Phoenix, also a school for special needs children, assisted in transporting the children for a few weeks. Thereafter the Group was forced to hire a vehicle. While the Group was busy attempting to solve its problems the Golden Gate School was being opened in Greenwood Park. AK Singh of the Education Department approached the Group in April 1980 about merging the two. According to Mayat, members saw this as a 'great opportunity' as there was a 'realisation that we would not be able to continue with Tiflaneh in the long run, especially because Rashida Vaid was about to get married'.

Singh advised the Group in August that it would have to provide a teacher and an aide, and assist with vehicle and running costs. The terms of the merger were finalised in October 1980. It was agreed that the section of the school sponsored by the Group would be called the Tiflaneh Centre. The Group would continue to assist towards various projects at Golden Gate. When the Group contributed R5 000 towards the nursery block in 1986, for example, S Singh, the school's principal, wrote to Mayat on 26 February 1986 to thank members 'for their very generous and spontaneous donation. Their magnanimity is a source of tremendous inspiration to us in our fundraising efforts. Your charitable disposition is to be admired and we pray you be blessed with good health and happiness you richly deserve.' The Group also contributed to the coffers of the Natal Indian Cripple Care Association (NICCA), Bantu Blind, Cripple Care Centre, Sydenham Cultural Institute, Durban Community Chest and Indian Social Welfare, while Mayat served on the board of NICCA for six years.

Another project close to the heart of many members was the establishment of a health clinic in Malagasy on the south coast. Several members visited the township in August 1978 and saw the appalling living conditions first-hand. It was a huge shock for some, such as Laila Ally, who had grown up under apartheid, to see Indians and Africans living side by side, and especially the extent of poverty among Muslims. It was an 'eye-opener', as she put it. She described Malagasy as an area for 'outcasts' – that is, a place of refuge for Muslims who had married non-Muslims and were shunned by their families. The pathetic conditions left her

> totally depressed. My father saw me and said, 'No, you're not going back there.' I said, 'Why not? I may be depressed today but there's something that can be done.' The next time we went there…we cooked yakhni. We told the ladies to meet us there. There was a little community centre there and we had lunch. We read namaaz together. And that was something that will live with me. It was such a fantastic experience – being with the local community. And then we asked some of these women, 'What do you need? What do you want? What can we do for you?', and thirteen women came forward and said, 'We want one thing.' And we said, 'What is that?' And they said, 'We want our nikahs to be performed because we are all living here like outcasts – like a condemned

Members of the Group visit the Zamokuhle Women's Welfare Society's gardening project; township visits were fairly common during the 1970s and early 1980s.

> community.' So MYM [the Muslim Youth Movement] got involved. They went and performed the nikahs.

In July 1979, the Group provided funds to assist the Muslim Youth Movement to build a clinic in Malagasy. The Group successfully approached Shifa Hospital to donate a couch and collapsible screens, while a table, chairs and steriliser were purchased from its own funds. The Child Welfare Department has used part of the clinic as an office and interview room and the Isipingo Board ran an antenatal clinic from the premises. A plaque bearing the words 'Women's Cultural Group Clinic' was placed on the outside.

An indication of the changing times was that, just ten years later, when long-time member Mary Grice resigned, Mayat wrote to her on 16 May 1990 expressing her sadness but commenting too on the political and criminal violence that was making it difficult for women to continue in their old ways:

> All our lives are filled up with things around us. Daily we have news of someone we know who has either been robbed, killed or worse. Conscience stricken as we are, we still go around eating, and taking some enjoyment out of life. May we be forgiven for being spectators of history and not participants!…The Islamic societies, like the church organizations, are doing meaningful work among the disadvantaged. The

> Cultural Group has helped out with funds, but believe it, when we were asked to go to Malagasy and see how the clinic and welfare work there is being conducted, we backed down on the grounds that it was too dangerous an area.

There were many other examples of the women getting involved in areas and issues that they would not ordinarily have visited or covered. In May 1978, twenty-two members visited the Spes Nova School for Cerebral Palsy in Phoenix. The visit, the minutes of the June 1978 monthly meeting recorded, 'made us realize just how much we have to be grateful for'. In November 1984, members visited the Imbeliyezwe Primary School in Hammarsdale and the Inchanga Islamic School, which they had sponsored. They were treated to lunch at Inchanga and received an insight into the running of the school and madrassah. Such visits sensitised members to the class and other inequalities in their midst and forged in many a determination to do something about it.

Chow-chow alliances

Involvement in the Group also resulted in working with African and white women, though friendships across race barriers remained limited. Support for African organisations was an interest of Mayat's from the beginning. She wrote in 1956, for example:

> It is kind of us to send relief to India and the Europeans to Holland after floods have ravished the country, but we should look around us and give succour. Africans unlike our people will not come round begging from door-to-door when the times are hard.[32]

There was a link, for example, with Zamokuhle, a social welfare society, and its officials such as Doris Pamla and Albertina Nguni, a councillor in KwaMashu township who was also a long-time member of the Group. Through Zamokuhle, the Group contributed funds to various African women's societies and initiatives. In July 1976, when Albertina Nguni returned from a conference on euthanasia in the United States, she addressed the Group about the issue. In September 1976, members of the Group arranged contributions for a cake sale organised by Nguni. Members also visited her home in KwaMashu, where they had tea and toured her garden, as Nguni was a keen gardener.

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On the occasion of its 18th anniversary the Women's Cultural Group of Durban held a get-together at the Orient Hall, Durban, recently, where the main guest was Chief Gatsha Buthelezi of Kwa Zulu. Picture shows the Chief interestingly watching a young member of the Women's Group applying Mehndi (henna) to his palm, while Mrs. Mariam Motala (right), a leading member of the Women's Cultural Group and wife of Dr. Yusuf A. Motala of Durban, looks on.

The association with Nguni drew the Group into the politics of the Zulu Kingdom. Chief Mangosuthu Buthelezi was invited on 3 February 1972 to be guest of honour at the Group's 'Sweet Seventeen' anniversary celebrations. Buthelezi accepted the invitation on 10 February, responding as follows: 'many thanks for remembering that our friendship [with the Mayats] is now 17 years [old]. That's a lifetime!' He went on to add, however, that a recent 'coup' attempt in Zululand had involved some members of Zamokuhle. He was 'not too happy about their involvement…However, if you have already involved them and you cannot extricate yourself from it, I will quite understand.' The function on 25 April 1972 went off successfully with Irene Buthelezi donning a traditional Indian sari. Six members of Zamokuhle who were considered loyal to Buthelezi formed a guard of honour for the Buthelezis, who were presented with a copy of the Qur'an. Buthelezi spoke on 'The disabilities

which hamper women in their efforts towards making their full contribution to the whole development of society'.

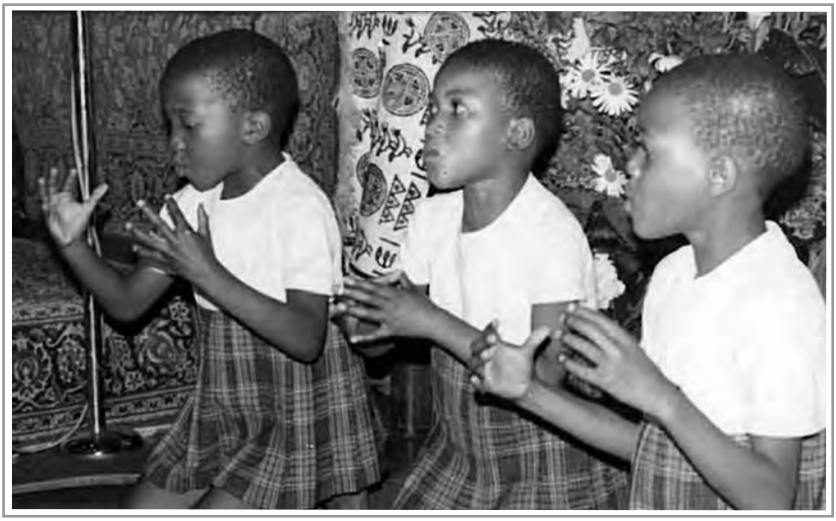
Irene Buthelezi was a patient of Zuleikha Mayat's husband, who delivered the Buthelezi children. Mangosuthu Buthelezi often visited the surgery and the Mayats' home in Clare Road. The Group also invited him to meet its international guests, such as jurist Sir Zafrullah Khan, who at one time held the position of president of the UN General Assembly.

The Group was also associated with the Sibusiwe Claremont Child and Welfare Society, headed by Virginia Gcabashe. Gcabashe was born in 1930 in the village of Blikana in the Eastern Cape, where her father was a teacher and her uncle was the local pastor. From an early age she aspired to be a nurse 'to help people', having been exposed to needs and traumas of people who visited her family for sustenance. One Christmas morning, a man arrived on their doorstep very hungry and with swollen feet.

> I was a child and the story which he related – being beaten up by farmers, walking through the night – touched me. And I was most touched by the way he ate – it showed how hungry he was. I thought if this is what happened to our people, I need to do something, to give comfort to people.

Virginia completed a nursing course and practised midwifery at King Edward Hospital in Durban. She married a doctor who had studied at the University of the Witwatersrand. The couple returned to Durban, where Virginia's husband, Vusa, worked at McCord Hospital with Dr Mahomed Mayat. Virginia remembers the resonance she felt with Zuleikha Mayat's vision of women working towards community development. 'I met Mrs Mayat because we had common interests in many ways – we felt we needed a Federation of Black Women and we formed this with the likes of Fatima Meer, Dr Goonam and Zubeida Seedat and other women.' The Women's Cultural Group supported several of Virginia's projects.

> In Durban, at first [my husband and I] lived in Chesterville and I started a local chapter of the Young Women's Christian Association. We then moved to Claremont and I was involved in community work through the Methodist Church, YWCA, and we formed the Sibusiwe Child Welfare. We started this because we understood that the first three years of a



Alliances with other women's organisations in the region created opportunities for children to cross apartheid-imposed lines and enjoy exchanges of talent.

> child's life were important. Claremont had lots of factories – mothers were working and children must have a place to stimulate them. This was fulfilling but we needed more. We looked at schoolchildren and felt that we needed a holiday programme. There was the excitement of Christmas and New Year but then there was a dull period and we wanted to emphasise life skills so [we] had a programme for high school children. This is when we worked with the Women's Cultural Group and they assisted in many ways. This was important because the projects are still running. These projects are still running.

Exchanges between segregated communities were not only financial; there were cultural events as well. In November 1972, the minutes of the monthly meeting recorded that the Group organised an Eid/Diwali function where guests read extracts from their own works in Urdu and English. There were talks on Indian music and dancing, while children from the school set up by Albertina Nguni, described as a group of 'Tiny Tots' from KwaMashu, 'thrilled everyone with their performance of songs and poetry'. In April 1973, Fatima Meer arranged for the Group to host the cast of Athol Fugard's anti-apartheid play *Sizwe Banzi is Dead*, which was performed at the Orient Hall.

In August 1976, funds raised at a fête were handed over to the Sibusiwe Child Care Centre. In December 1977, members funded the training of two nursery school teachers in Hammarsdale and collected cash and other donations for Albertina Nguni's crèches in KwaMashu. In March 1978, financial assistance was provided to build an Educational Centre at the Inanda Seminary. Three members visited the school in April and described it as an inspiring trip: 'Those who have not been there have really missed out on something worthwhile.' Mayat described the Inanda Seminary in 2008 as 'a very important institution which still exists but sadly we are not in touch.'

The Group assisted Dr Siko Mji of the Hammarsdale Women's Group to establish a pre-school in 1978. The relationship with the Mjis began through Dr Mayat, who would often bring colleagues and acquaintances home for supper on Wednesdays and in this way an association would be forged. Members of the Group visited the pre-school on several occasions. For example, they attended an 'Open Day' at the Mpumalanga Crèche on 11 November 1979 where Dr Mji addressed them while the children entertained parents and friends with songs and dances.

Like Virginia Gcabashe, Siko Mji (née Mjali) was a contemporary of Zuleikha Mayat. She was born in the Eastern Cape – in Tabankulu in the late 1920s – to a father who was a Methodist minister. Although only a year younger than Zuleikha Mayat, her educational path was quite different. Following her father's postings she attended six different primary schools and matriculated from high school in 1942 at the Healdtown Institute. From there she was educated at Fort Hare. ('As a matter of interest, my roommate was an Indian girl,' noted Mji.) She taught briefly at Kroonstad Secondary School in the Orange Free State while engaged to John Dilintaba Mji, whom she had met at Fort Hare. The couple went from there to the University of the Witwatersrand, where he was studying medicine. In 1952, the year she was married, Siko herself received a scholarship to study medicine at the University of the Witwatersrand and she managed to juggle the responsibilities of marriage and professional training.

> It took me ten years to complete because it seemed that every alternate year I had a baby. In fact, three of my four children were born while I was studying for my degree – to make the story really spicy, my only daughter was born at 9am on the day I was to write my final examination. I would want to return to classes the next year but Professor Dutt, the famous

> Professor Dutt, would insist, 'You stay at home and breastfeed your baby'. There was no Pill in those days, no contraceptives. White people may have known about condoms but we didn't.

Later, while practising at McCord Hospital, Dr Mji's inevitable contact with the Mayats sparked a number of interactions with the Women's Cultural Group, many of them related to Siko and Zuleikha's mutual interest in helping women. Dr Mji recalls:

> [My husband and I] lived in a far-off place then, Hammarsdale, where the situation was difficult for women – they had to work, raise their children, their husbands working – and they earned poor wages. I was touched by that and saw a need for pre-school care. Together with several community friends, we founded the Pre-School Education Forum and worked to build a pre-school. We had to raise funds, get equipment, pay teachers, and all these things required money and time. I had heard about Julu [Zuleikha Mayat] and visited her to ask if she would help. And I had known her husband many years earlier. In this way I was put into contact with the Group. They were a very active group – involved in their sales, book, fairs and so on. I was even made MC for one of the big fairs at a school. It was a great benefit to us as we could also buy things cheap and they helped us organise one or two of our fairs. Julu was a helping hand that I cannot forget. The pre-school is standing to this day – Khulakahle Pre-school. We were assisted by the Urban Foundation, Julu, the Beare Group and others.

Siko Mji became 'a more or less honorary member' of the Group. She attended meetings and was kept informed of everything but could not be active like the other women because of her many other involvements. Commenting on Zuleikha Mayat's organistional skills, Mji had this to say:

> They were an enviably active group of women. Being a woman organiser I knew how difficult it was to organise women and I could not organise women like Julu did. She was creative and energetic and now I read that she could not fulfil her desire for education, but she had no inferiority complex, nor a superiority one, for that matter.

The Group's limited resources meant that it was unable to cope with the high demand for assistance. The annual report for 1977 stated that numerous appeals had been received for financial assistance but it could only 'adopt' a few. In that year Ohlange High was chosen as the 'big project'. At the opening of the school, a plaque bearing the name 'Women's Cultural Group' was put up. Monies raised at a a fête in July 1978 were given to the likes of Ohlange High, KwaMashu Crèche and the Hammarsdale Group. In September 1979 medical instruments were given to the Happy Valley Clinic and Eid hampers were given to Dr Dada of the Inchanga Centre in Marianhill. On 11 November 1979 the Group attended an 'Open Day' at Mpumalanga, Hammarsdale, and visited the Marianhill Islamic Centre.

In December 1982, blankets, biscuits, sweets and other items were sent via Albertina Nguni to crèches in the African township of KwaMashu as part of the Group's 'Christmas Cheer' programme. In November 1984, members visited the Imbeliyezwe School and Inchanga Institute which they had helped to establish. They were treated to lunch and received an insight into the running of the school and madrassah. The Group's files are littered with letters of appreciation from recipients such as Dr Siko Mji and S'bongile D Nene of the Nosizwe Community Project. For example, the latter wrote on 10 January 1986 'to express on behalf of management committee our heartfelt thanks for your very kind support'. Despite supporting predominantly African-run township-based organisations, the Group was sober in its assessment that the attempt to forge links with Africans had not succeeded to the extent that members had hoped. This was remarked upon in the Group's 1972 brochure, and the relationship arguably weakened in subsequent years as apartheid intensified:

> Over the past eighteen years many are the bridges that we have crossed on the road of race relations. Our members have addressed other women's organizations and we have given them a platform in return, so that each child could learn from the other; that civilization and culture knows no colour; that every mother wants a better life for her offspring. Whilst these bridges were crossed and temporary meetings held at the caravanserais, along the harsh road of man-erected barriers, no permanent station seems to have been established.[33]

Friendship with Albertina Nguni and Doris Pamla lasted until their deaths, after which contact was lost with Zamokuhle. Mayat observed that, ironically,

Albertina Nguni, Doris Pamla and Mariam Motala.

with the end of apartheid, there is less need for cross-race contact. African members and societies have greater access to state and other sources of funding and are no longer dependent on the contributions of Indians. The rapid rise of Dr Diliza Mji, the son of Dr Siko Mji, on the corporate ladder is an example of the changing post-apartheid landscape. The same pattern is replicated with most organisations. As the extract suggests, and as Mayat pointed out, 'there is a great deal of regret that we did not or were unable to sustain these relationships'. Mji similarly comments:

> At that time the various races worked together, they felt they had a togetherness. We were all under the iron heel of apartheid, particularly in education and academic field and there were good feelings. In Fort Hare for example, as I said, Miss Pillay was my roommate. We had other Indian and coloured friends – generally there was no deep consciousness of us being African and they being Indians, especially those belonging to the ANC [African National Congress]. We felt no difference. The co-operation was most welcome. Even the Black Sash were with us, though they were apart, we felt. In the present time, to be honest, things have not gone as people anticipated. I would have expected the accord to go stronger but it has grown weaker, not stronger. The new generation has tendency to divide. Africans are Africans, and they feel that Indians are taking bread out of their mouths. This is developing a lot. I don't understand it.

Mary Grice was similarly perplexed about the faltering urgency for cross-racial exchanges, and even her own, once-regular association with Group members has diminished. 'I don't know why but over the years there has been less and less contact, though now and again I do get to meet Zuleikha', she declared. One such occasion was the launch of Zuleikha Mayat and Ahmed Kathrada's book on 24 October 2009, which was attended by both Mary Grice and Siko Mji. Virginia Gcabashe was also invited, but being confined to a wheelchair she found it difficult to attend, though she sent a letter of good wishes that was read out.[34]

A formal Group member from the 1960s, Grice had been a stalwart of the Black Sash and South African Institute of Race Relations. Born in the same year as Zuleikha Mayat, her father was in the British Colonial Service in Kenya and she grew up in Tanzania in the 1930s. Moving to England during the Second World War, she studied for a year in London at University College, then moved to Cairo, which she described as 'a fantastic place, what a change from a quiet ordinary English life...people from all over the world, speaking so many languages, so many cultures'. In 1947, she moved to South Africa to study at Rhodes, where she earned a BA in economics and politics.

Her husband, Duchesne Grice, a lawyer, had arrived in Durban in early 1951 and settled in Gillits. Duchesne Grice was a member of the South African Institute of Race Relations, and its president from 1973 to 1974. He was 'keen on getting people from all backgrounds to meet'. With people such as Joe Thorpe and Ann Perry they set up the African Art Centre 'to bring people together'. Mary Grice met Zuleikha through their respective husbands' professional networks and liberal social circles. She remembers that 'my husband knew Mayat's husband – they would meet socially – sometimes we had dinners at my in-laws' house where people of various race groups would attend – in Lambert Road – JN and Radhi Singh, IC Meer and Fatima Meer, Devi and Dennis Bughwan, lots of such people'.

The cases of Grice, Mji and Gcabashe shows that the Group's early inter-racial exchanges and collaborations with non-Muslim women were clearly facilitated through the marital and class positioning of a few key members. Marriage to professionals, or being active professionals in their own rights, connected them to humanitarian enterprises across the segregated spaces of apartheid. Socially active and professional women such as Siko Mji, Virginia Gcabashe and Mary

Grice were important in the Group's aspirations towards a broader sense of sisterhood and community. While the Group remained a mostly Muslim women's association, it always strove to find ways of concerning itself more broadly with the 'pickle-mix' of South African social needs. This vision has come under strain with the end of apartheid and challenges posed by globalisation.

Family and faith community

The society in which the Group operates has transformed over the past half-century and the Group's activities and focus have changed accordingly. Importantly, myriad organisations have emerged, many with access to greater resources. The Muslim Youth Movement was established in Durban in 1970. During the early phase its focus was on increasing Islamic consciousness among the youth. By the end of the decade there was a concerted attempt by many Muslims to integrate Islam into all aspects of their lives, and several other organistions such as the Jaame Limited, the South African National Zakaat Fund, the Islamic Da'wah Movement (IDM), the Association of Muslim Accountants and Lawyers (AMAL) and the Islamic Relief Agency (ISRA) were launched.[35] The South African National Zakaat Fund, for example, founded in 1977, provides emergency relief, a winter warmth programme and a labour bureau. Its funds are obtained mainly from zakaat contributions.

The Women's Cultural Group has worked through organisations such as the South African National Zakaat Fund and the IDM, which was founded in 1981 and has established jama'at khanas (prayer centres) and madrassahs across the province, and assists indigent students with school fees and books. The Group also provided financial assistance to the Islamic Relief Agency (ISRA), which was formed in 1987 in response to floods that caused major damage in KwaZulu-Natal. ISRA has worked closely with the Red Cross and other emergency organisations in providing medical assistance, food, clothing, blankets and financial assistance to those living in squatter camps and informal settlements.

The Gift of the Givers Foundation was formed by Dr Imtiaz Sooliman in 1992 with a focus on feeding schemes, education, and health and medical services. The organisation has an international profile given its involvement in places such as Bosnia, Palestine and Bangladesh, and it provided millions of rands worth of aid following the xenophobic attacks that swept across South

Africa in May 2008, when the government response was lethargic. Members of the Women's Cultural Group did not wish to duplicate this work and therefore contributed financially to these organisations or provided skills training. One consequence of this approach is that there is less direct contact between Group members and the beneficiaries of their endeavours.

The Group's focus has shifted over time as new challenges have arisen. As part of its 'crisis' programme, a helpline was started in January 1996 for women in distress as a result of wife and child abuse, substance abuse, and marital problems – problems arising in part from the breakdown of extended families.[36] The presence of elderly family members and extra hands around the house had, in the past, cushioned the impact of various tensions. Ayesha Vorajee, Shameema Mayat, Zohra Moosa, Zubie Paruk, Suhaima Tayob, Shairbanu Lockhat and Sabera Timol were among those involved in this project, and Nafisa Mayat was made co-ordinator. Volunteer counsellors were available to the public from Monday to Saturday mornings. It was open to women of all religious backgrounds. After the first year of operation, Nafisa Mayat reported that most of the cases involved depression and young people's failure to deal with marital problems.[37] Callers were provided with advice and referred to professionally qualified psychiatrists, doctors, social workers, welfare agencies, and mawlanas. After almost two years the service was stopped when Nafisa Mayat joined the Department of Social Welfare and organisations such as Al-Ansaar began to operate similar services. A perusal of the records shows that many callers were afraid of their husbands finding out that they had sought assistance and pleaded for anonymity. They also asked for 'a strong person' to speak to their husbands. Comments such as 'the woman sounded desperate [but] she seems afraid to take the next step' were common in the case records. Women feared divorce because they felt that they did not have skills to survive alone and remained in a dependency relationship. For Zuleikha Mayat, this confirmed the need to empower women.

A formally structured 'Women's Cultural Group Crisis Fund' was initiated in August 2002 to assist those faced with unforeseen short-term financial problems.[38] This too is a reflection of the end of systems of mutual aid. It was opened with financial assistance from the Iqraa Trust, the philanthropic arm of the Al Baraka Bank, to assist families that required short-term assistance for school fees, uniforms, medical bills, and utility bills that could not be met because

of unforeseen circumstances. Mayat wrote in the jubilee brochure (2004) that 'it becomes almost impossible to refuse these genuine cries for help if the need has been established.' The minutes of a committee meeting of 3 September 2002 stated that the money would be given as a 'loan in order to not make the recipient feel like they are receiving a hand-out as they are not used to this'. Hajira Omar, who heads this committee, explained:

> We help people just, for example, a woman who got too ill to pay her utility bills, that kind of unforeseen expenses – somebody's son is very sick or they have a crisis in school fees, or rentals they can't afford, and then we would interview and check whether there is a genuine need or not, and once we have screened that, we either give them a loan or it's just given outright sometimes.

Typical of the assistance provided was that given to a mother of four in Chatsworth in January 2003 who earned an income by going from house to house doing washing and ironing. Her water had been disconnected when illness prevented her from paying the utility bill. The Group paid the bill to reconnect the water. The Crisis Fund has even assisted school governing bodies to meet their utilities commitments. For example, R2 000 was given to the Ekukhanyakwelanja School in Chesterville in July 2006 to pay utility arrears.

The empowerment of women has been a 'hobby horse' of Zuleikha Mayat's for many years as she sought to help individuals develop cottage and small business initiatives so that a class of entrepreneurs could be created among those that the formal sector failed to absorb. Mayat sought to avoid what she termed a 'dependency syndrome' and advocated teaching women skills and knowledge related to productive work and empowerment so as to create opportunities for them to become self-sufficient.

While Mayat and most of the formative Group members were home-makers, they did not articulate a vision of the 'ideal' family as comprising a working husband and non-working wife. On the contrary, Mayat emphasised the advantages of the economic empowerment of women and advocated that women should work if it meant economic benefit to the family. She wrote as early as 1956: 'I can only say that one rule applies to any family, anywhere whatever their religion or race. That where the father is incapable of earning a livelihood then it is better for the woman to do so instead of begging.'[39]

The Group presented a proposal to the Iqraa Trust in September 2003 to empower women, whose neglect, according to the memorandum, resulted in 60 per cent of human resources being 'ignored or lost' to the Muslim community. Poverty forced many women to supplement family income with home-based production and the proposal called for 'motivation lectures' to encourage women to start small businesses and set up savings schemes. For example, some women sold rotis from home but with a roti-making machine they could 'easily treble income and with less sweat at that'. In the proposal, Mayat cited one 'success' story to make her point:

> A family was in a precarious financial situation. Husband, wife and two children had a roof over their heads that was under threat of being removed. It was imperative that the husband who was without a job should start earning. The husband and wife came to my home, we made a marinade and the Women's Cultural Group was involved to help retail it. At every food stall, flea market and food demonstration the Women's Cultural Group ladies were in attendance with the wife. Very soon the couple could not cope with the demand [for the marinade] and the wife's brother closed his own operation in a café and joined them. Today Magi Masala and Gorima's [masala] are entities known throughout the country. All this started from making one twenty-five litre [container] of masala at a time.

Mayat quoted several other examples, such as providing sewing machines to individuals and organisations that were teaching sewing skills through the Crescent of Hope organisation, which also helped trainees to market their products. While the women were in training, the Crescent of Hope deposited part of the income they earned in a bank account in their name to help them acquire their own sewing machine. Another example was that of Darul Tauheed, which, with the help of the Iqraa Trust, set up a pottery studio at the Anjuman School in Leopold Street. The Group also assisted a carpentry firm to secure a government tender to produce door and window frames for a housing scheme. The loan was repaid timeously and the company secured a bigger contract. Mayat argued that such small business enterprises should be nurtured to 'erase the prevalent dependency syndrome and change it into entrepreneurship.'

The Group's attempt to implement the scheme more broadly received a setback, however, when serious defaulters stretched its resources and the scheme had to be stopped. In a letter to Mawlana Kathrada of the Jamiatul Ulama on 26 November 2004, Mayat explained that the Group had hoped to assist people to 'start some money generating operations' but was forced to shelve the idea after several negative experiences.

As a result of the achievements of the Group over the past half-century and Zuleikha Mayat's standing in the Muslim community, she was invited to serve on the board of Al Baraka Bank as a 'Special Advisor' and on the Iqraa Trust as a trustee. Advocate AB Mahomed, deputy-chairman of the bank, hoped that Mayat would inspire Muslim women to become involved in Islamic banking in order to empower them, noting that

> I would like to see the day when no women of Islam are left without help when misfortunes fall on their husbands or families; that they become truly self-reliant educationally and economically; that in their youth they are given educational and spiritual opportunities that will make them the finest builders of human beings and potentially of new Muslims.[40]

Mayat accepted the position on 16 June 1990, stating: 'I appreciate the appointment of the Al Baraka Bank Board and do thank them for it. As I take all my responsibilities seriously I hope and pray that I will prove to be of use to both your establishment and to women in the community.'[41] Mayat served on the board until 2005.

Mayat was also invited to serve on the board of the Iqraa Trust, which was established by the Al Baraka Bank in 1994. Iqraa in Arabic means 'read' and the mission of the Trust is to spread reading and literacy in order to facilitate development. The Iqraa Trust provides assistance to organisations that focus on welfare, education, skills development, and social development. Mayat remains a trustee of Iqraa, which has donated over R60 million between 1994 and 2009 to health, education and social welfare projects without regard to race or religion.

The Women's Cultural Group has also been involved with the Darul Yatama Orphanage since the late 1950s. Darul Yatama runs old people's homes for men and women, an orphanage in La Mercy and a school in Pine Street. Group members are involved on a hands-on basis in the old people's home for ladies,

the Baitul Hifazat in Williamson Road, Sparks Estate. There is a separate home for men, the Baitul Firdous in Randles Road. The Group contributed financially and has assisted with the running of the home since the project was first mooted in January 1998. At a meeting on 24 February 1998 it was established that the Darul Yatama would be the umbrella organisation co-ordinating the project, with the Group forming a women's wing to get the project off the ground.[42] Mayat made it clear that 'this does not give any special status to the Women's Cultural Group, it only means that we will be able, because of our constant association with the Darul Yatama, to liaise more effectively with them.' Ever the diplomat, Mayat emphasised:

> All of us gathered here are going to give our services in various capacities, but often that means chaos especially when one half of the members do not know what the others are doing, and there will occur overlapping, treading on each others' toes and leaving bad feelings against each other, so really the work of the Women's Cultural Group will be that of facilitators. What we all have to keep constantly in mind is that our orders will come from the Darul Yatama.

The Group opened a separate sub-account for all funds collected on behalf of the Baitul Hifazat. Twenty-one women from several organisations attended a follow-up meeting on 4 March 1998. Committees that had been formed to look into the requirements of setting up the home reported on progress.[43] When committees and office bearers of the Baitul Hifaz were elected on 12 March 1998, Group members featured strongly – Ayesha Vorajee was elected vice-chairperson, Zarina Moolla was placed in charge of finance, and Fatima Patel of the kitchen. The first residents were admitted on 21 October 1998. Group members such as Sara Simjee, Shameema Mayat and Zaiboon Naidoo are involved in the home informally, and it is an involvement that has given them great satisfaction. Simjee, for example, said that she 'got to know the old-age homes through the Group…I was very laid-back in a way, but Mrs Mayat will phone, "Come and join in, we are going to this place", and now I go on my own and sit with the people and talk to them.'

Assessing the Baitul Hifazat in February 2006, Mayat wrote that it was 'rapidly being filled with the lower income group but, where the higher income group is concerned, the stigma of a family member in an old-age home

lowers the family izzat and the persons involved would rather suffer in silence than have the lowering of the family prestige.'[44] Getting the old people's homes established was a struggle because of opposition from certain sectors of the (Muslim) community. According to Mayat,

> The old mawlanas would say, 'no orphanage, no orphanage, no old-age home – families must look after them.' Eventually they had to give up first with the orphanage because there were abandoned children – nobody looking after them – so they had to open an orphanage. The same thing with the old-age home – 'No, never, if you throw your mother and father out, you know, how you going to face God and so on'. Eventually they said, 'There's no way around it. The lifestyle is now such – people are being abandoned, rather [set up] a home.' So we started the home and some of them are very happy there.

Notwithstanding the opposition, Mayat holds firmly that the expansion of female employment and nuclear families made the old-age home inevitable. She went a step further when she submitted a proposal to the Group and the Iqraa Trust in February 2006 for a retirement village. Mayat argued in the proposal that the community had to deal with 'the plight of our elderly parents who can no longer attend to their needs'. The extended family had ensured that the old were taken care of by daughters, daughters-in-law and grandchildren. In the patriarchal nuclear family, one person had to cope with 'the whims and demands of the aged parent. The granny especially feels ignored and sidelined for the grandfather can still move around meeting friends even if it is just at the Mosque. In the midst of luxury they are starved of attention…From a commanding position they are demoted to a dependent one.' Young mothers too often felt trapped in a generational chasm as they were torn between seeing to their children and the elderly. Mayat urged the community seriously to consider establishing a retirement village:

> For over a decade some of us have been ventilating the idea of a retirement village, a place where the ageing persons can reside with others in the same situation. The complex should have a central building with a cafeteria, clinic, and space where hobbies can be pursued and socialising made comfortable…I am not asking for financing for the complex…

> What is required is to raise the community conscience towards a problem that will soon reach a crisis point.[45]

Mayat is confident that her vision will become a reality in the not-too-distant future. In the 1930s, she pointed out, the ulema were against orphanages 'but they had to change their fatwas when the situation became acute'. They eventually conceded that old people's homes had become a necessity, 'so why not a retirement village?'

Many small-scale projects continue to be undertaken more quietly. Fatima Mayat started a soup kitchen in the late 1990s. For a few years members went to outlying areas to serve food. Due to crime and security considerations, they then began providing sandwiches, which were prepared at the Centre and sent to schools. If members are not available to make sandwhiches, the bread and fillings are supplied directly to schools. Since 2006, Safia Moosa has been collecting books for less-privileged schools. Also ongoing is the collection of clothing and utensils for refugees and shack dwellers. Sometimes the collection is for an organisation, such as the Chatsworth Hospice for its fête in 2006. The Group has supported the Imdaad Literacy project aimed at developing the literacy skills and expertise of domestic workers. It supports organisations such as the As-Salaam Private School, Phoenix Hospice, Al-Qalam Bursary and Research Fund, and others in various ways.

Speaking to members, there was a clear articulation of the view that, since they were economically comfortable, it was their duty to assist others. Third-generation member Zarina Rawat, who joined in the 1990s, did so because the charitable aspect appealed to her as she felt that it made 'life more fulfilling'. And, according to Zarina Moolla:

> Nobody's looking for any sort of status through the Group's wealth and things like that. To help people is the reason why I've probably stayed with the Group because there's a lot of transparency here...There's a lot of accountability, you know, if you take a bunch of dhania from this Group, you pay for it. And that, to me, is very important. There's no free ride, there's no gravy train here whatsoever, because even if we go for dinner say, to a restaurant, for an Eid meal and one of the Group's members decides to pick up the tab, to treat the women, we are not allowed to take it. We have to put the money into the Education Trust or into the feeding

> scheme or something – so we would not get a benefit in the name of the organisation, you know, which I think is absolutely important. In fact my husband always says, 'If you put the Group of your women into the Parliament, you'll sort out a lot of the problems there also.'

Petitioning the state

When the then Minister of Education Naledi Pandor spoke at a Group brunch in 2005, Zuleikha Mayat addressed her, saying:

> Among the audience are equally involved persons who represent other NGOs who work *sans* publicity in the field of education, welfare and health. That is why we have asked you to motivate us to get out of our laagers and become more inclusive in our sphere of activities. We want to know from your experience the effectiveness of lobbying, the importance of involvement in local, provincial and national affairs, and how to avoid being marginalised on key issues. Perhaps you will inspire us to march with the times and not float around like debris after a storm.

The Group had, in many ways, been 'marching with the times' for years. One such occasion was when the Indian Market in Victoria Street burnt down in 1973. Many believed it to have been a case of arson organised by the City Council. The market had originally been built during the First World War and the City Council was trying to evict stallholders, as the land was required for a proposed freeway. The final eviction date was June 1973. Negotiations were under way for the vacant beer hall site next door when the market was consumed in a blaze. The City Council's position was that the market was a shopping complex and that it was under no obligation to rebuild it. The Minister of Indian Affairs issued a statement that there would be a temporary restoration of the market. On 13 April, the Women's Cultural Group formally proclaimed that temporary restoration would 'not meet with the wishes of the citizens of Durban' and called for the market to be restored because of its value as a tourist attraction; a place where poorer segments of the population could purchase their requirements at competitive prices; and because of the potential 'loss of income for stallholders, employees and their dependents'.[46] Two weeks later, the Group submitted a petition containing 10 980 signatures (broken down as follows:

6 764 Indian, 3 075 white, 561 African, and 166 coloured, plus 264 tourists and 150 undefined) to Mayor Ron Williams, the City Council and the Minister of Indian Affairs and Tourism, Senator Owen Horwood, calling for the market to be rebuilt as a matter of urgency. The petition argued that the market

> has been a landmark historically and traditionally associated with its Indian citizens, giving to the city an individual character known internationally. As a cultural association we maintain that as a tourist attraction, the Victoria Street Market had no parallel in South Africa. Serving daily some 100 000 persons of diverse racial origins from all walks of life, it generated a colour and vitality peculiar to Durban. This made the Market a must on the itineraries of all tourists to the city. Markets like these are the very heart and soul of the cities where they are situated. Flea markets, Pettycoat Lane, Portobello and other day markets, Grand Bazaar in Istanbul, Shah Abbas in Isfahan to name just a few. These markets do not belong to the few that are running it. They belong to the city.

The petition appealed to the gendered authority of the signatories in their domestic vocation:

> As homemakers we are convinced that as a low level shopping area, the Market enabled housewives of all racial groups to combat the increasingly high cost of living, and that from under this one roof, so centrally and ideally situated near bus terminals and the Berea Road Railway station, basic commodities, fresh meat, fish, fruit and vegetables could be purchased at prices generally lower than anywhere else in Durban.

The local press photographed Zuleikha Mayat, Albertina Nguni and Josephine Thorpe of the South African Institute of Race Relations, representing a cross-racial alliance over the issue, presenting the petition to the authorities.

More recently, the Group involved itself in lobbying against South Africa's Anti-Terrorism Act. When the Department of Safety and Security introduced the draft Anti-Terrorism Bill for comment in September 2002, South African Muslims were concerned that the bill would target them, and Muslim organisations such as the Islamic Medical Association, Jamiatul Ulama in KwaZulu-Natal, the Muslim Youth Movement, the Association of Muslim Accountants and Lawyers, the Al-Ansaar Foundation and the Women's Cultural Group met

on 16 September 2002 to formulate a response. They drew up strong submissions against the bill on the grounds that the state already had sufficient legislation to deal with the threat of terrorism. In its submission, the Group argued that the government's inability to deal with bombings and killings in the Western Cape (which were blamed on an organisation known as People against Gangsterism and Drugs), the 'frightening rate of crime in the country', and the AIDS pandemic had caused ministers to make accusations without proof.

> It seems we have learnt nothing from the McCarthy era, nor from the dark days of apartheid, nor from other lessons of history (or perhaps they have!). Our learned President ought to take time to read the *The Crucible* by Arthur Miller to his Ministers so that they can be educated as to the dangers of rumour, innuendo and witch-hunts.[47]

Several human rights organisations, the Congress of South African Trade Unions and the Freedom of Expression Institute also opposed the draft bill on the grounds that it would curtail civil liberties guaranteed by the constitution.[48] The government refused to discard the bill but made amendments and a revised version, taking cognisance of some of the objections, was eventually passed in November 2004. The importance of this process is that it drew Muslims into organised lobbying over a national issue, albeit one that was perceived to be a direct threat to Muslims.[49]

Following the 9/11 attack on the World Trade Center in New York, then US President George Bush declared an indefinite 'War on Terror', which included the invasions of Iraq and Afghanistan, and peddled manichean narratives of good and bad which emphasised difference and division. Restrictions on civil liberties included the secret detention of citizens and non-citizens, extraordinary renditions, expanded surveillance of political and religious groups, unauthorised interception of telephone calls and emails, and the denial of habeas corpus to so-called enemy combatants at Guantanamo Bay. Zuleikha Mayat commented on some of these developments from time to time. In her annual report for June 2004, she wrote: 'we live in very interesting times, these are also very dangerous times. The onslaught from many sides on all things Islamic should alert us to the constant danger that lurks and is ready to pounce when we lower our defences. Our duas are essential but our deeds and acts are equally so.' In her speech to the AGM on 6 July 2005, she wrote that

> the humiliation of Gauntanamo Bay, of Abu Ghuraib, of the flushing down of Qur'ans, we had to suffer side by side with the devastation of Afghanistan, Iraq with its historical sites at Kerbala and Baghdad, of the hundreds and thousands of innocent Muslimeen tortured and killed by enemies which they then cosmetically dub away as 'collateral damage'. The perpetrators enjoy peaceful sleep; we, the emotionally raped Ummah, toss and turn in our beds trying to forget the nightmares that bedevil our lives.

Another notable instance was the disappearance of Pakistani national Rashid Khalid from South Africa in 2005. Khalid was a resident of Estcourt, a small town in KwaZulu-Natal. This particular case caught the public headlines because of the South African government's role in the alleged extraordinary rendition. Khalid was arrested by heavily armed men in the middle of the night, whisked off to Pretoria and handed over to Pakistani authorities, resurfacing in a Pakistani court in 2007, where he was cleared of all charges.[50] Mayat wrote in her annual report on 14 June 2006:

> From our own doorstep a young man has disappeared. Some unknown flight, manned by unknown persons has flown him to an unknown destination. What torture he must be enduring at the hands of those that perpetuated the rendition can be imagined. A Christian Bush and a Christian Blair are the prime suspects and our own Government seems to have danced to the tune of these pipe masters. If anyone deserves a Nobel Prize then it is Mr [Zahir] Omar, the lawyer who has put his life in danger in bringing the case to the attention of the world.

In 2009, the Group involved itself in the national debate over the possible implementation of Muslim personal law, which would be based on shariah law. During the transition to non-racial democracy in 1994, some Muslims called for the implementation of Muslim personal law on the grounds that the South African Constitution made provision for the recognition of 'personal or family law' provided it did not contradict other provisions of the Constitution. The government established a Muslim Personal Law Board, but nothing came of that. On 6 July 1995 Zuleikha Mayat wrote to the Minister of Justice, Dullah Omar, that the Group, as an 'organisation concerned with Community Affairs', had

> closely followed the proceedings of the Muslim Personal Law Board (now dissolved) and the current technical committee that is attempting to get it back on track…As far as women are concerned there are several aspects that we find most disturbing…[and] need to have discussions with you. For that reason, and many others of course, we are requesting that you accept our invitation to come to Durban.

Dullah Omar was unable to accept the invitation but the issue remained of concern to the Group.

In March 1999, a Project Committee of the South African Law Reform Commission was appointed under supreme court Judge Mohamed Navsa to draft an Islamic Marriages Bill. The Committee issued discussion papers in May 2000 and December 2001 and, after three years of extensive deliberations with South African Muslims, a report was presented to Justice Minister Penuell Maduna in July 2003.[51] The report, popularly known as the Draft Bill on Islamic Marriages, has not been ratified because of differences among Muslims that created much contestation. The ulema consider the draft bill too liberal, while many women's rights groups feel that it gives too much leeway to men. As Waheeda Amien points out, 'The draft legislation can be described as a product of compromise between extreme views, the internal dynamics within the Committee regarding gender composition and political leanings, and the external pressures by the clergy.'[52] The law would be optional as couples would have to register to have the bill apply to them. The result has been a stalemate without an imminent resolution.

In May 2009, a South African NGO, the Women's Legal Centre Trust, argued in the Constitutional Court that Parliament and the president were required by the Constitution to 'prepare, initiate and enact' legislation to recognise Muslim marriages. The Trust's lawyer, Andrew Breitenbach, told reporters that they had taken the matter to court because Muslim women who married under shariah law were prejudiced in the absence of regulatory bodies to rule over issues such as divorce.[53] Shameema Mayat submitted a twenty-page memorandum on behalf of the Women's Cultural Group on 20 April 2009 – acting as as a 'Friend of the Court'. She argued that while the Group agreed that there was a 'dire need' for legislation, because of the fundamental differences among Muslims it would be 'reckless to simply set a time frame for an Act to be promulgated'.

She continued that the draft bill had

> caused great animosity and acrimony, and huge rifts within the Muslim community…Any attempt at steamrolling through such legislation is short-sighted and may in fact result in no legislation being passed at all…The Women's Cultural Group fully supports the process for appropriate legislation recognising Muslim marriages and their consequences. Such legislation will be subservient to our Constitution and must be premised on full freedom of choice for existing and prospective Muslim marriages.

On 20 May 2009, the Constitutional Court narrowed its argument to two issues – whether it could instruct the president or Parliament in terms of law-making, and whether it should be the first court to hear the matter – and reserved judgement.[54] At the time of writing (March 2010), the question of Muslim personal law had not been resolved and in the absence of a statutory framework where Muslims are married according to religious rather than civil law, disputes are settled on a case-by-case basis, often to the detriment of the woman concerned.

Notwithstanding intense debates about the efficacy and purpose of philanthropy, philanthropic work was important in the Women's Cultural Group's self-definition and that of many of its members. It drew them into the wider community and caused them to experience aspects of urban life that, as middle-class women, may otherwise have escaped them. This impacted emotionally on some members. As the president's annual report dated 14 June 1978 recorded: 'Remember that unforgettable moment when we visited the Spes Nova School. We were impressed and touched with the love and dedication of each person involved in the caring of the handicapped. Mr Desai's words are still ringing in my ears: "Your Group's first R1000 started this school".' There were many such moments. The fact that members identified with the Group's objectives and derived affective satisfaction from charitable activities made it easier to get involved.

While most of their civic labour was humanitarian in nature, the Women's Cultural Group engaged in overt political action on occasion, drawing upon their moral weight as women, as ratepayers and – more recently – upon their identity as Muslims to level their petitions.