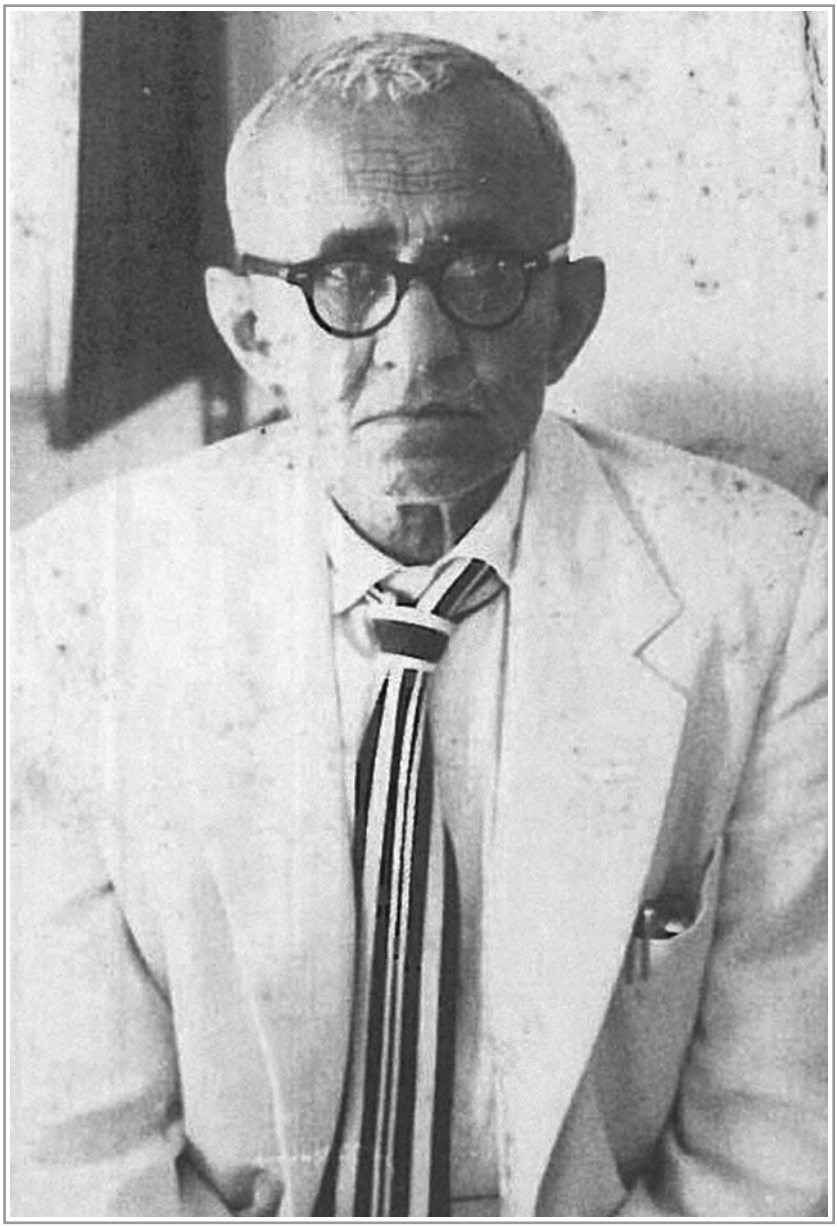

Mohammed Bismillah, father of Bibi Mall and Zuleikha Mayat, drummed into his children the lesson that others have a share in our incomes.

6
BAKE, JUMBLE AND TRUST

Let us earn the good pleasure of our Lord.
By giving in charity of such goods, talents and service
To those that are in need thereof;
This is the wish of our Lord that riches
Bestowed by Him should circulate amongst all.[1]

Growing up in her father's shop in Potchefstroom, Zuleikha Mayat noticed that at the end of each business day he would put a tickey for every pound of gross sales into a jar. '[It] drummed into me the lesson that others have a share in our incomes.' As a teenager Mayat heard about a funding drive for the Friends of the Sick Association which had been established in the 1940s by the Reverend Paul Sykes in Durban as a care centre for patients with tuberculosis. Mayat responded 'by digging into my pocket money and cajoling friends and parents and siblings to add to it' and sent the sum by postal order. In 1972, Mayat expressed the ethos of the Women's Cultural Group when she wrote that 'the Bounty of God is not just for a select few but possessions, knowledge and talents must be shared so that a maximum number of people benefit as a result.'[2]

But the concept of sharing and providing relief to the needy meant more than handing out alms. The above passage from the Qur'an, which appears in the Group's publication *Qur'anic Lights* as well in as many of its brochures,[3] captures the Group's approach to welfare and redress. Sanctioned by the Qur'an, charity is a valued social practice which manifests in the lives of Muslims through concrete acts such as the payment of zakaat, which is one of the five pillars of Islam, and thus as important as the declaration of faith in God, prayer five times a day, fasting during the month of Ramadan, and making a pilgrimage to Makkah. In addition, optional acts of charity such as lillah, fitra and sadaqah are paid at different times for specific religious purposes. Mayat emphasised that the best 'givers are those who get off their seats, lift their hands and do something through hard work'. In seeking to bring about a more just society, she argued, individuals should assist needy persons irrespective of race or religion. The Qur'anic passage quoted above resonated with the vision of Group members because it called on them to give of their 'goods, talents and service' rather than simply hand out money.

Mayat wrote in 1992 that 'we seldom touch the public for donations. Instead we break our backs in attempting to generate our own funds.'[4] This approach infused cash amounts with social value and transformed unpaid labour into an act of wealth redistribution. It helped to define the citizenship these women were creating and practising, a citizenship that was not linked to formal state recognition and rights but to responsibility under an alternative authority.

The production and marketing of *Indian Delights* proved a reliable source of revenue for funding many charitable projects and became the bedrock of the Group's financial independence and longevity. But there have been a spectrum of other fundraising schemes, and significant energy has been directed towards 'roll-up-the-sleeves' types of enterprises.[5] These activities demonstrate the innovation and shifts in strategy and scale that have patterned the Group's philanthropic career. They also reveal how this line of entry by Muslim womanhood into Durban's public sphere was empowered by their class status, constrained by apartheid restrictions, and bounded by patriarchal guidelines of acceptable action. While Group members frequently had the support of 'powerful' men in the local Muslim community, they were compelled to tread with gendered circumspection to cultivate and maintain their organisational

reputation. Over the years, their efforts not only successfully raised millions of rand in charitable funds, but also circulated 'riches' originating largely within the Durban Muslim community, thereby constituting an important node in communal networking and identity reproduction.

The beginnings were humble. Before the cookbook, the Group relied almost completely on time-consuming and labour-intensive methods of raising funds, such as selling baked goods, rummage sales and dinner events. As Zohra Moosa recalled, 'Initially our fundraisings were not such big elaborate dinners; it used to be jumble sales and things like that, even cake sales.' In interviews with members, all were keen to emphasise that they raised money through their own initiative and hard work and exercised thrift in how these funds were used. In a speech in 1972, Mayat asserted that

> if the public thinks that we are squandering a lot of time and money on lavish functions let me assure you that very little of the Group's funds are touched on these occasions. Our policy is to make each function pay for itself. For tonight's function each member has been levied in kind, cash and talent and any shortfall we expect to cover from the sale of brochures.[6]

Mayat's prudence has translated into strict policy. One member confided that

> when it comes to money, Mrs Mayat doesn't like to spend. You know, for everything that we do we have to save, we have to collect money. Even for our monthly meetings, four members get together to provide the lunch but we don't use any [Group] money. That I agree with, but to do other things, like improve the [Activity] Centre, we have to battle to get money out of her – like to put in an air-con[ditioner]. I used to be in charge of the hiring of the hall. It becomes very hot and [if] you want to have functions, you've got to improve the hall. This hall has been improved now because Shameema herself raised funds. [Mrs] Mayat didn't let us spend money. I don't totally blame her because in lots of organisations – I heard that in one local [Muslim] organisation people are taking R25 000 salary for 'voluntary' work. I mean, it's supposed to be a charitable organisation! We are all *voluntary* workers – whatever it is that we do, even when we have our fundraising brunches, a lot of the things the ladies make at home and [donate].

Selling cakes and sweetmeats, Fatima Loonat (right) was an early member of the Group and active in all of its fundraising events.

As all members conceded, however, Mayat's parsimoniousness has been pivotal to the Group's growing its assets and ensuring that it was sufficiently independent to be able pursue projects of its choosing. It also meant that members have not been reliant on men, even while they respected the gender boundaries and had the support of their husbands.

Sweets, sales and sweat

One of the earliest methods of raising funds was through cake sales. Recalling the first years, Khatija Vawda explained, 'Ja, there were no dinners at that time, only there were cake sales and jumble sales where we sold everything from clothing to crockery.' Baking was a woman's skill, built upon a heritage of matrilineal knowledges, large family sizes and the alchemy of thrift and pleasure. It did not require expensive ingredients, which meant that members could donate large quantities, and a great variety, of home-made sweets and savouries. Zohra Moosa recalled also that 'we used to ask all the [Group] members, as well as friends of members, family of members, and the response was consistently positive'. While advertised as a 'cake sale' the fare included iced cakes and cupcakes, as well as Indian specialties such as gulab jamboo and

naan khathai, and the ubiquitous samoosas. Cake sales became a staple of Group activity within the first two years of its founding, held at schools, and at busy spots such as at the corner of Grey and Prince Edward streets, as well as outside the main Post Office in Pine Street.

Rummage sales, or what members called 'jumble' sales, were the lifeblood of the Group during its formative period. These sales were held regularly in school or church premises. Gori Patel recalls that the earliest ones were held 'in the Jumuah Musjid School…then we had it at the corner of Lorne Street and Grey Street, you know, where there was a church'. Nafisa Jeewa points out that all classes and colours of the public supported them 'as long as the location was right'. And the Jumuah Musjid School in Cathedral Road was an excellent location

> because that is central town and [we had] a lot of passing trade on a Saturday because the bus rank was there, and people in the flats were good buyers. And everybody wanted a bargain, right, so we'd pass the word around. We'd tell schoolchildren that we'd have a Saturday morning fair and they'd come.

Zohra Moosa agreed that it was a convenient location because 'a lot of Africans going to the market passed, so we used to get a good crowd coming in. We used to collect jumble from everyone, you know, and it used to go well.'

Gori Patel was first introduced to the Group when she attended a jumble sale at the Vedic Hall and met Zuleikha Mayat. Several of her friends were involved and, as she lived close to the hall, they would ask her to 'take along tea and biscuits to them at ten-o'clock, then I used to stand for a little while and help them', and she was persuaded to become a member. Collecting items for sale was part of the job:

> We had to collect the old clothes. I used to collect from here and there and [people] willingly giving us everything after we used to go explain to them, you know, if you got any old clothes give us – we don't want any new ones – so we can go and sell and make money for other people.

Extended households proved an advantage, Nafisa Jeewa remembers, for passing the word around and 'everybody's always got things in their homes that – not that you wanted to discard it – but things that could be of some help

At jumble sales, bargains were plentiful and clothing passed to new owners for a few cents.

to somebody else. So we used to go around telling friends that "please, if you've got any clothes, crockery, groceries, whatever, we'll come and collect it." So that's how we started.' Items for jumble sales were obtained in advance and stored at members' homes. Nafisa Jeewa remembers that sometimes members of the public needed to get rid of items urgently and members had to collect them well in advance of a fair and store it. A couple of days prior to the jumble sale, a 'sorting afternoon' was organised where members 'sorted out the good from the bad and categorised, organised and priced the items'. This involved a lot of drudgery and hard work but it also contained strong elements of fun and pleasure, and was an excellent means of building camaraderie. Jeewa suggests, too, that it offered a certain freedom:

> Really, the ladies would enjoy it thoroughly, preparing for it. They'd be there from a Friday afternoon, everybody would carry tea and flasks and cake and whatever with them and we're sorting out things and everybody lets their hair down because you can laugh, nobody's keeping an eye on you – there's no 'hawk-eye', right, so that was a lot of fun.

At jumble sales, the Group 'did not give anything away for free because nobody appreciates it then. If you're going to pay five cents for a dress you've paid five cents and you are going to value that more than just being given something.' Charging low prices for things that were essentially obtained free

of charge helped both to raise funds for charity and to circulate and recycle useful goods on moderate terms of exchange.

Fêtes similarly became regular events. In February 1956, Mayat wrote in 'Fahmida's World' that the Group had given out bursaries for study to three girls with funds raised at a fête. Two years later, she reported that money collected by the Group at its annual fête had been distributed amongst various charities in Durban, among them the Natal Indian Blind Society; the Indian Women's Literacy Association; the Darul Ulum; Bantu Child Welfare; the Coloured Women's Hostel; Darul Yatama; a Muslim orphanage run by the Mehfile Khwateen Islam in Riverside; and various other charities.

A fête held on 8 August 1959 at the Anjuman Islam School in Leopold Street was officially opened by Melody Gumede, the wife of Dr M Gumede of Verulam, an acquaintance of Dr Mahomed Mayat. There were stalls of groceries, fresh produce, hand-sewn articles, and toiletries. Bibi Mall's Little Theatre presented a play, *The Wedding of the Painted Doll*, and enacted nursery rhymes. 'Zarina's Café' served tea and refreshments. Another stall sold samoosas, pies, puri pattas, cakes and biscuits, fulfilling Fahmida's promise to the public that 'the leading hostesses of our town are contributing to swell the funds of the group'.[7] The event was proclaimed 'a roaring success' with helpers 'rushed off their feet at times trying to cope with the demands'. The sum of £105 was raised.[8]

Over the years, fêtes continued to be organised and expertise grew. In August 1976, when the rand was twice as strong as the US dollar, a fête raised R2 000, of which R1 000 was given to the Indian Cripple Care Association and R1 000 to the Sibusiwe Child Care Centre. Aside from their own fundraisers, the Group assisted other women's groups in organising fêtes or was 'contracted out' through friends and associates. For example, in September 1981, they assisted Dr Siko Mji to organise a fair at the Hammarsdale crèche; they also participated in the 'Malay Fête' at Jumuah Musjid in July 1979, and assisted the Coloured Cripple Care Centre at City Hall in June 1979. Virtually all the funds that were raised at jumble and cake sales were given to organisations involved in welfare and education activities.

While by the 1970s, western feminists would view the participation of women in cake sales and fêtes as a symbol of their marginalisation, in 1950s and 1960s Durban such events were often viewed as pushing gendered boundaries, riding the thin edge of respectability. For Muslim women to engage in

public-sphere commercial activity was very much contrary to prevailing notions of acceptable behaviour. Gori Patel recalls that their activities raised eyebrows but this was compensated by the many positive responses:

> Ah, mawlanas, they were stopping us. And even when we went for collection – the people, they spoke, 'the women are walking in Grey Street, they're marching, they going shop-to-shop to collect [goods]', and all that. And, you know, I tell you, when we just go by them [the traders], they said, 'How much you want?' They won't ask us what you want the money for. They said, 'How much, how much?' So we don't have the amount, we tell them, 'Whatever you want to give, we'll be very happy'.

While crossing boundaries through their public participation during the Group's formative decades, they had support from male friends and family members. Zuleikha Mayat noted in 1972 that

> behind the scenes all our projects entail a lot of thought and hard work. We do not only pick the collective grey matter of the members but that of our husbands, fathers, and friends as well. One often hears the adage that behind every man there is a woman, but the converse also holds true.[9]

Gori Patel commented that while many in her family were unhappy about her participation in the Group, 'you see in the functions, everybody – all the members' husbands used to get involved. They used to come and help us too, like, you know, whatever we needed – I collect lot of old clothes and so he pack up and then he help us to take the boxes. All, all the members' husbands was involved.' Nafisa Jeewa agreed that

> we could rely on [husbands], you know, because – you can't just organise something and not have men around you, so especially when we had that very big fair [in 1978] the husbands were there from the morning, helping us lay out the tables. They'd be walking around, if there were things to fetch – they would do things like that.

Ayesha Vorajee added:

> Fortunately I married a man who didn't stop me from going out and doing community work. Because within the Muslim community there are some men who are very particular about that, they do not encourage

Husbands of Group members supported the organisation by paying for tickets and attending the dinners or helping out behind the scenes.

> their women folk…You know, our husbands encourage us, they are very supportive. For instance when we have fêtes – you need the man around there as well too, you know, because of security and so on.

Men offered physical and emotional support, their presence perhaps viewed by some as chaperoning and overseeing events. But it also indicated shifts in thinking about divisions of labour within marital partnerships. Zuleikha Mayat did not hesitate to suggest that such equity should play itself out in private spaces, too. Speaking at a fundraising banquet in 2007 she said:

> If you glance at our menu card you will notice that macho males are carrying food trays on their heads. Helping your wives in the kitchen, gentlemen, will not render you effeminate. You will only become more endearing. Our Prophet (peace be upon him) mended his own clothes and when a guest had dirtied the bed linen he did not call on the Bibis, Ayesha or Hafsa. No, he washed it out himself. What a role model to follow![10]

While husbands' support was always important, over the years the role of male community leaders was also critical in adding respectability to the Group's public engagements. Essop Randeree, Essop Timol, Yusuf Lockhat and Cassim Bassa were involved in a host of voluntary organisations and communal activities and, therefore, commanded the respect of local Muslim traders and mosque trusts. Their support for the Women's Cultural Group was crucial in conditioning the reaction of the broader society. Even though the rigid separation of gender spheres was being challenged in the worlds of education and wage work, it continued to shape the thinking of ulema who sometimes castigated the Group for showcasing their handworked products, engaging in sales and interacting with men, as this was deemed to threaten codes of female Islamic propriety.

For the women themselves, participation in these early fundraising activities extended their domestic roles and labour into the public sphere and into a wider economy of human relationships. Significantly, some of their events offered spaces for large numbers of women to utilise their gendered talents and skills to generate a bit of income. Two especially memorable events were the 'Meena Bazaars'.[11] Both involved hard work and meticulous organisation on the part of members and created an opportunity for other women to sell their wares. The first Bazaar, advertised as a 'gigantic bring and buy sale', was

held on 29 July 1978 at the Orient Islamic School. In the treasurer's report for 1978, Zuleikha Mayat wrote that 'because of the high cost of living, many householders are struggling to make ends meet. Our concern goes out to them and in order to help, we have already got one scheme off the ground.' She was referring to a depot in Prince Edward Street where home-cooked food was sold. The Group hoped to expand this to include home crafts 'such as embroidered goods, godris, etc. Tremendous interest is being displayed by housewives from all walks of life. Our fête will help advertise this aspect of our life.' The Group was keen that where women were forced to remain at home, opportunities should be found to market their products, from cooking to embroidery.

Pamphlets advertised the 1978 Bazaar as 'no ordinary fête…for apart from the usual cake, fruit, grocery, jumble, clothes, we will also stage some unique demonstrations. This includes the making of sev, jalebis, laarwas, moorkhoos, etc.; badla work, embroidering with jeek, abla embroidery.'

Zuleikha Mayat invited Essop Randeree to open the fête, 'not because of the long association of our Group and yourself, but for the many years of continuous service that you have been rendering to the various communities'. Mayat thanked Randeree for assisting in their collection drive: 'the girls appreciate this gesture very much and they realise that without your help they would not be able to get a fraction of what they are receiving now.'[12] Nafisa Jeewa remembered that Randeree's support for the Meena Bazaar

> was really massive. It took months to organise. We had a lot of sponsors. We used to go around – a group of about four ladies and then we had Mr Randeree, whom we actually made an honorary member because he was well liked and the members also were very happy with him. He was easy-going – liked talking and made you laugh – and he was well respected. We used to go to all the shops in town and he would make a grand entrance – introduce us to the people and then we'd go into the office and he'd say, 'Right, Nafisa, tell them how much you want'. 'Come on, come on, give us a blank cheque' – that kind of stuff, you know, because he was very well known in the community. We never ever stipulated what we wanted because you may have a huge wholesaler but you don't know what business is like so it is not fair to impose on anybody. We would just tell them, 'Whatever you feel you want to give'.

The Meena Bazaar was one of the biggest undertakings of its kind yet attempted by the Group and they were determined that nothing should go wrong. At the beginning of July, a circular was sent out in the names of senior members, Zuleikha Mayat, Fatima Loonat, Mariam Motala, Hawa Bibi and Amina Moosa, to members noting that the fête had been made possible by the efforts of 'the young leadership'.[13] The letter went on to say that the addressee's contribution was 'welcomed because there is so much to do: typing, phoning, publicity, sorting, collecting…' Members met at Orient Hall on Friday afternoon to set up the stalls. All volunteers wore name tags. The main hall was transformed, recalling its namesake in India: the space was divided into a number of stalls, such as the 'Chor Bazaar' (Thieves Market), where things could be purchased at a 'steal'; a henna stall; a chaat stall, which also sold tea, cakes and savouries; and an '*Indian Delights* stall', where cooked food was sold. There were stalls for 'cosmetiques', old magazines, used clothing, ceramics, arts and crafts, groceries, piece goods, greengrocer, and cookery demonstrations.[14] The three-day fair ended at five o'clock on the Sunday and members were warned well in advance: 'unless you have a very good excuse, you may not leave the fête until everything has been cleared…If this newsletter sounds a bit harsh please remember that the pressure of work does not allow for sweet talking.'

A post-fête report proclaimed the Meena Bazaar 'an unqualified success', as all three objectives that the Group had set for itself were met: to give 'a hand to the many organisations crying out for help; to provide a venue where our craftsmen and craftswomen could find a market for their creations'; and to create an outlet 'for our many housewives who desperately need to supplement their incomes'.[15] The profit of R7 000 (which exceeded the target of R5 000) was distributed to Ohlange High School (R2 000), the Natal Indian Blind Society (R500), Indian Cripple Care (R500), Durban & District Community Chest (R250), Hammarsdale Nursery School (R250), KwaMashu Crèche (R250), and Malagasy Clinic and Community Centre (R3 250). Unsold clothing was given to the KwaMashu Zamokuhle Women's Welfare Society's crèches (organised by Albertina Nguni) and to the Hammarsdale Nursery School (organised by Dr Siko Mji). It was agreed that there had been a

> magnificent response from our business community and housewives who gave so freely in cash and kind, the overwhelming response from the

> public…eating the delightful fare that was being sold, trying their hand at the competitions, watching the fashion parade and the many demonstrations and sharing in the spirit of goodwill that was about.[16]

The minutes of the general meeting on 10 August 1978 recorded: 'In these Mubarak days spare a prayer for the health of all our members and for members of our business sector. This combination made our Fête a success.'

Another full-scale Meena Bazaar was held from 21 to 23 July 1983. Then president Mariam Motala reported that with 'the influential and very effective assistance of Hajee [Essop] Randeree some of our members have collected in kind and cash approximately R30 000.' The Meena Bazaar report of 1983 noted the Group had 'struggle[d] to gain recognition as a Group that lives to serve, especially in our male-dominated society that wished to dismiss us as another of those "female tea-party groups". We knew our fight was over when Mr Essop Randeree accepted honorary membership of our Group.'[17] This Bazaar again required extensive planning. Letters signed by office bearers[18] were sent to organisations, individuals and businesses in early May, simultaneously calling upon and welding a sense of belonging to community:

> Dear Friend,
> The success of *Indian Delights* is due to your help. You gave us your choice recipes, over the years you gave valuable tips and generally you have helped increase the knowledge of cooking in our community…It was also your help that has in the past made every function that we have organised so successful. Whether it was a dinner, play, debate, wayez, mushaera or fête, it was your help and participation that led to its success. Here is our first appeal. In July the Mayor, Councillor Sybil Hotz, will open our Hypersize fête which we have named Meena Bazaar 1983. We want your help with planning and organising and collecting. We don't only want stalls filled with lovely bring and buy things. We also want competitions, games, demonstrations, etc…Read the accompanying circular and see how you can help make this the fête to remember!

The fête was opened by the mayor and included prayer facilities; food stalls; chaat stalls; Rajah's Greenhouse (flowers, fruits, vegetables); Boutique Oriental (saris, burkhas, Punjabi outfits, etc.); jumble (old clothes); tumble (crockery,

old toys); a Mendhi Salon; demonstrations (of mithai, pottery, screen-painting, etc.); and a chotli competition. The fête included innovations such as a parcel depot at the entrance, a crèche, and a games section to occupy the children while parents shopped.

The Group made a profit of R26 190, which was given to charities such as the KwaZulu Water Development Fund; Imkan (for boreholes in rural areas of Natal); Sibusiwe Clairmont Crèche; the Hammarsdale Centre; the Zamokuhle Centre (KwaMashu); the Islamic Women's Association; the VN Naik School for the Deaf; the Friends of the Sick Association; the cancer ward at King George Hospital; the Community Chest; and the *Daily News* Fund. Each organisation sent a representative to a meeting at the beginning of September 1983, where they met members of the Group and received their cheques.[19]

Nafisa Jeewa described this fête, too, as 'a great success – with the help of almighty Allah', in her presidential report for 1983. 'To have raised the amount we did, would not have been possible had we not worked as a team and a family.'[20] The Group dedicated the fête to Cassim Bassa, who had been involved in welfare work for many years and died shortly before the event. The post-fête report paid tribute to him and other philanthropists:

> In South Africa our Community has been served by outstanding personalities over the years. Recently we have lost so many of them. The late MAH Moosa, Habib Rajab, Dr AM Moolla, Dr Mahomed Mayat, Dr M Sultan. Some of these have been fierce critics of the Group but they were also our invaluable mentors. They gave guidance and constructive help. They introduced us to people that we needed to know at various times. Above all they encouraged us in all our work…Meena Bazaar 1983 commemorates not only the memory of Cassim Bassa and those mentioned earlier but all who served their people in diverse fields and we mention some more: the Late RK Khan, ML Sultan, Sorabjee Rustomjee, Mawlana Bashir Siddique, Moosa Meer, Gigi Bai Jhavery, Sakina [Bibi] Mall, Zuleikha Motala.[21]

Remembering these fêtes, Group members expressed great satisfaction at breaking new ground. For Ayesha Vorajee, 'you learn so much, you meet such interesting people. The fête was a completely different experience for all of us. In fact we were the first organisation to start with the fête, you know, amongst

Some of the Group's benefactors. Back: CM Bassa, EM Moosa, Yusuf Lockhat, Essop Timol. Front: ME Sultan, Essop Randeree, AM Moolla and Zohra Moosa's husband, YAB Moosa.

the Muslim community. And thereafter it's been going from strength to strength.' Many Islamic organisations and schools have subsequently embraced this 'model'. But there are some differences that members have noted. One difference, according to Jeewa, is that 'the fairs nowadays are like an outlet, an extension of your shops, so it's not like you're going to get any bargains, you're just going to meet a lot of people there, but that's it. But here [at our fêtes] you could buy a dress for ten cents, you could buy maybe a set – cups and saucers – for about twenty-five cents, which was something.' Zuleikha Mayat pointed to another important difference. While most fêtes and flea markets have become an avenue for ready-made goods these days, often mostly imported goods, the Group's vision was to create an opportunity for ordinary housewives to sell things that they produced at home and, in the process, make the public aware of their products. The seeds for developing a home industry were intended to benefit those who were struggling financially but unable to go out to work for various reasons.

Fêtes and sales raised money for charity, offered opportunities for financially empowering women and brought women into the public arena of commerce. While these actions might be viewed as an extension of accepted domestic roles, the successful interface with the public and with well-established businessmen and community leaders had the effect of bringing the Women's Cultural Group into the arena of accepted civic life, and its members became informal agents of community welfare. It enabled the Group to call upon an ethos of community that simultaneously circulated wealth and enforced a feeling of identity and belonging. The Bazaars were cultural productions as well as fundraising enterprises, bringing a sense of India's Meena Bazaar to Durban, and encouraging a diasporic identification in a localised space.

Fine dining and ladies' luncheons

From the early 1960s the Group adopted another method of raising funds: hosting formal dinners and brunches. These were initially all-women affairs, held at the Bolton Hall or Tamil Vedic Hall in Durban. The dinner was accompanied by a variety show, usually by a visiting qawwali artist or sometimes by members or their children performing an Indian dance or ballet. Members themselves prepared the earliest dinners at the home of Mrs SM Paruk in Derby Street, which was conveniently situated close to both halls. Subsequently, when guest lecturers were invited and the Group opened up its events to men, fundraising dinners moved to bigger venues, initially the Orient Hall, then the Truro Hall in Westville, DLI Hall in Greyville and, more recently, the plush NMJ Hall in Overport.

Menus featured Indian cuisine and were often organised around a theme. For example, an 'Oriental Dinner' was held on 18 June 1964 at the Tamil Vedic Hall. The 'Oriental Delights' included Sherbet-e-Pul, Khowse Rangooni (soup), a fish-dish called Kabab-e-Umgeni, which was served with Afriki Salad and patta; the rice dish was a Moghul Pilau and Kalya-e-Murghi, while the dessert included Halwa-e-Phaida a la Manjra. Entertainers included Maya Devi (Duwa-e-Sharooh), Mr Nandha (veena recital), Ravi Shanker (Indian dancing), Ramachandra and Party (singing), and a display of traditional costumes. Farooqi Mehtar read out a composition of his poems and songs.

The founding narratives of the Group emphasised 'culture', and during the early years there was much focus on the creative arts. First local, and later over-

seas, artists were given a platform to perform Indian dancing, play instruments, model costumes, or recite poetry. Over the years, featured guest lecturers included luminaries such as: jurist and past president of the UN General Assembly, Sir Zafrullah Khan (1967); Palestinian-born professor of Islamic studies at Temple University, Ismail al-Faruqi (1971); distinguished Islamic scholar, Fazlur Rahman Ansari (1972); Professor Saeed Ahmad Akbarabadi (1976); expert on Islamic art and architecture, Dr Yaqub Zaki (1977); visiting Indian singer, Mohamed Rafi (1978); Professor Muhammad Hamidullah (1984), an expert on Islamic and international law; the then editor of the London-based *Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs*, Dr Saleha Mahmoud (1997); and Cape Town-based scholar Shafiq Morton (2007).

Guest lectures and cultural events drew larger and larger numbers, with 350 guests not uncommon for a single dinner. As guest lists grew, and as younger members entered full-time employment and motherhood, they found it difficult to cook all the entrées and a compromise was found, with the Group preparing biscuits, pastries and savouries and renowned local caterer, Solly Manjra, being subcontracted to provide the main course. Over time, the formal sit-down affairs came to be limited to annual events. According to Zuleikha Mayat, this was because many more organisations were hosting fundraising dinners and 'we are tapping the same public and sponsors and there is a limit on the resources we can tap into'. The Group has endeavoured to make their annual dinners unique. For example, a dinner in December 1989 was called Dhiyafat-e-khaas – A Special Feast. According to Mayat, members always tried to come up with innovative names for dinners, as well as for the various courses as a way to draw interest and 'tantalise the minds of the people. "What is this?" they should wonder.'

The 1989 annual dinner made a profit of R18 927, mainly because members contributed in cash towards various items and prepared the desserts at their own cost. They also paid half the cost of their own entrance tickets ('which [we] did not have time to enjoy,' Mayat wryly observed) and full price for their immediate families. They prepared side dishes, helped decorate the hall and tables, and assisted in clearing up afterwards. 'Clearing up did break our backs!' This arrangement has remained policy and members continue to participate and get enjoyment out of it. For example, Sara Simjee, who returned to the Group after a long absence, 'enjoyed participating in [the fundraising dinner]

and working towards it and selling tickets – and then we have these guest speakers and they are the highlight.'

Sometimes annual dinners target specific causes or occasions. In 2005, for example, the Group held a fundraising dinner for the South Africa-Mali Project – a cultural initiative of the New Partnership for Africa's Development. The project started when then South African president, Thabo Mbeki, made a state visit to Mali in November 2001 and undertook to help build a new library in Timbuktu to conserve thousands of ancient West African Arabic manuscripts.[22] The Group raised R25 000 for the project. Safee Siddique, a local poet, composed a special poem for the dinner, which ended:

> Accept O Africa this request of the Women's Cultural Group
> Allow us to add our colour to your wonderful ones
> And to graft the exotic blooms of the orient on the Africa Flora
> For are we not truly part of the rainbow nation?
>
> 'Safee' sends this message to the western invaders:
> Facts cannot be hidden by fabricated dress
> Africa's garden is so infused with history
> Its fragrance does not emanate from artificial blooms.[23]

Ferial Haffejee, then editor of the *Mail & Guardian*, was another guest speaker at the dinner. In her letter of thanks following the occasion, she confided that although the dinner was the first time she had attended a Group function, the Group had long been a household name in her life:

> When young, my niece Jihaan always spoke of the Women's 'Cuchural' Group; we tasted the achaar and read all the books. Now I have been able to put faces to the names and recipes to the individuals. It was an honour and I do hope we will get to meet again. I will nag for cooking lessons when I eventually get married.[24]

While grand public evenings are annual events only, ladies-only breakfasts and brunches are hosted with more regularity. These have become popular since the Group moved to its current location at the Mariam Bee Centre. The Group's expenses are minimal since hosting at the Centre means no overhead costs for the rental of space, and members subsidise the event by donating the

ingredients and assisting in all preparation. As Zuby Seedat (née Asmal) pointed out, the brunches have become 'very famous. It's lot of work, a lot of work [as] we bake things, cook, make rotis, we make everything at home.' Luncheon fare may include canapés such as samoosas, sandwiches, and salads, with fruit juices, tea, and pastries, accompanied by a main course, with popular dishes such as butter chicken, salads, and a full buffet of deserts. These events draw upon family, friends and acquaintances who attend to show support and to listen to an interesting speaker. They tend to be lively occasions with an emphasis on friendship. According to Zohra Moosa, 'The ladies sometimes enjoy being on their own, not with the men folk.' Speakers are selected to educate, entertain, and inform and inspire: 'maybe a beauty therapist, something interesting for the girls – yoga or different aspects of health, diabetes and blood pressure or nutrition, how to change their eating habits [*laughs*], which we need very much, isn't it? Really badly I mean, because our food is so rich.' In considering guest speakers, the Group tries to cross religious barriers by introducing non-Muslim speakers; they also look out for successful women to serve as an inspiration, and they focus on the fact that women should benefit from the talk without feeling overwhelmed. Speakers over the past decade have included attorney MS Omar, a specialist on Islamic law; dermatologist Dr Zuby Hamed; Nuri Domingo, on alternative remedies; plastic surgeon Arvin Lalbahadur; then Minister of Health, Manto Tshabalala Msimang; then Minister of Education, Naledi Pandor; Percy Moodley, a gynaecologist; Jayloshni Naidoo, actor and comedian; Shagufta Khan, a make-up artist; and Nishani Shah, a beauty therapist.

Third-generation member Zarina Rawat, views the brunches as 'spreading knowledge and information. We have guest speakers on everything – health, politics, beauty, finance – it uplifts women as it is educational, but also an opportunity to come out. So it is an outing, socialising and education thrown together.' Zuleikha Mayat also pointed to the events as a forum for breaking out of small social circles, 'to meet others, network – that's why they are very popular'. Trends in the kinds of speakers who have been invited have clearly changed over the years and a lot of this is due to younger members such as Shameema Mayat, who initiated a change by taking responsibility for organising the event. According to Shameema, they have made a deliberate attempt to keep things on the lighter side:

Over the decades, themes for luncheons and lectures have shown a gradual shift in focus.

> Sometimes, these highbrow lectures can be too serious. And, really, these events should be a place where we can come, you know, and just take the veil off! Not so serious, not so scholarly, not so solemn. It should be an occasion for the ladies to listen to something they can identity with, something that addresses current needs, and something they enjoy. Years ago it was different. Women did not have access to formal education, news or the internet and so they really looked forward to serious talks and intellectual topics. Nowadays women have this, and they are actually looking for something light-hearted, so the focus can't only be on the serious stuff.

This change was contested and there have been generational differences of opinion over the appropriate forms of entertainment. In one instance around 2004, younger members wanted a comedian while the older members lobbied for an Urdu artist. Eventually, the younger members prevailed, though not without a struggle. Generational differences in interests and aesthetic tastes have become more pronounced as younger women seek inspiration in the globalised world of food and fashion that has opened up since apartheid's end. They have been eager to bring the decor and themes of fundraising meals more 'up to date', partly in the hope of drawing in new young members. In response, some first- and second-generation members have felt sidelined and that their views are being 'pooh-poohed' as old-fashioned, as one member put it. Younger members feel that while first-generation members did 'a wonderful job' in

starting and growing the Group, the demands of the 21st century require a fresh approach. They reason that, even among Muslim women, a host of new charity groups have sprung up all over the province that are engaging in similar fundraising activities and targeting the same 'market', and that it would be the death knell of the Group to 'sit back and do things they did fifty years ago', as one member explained. Competition includes the production of recipe books by other organisations. Sharing shelf space with *Indian Delights* is *Food with Flair* by the Taalimun Nisa Association; *Kitchen Companion* by the Vryheid Muslim Ladies Group; and *Maa'ida* by Madrassah Islaahul Muslimat. These and a host of other new books may not carry the heritage value or gloss of the *Indian Delights* stable but they do well because they are sold locally for a 'good cause'. Because the Group is no longer 'the only show in town', invention and innovation is crucial for continued success, according to younger members.

In the world of dining and the culinary market, another society-wide transformation affecting the Group is the opening of numerous restaurants which offer access to global cuisines, and which bring food presentation and style to new levels of elegance. The arrival of immigrants from India and Pakistan in the post-apartheid period has also intoduced new dishes and flavours to 'Indian' food. Smaller households and more women working outside the home has meant more incentive for regular dining out. Increasingly, too, more local people in the Durban Muslim community have the opportunity to travel overseas and enjoy dining experiences abroad, thus also augmenting expectations of varied culinary and aesthetic styles. 'Like everyone else,' one member said, 'Muslims too have become a consumer society.' Careful thought, therefore, continues to be given to food functions to conjure creative ideas, sell tickets, settle on the decor, and draw up a menu that includes new dishes and unique flavours. Nostalgia and novelty compete for elbow room at these events, sometimes as a generational clash of ideas about taste.

Food and funfairs

From 1995 to around 1998 the Group organised an Annual Food and Fun Fair, held in September, at the Mariam Bee Centre in Kenilworth Road. The response from the public was so unexpectedly enthusiastic that on 29 July 1998, the Group secretary Aziza Mayat wrote to the Durban City Police requesting 'police assistance to control traffic due to massive public response'. The idea

for a food fair came from Shairbanu Lockhat. Twice it was discussed but passed over as there were doubts about its success, but on the third occasion Lockhat 'mustered some support from the younger members'. The idea took off and 'grew beyond the vision of the proponents'. It involved a lot of hard work, according to Aziza Mayat:

> For the members it is backbreaking work that stretches into weeks of pre-planning and cooking, battling and sweating. We are our worst critics. We set very high standards for ourselves and we always aim at giving value for money spent with us. This cuts down deeply into profitability, but the goodwill this generates is wealth itself.[25]

The purpose of the fair, Ayesha Vorajee explained,

> was to enable the women, and there were lots of women who used to make things at home, to supplement their income. So we gave them a chance to sell. The tables – I remember clearly because I was in charge of that. We hired out the tables [and] felt that it helped the women in the community to empower themselves. That was the whole idea.

The Group itself decided to sell pickles, chutneys, masala and savouries, which was a huge success. The Group was determined that the fair should not be a flea market, but 'an opportunity for housewives to meet with their families and sell their wares in a delightful atmosphere. Also they can make some money and enjoy the food and fun.'[26] Since most of the advertising was by word of mouth, most of the stallholders and patrons were Muslim. Such was the popularity, Aziza Mayat noted in her report for 1998, that 'we have outgrown our venue'.[27]

During 1999 and 2000, the Group did not organise a fair, but participated in one organised by Al Baraka Bank on a much larger scale. This was also a mainly Muslim event. After the fair in 2000, in which the Group ran a tea garden, Mayat provided a breakdown of the Group's labour: a total involvement of 3 169 hours.[28] Group members also each contributed R5 for the tea and lunch that they consumed. The Group made a profit of R20 000. Despite the 'poor' returns relative to the heavy preparation involved, Mayat wrote to Al Baraka Bank on 14 October 2000:

> Our members voted to participate again this year for they said that being part of a community get-together, participating in friendly rivalry was

Kitchen and politics: cooking demonstrations were popular with white South African women.

> worth more than lucre…Shirin [the organiser], your continuous good humour, friendly spirit and concern is highly appreciated…May the sisterly bonds reinforced continue in the future.

The Group eventually stopped participating because there were too many fairs being organised in Durban. It was becoming, in Shameema Mayat's words, 'too common and we felt we should concentrate on breakfasts which could be made into something different. Each fair was a repetition of the same products. We wanted something novel.'

Cooking demonstrations and lessons

Indian Delights facilitated the entry of Group members into the public domain as they promoted the book, appeared in the media, gave cookery demonstrations and gained recognition across South Africa as the doyens of 'Indian' cuisine and culture. In this way, the cookbook helped them raise funds not just through royalties but also through the opportunities that accompanied the growth of its reputation. Members were invited to public events, which meant travelling, mostly by themselves, sometimes away from Durban to places such as Howick, Margate, Johannesburg, and Estcourt. In 1972, for example, a delegation visited Estcourt, where they were hosted by a Mrs Kajee. They spoke on Indian arts and culture and gave a cookery demonstration. Members of various institutes and associations in and around Estcourt attended. They gave

a similar demonstration at a large chain store, Greenacres, in January 1961; at a hobbies fair in August 1961; to the Numismatic Society in June 1976; and to women in the suburb of Hillary in November 1976. These audiences were mainly composed of white women.

Amina Moosa was appointed head of a now necessary Cookery Demonstration Committee during 1977. There were several demonstrations that year, beginning with one at the Twini Park Women's Institute in January, and another at the Maharani Hotel attended by a hundred women. In September of that year they gave cookery lessons in Hammarsdale. In November, a demonstration was organised at the *Natal Mercury* kitchen, with a menu that included prawn biryani, coconut sweetmeats and rotis. On this occasion, there were three sessions per day. The secretary's report for 1977/78 described the demonstrations as 'very successful. The audience was very impressed.' The occasion also resulted in sales of the Group's Magic Masala, a masala mix specially developed by the Group, and *Indian Delights*.

Another initiative that year was participating in the setting up of a 'multiracial restaurant' with nine other organisations, each taking turns to cater for a week. Mariam Moosa, Khulsum Motala and Gori Vahed represented the Group in this venture in St Andrew's Street, which began in August. They made sandwiches and tea for sale at lunchtime. Sadly for the Group, the public response was poor and the restaurant closed within a few months. The secretary reflected in her annual report for 1977/78 that 'group members were very disappointed with the project as they felt it was not serving any social purpose. Very few people patronized it, and hardly any whites.'

The Group participated in a cookery demonstration at the *Natal Mercury* auditorium in July 1980; gave a biryani demonstration at Salisbury Island for the wives of naval officers in September 1980; and in November 1980 held a sweetmeat demonstration organised by the *Daily News* where Amina Moosa, Zuleika Moolla and Gori Moosa demonstrated the art of making burfee and jalebi. In March 1982, a Mr Knox of the Midlands Group in Tweedie asked for a demonstration on meat curries. The committee meeting of April 1982 described the Midlands outing as a 'great success'. The audience had been energised and twenty cookbooks were sold. It turned out that Knox's daughter, Cathy, was a subeditor at *Fair Lady* magazine, and this led to a copy of *Indian Delights* being given to the magazine's editor, Jane Raphaely. Cathy

Knox then asked to interview Mayat for the magazine. The resulting article was, however, described by Mayat as 'disappointing because it contained factual errors and the photographs were not even from the book'.

The Group participated in an Indian trade fair on 22 May 1982, where, to market their 'brand', members wore 'Women's Cultural Group' aprons that they had sewn themselves. The monthly meeting for May recorded that the Group had made 'an impression' with demonstrations covering Indian curries, samoosas, chilli bites, and sweetmeats as well as the application of mendhi and embroidery. In October 1982 they participated in an 'Oriental Experience' organised by the *Daily News*, with Zulekha Moolla, Khatija Mall and Laila Ally demonstrating the art of samoosa making. Around ninety people attended each of the three sessions.

In November 1983 the Group was invited by a Mr Saloojee to participate in a food fair in Johannesburg. Zuleikha Mayat, Amina Moosa, Gori Patel and a few other members travelled to Johannesburg by train. But when Saloojee did not pitch up, they had to to find their own accommodation. There was more disappointment for the usually meticulously organised Group members when they got to the hall. According to Mayat, 'There were no pans, no *masalas*, nothing, so we had to start, you know, phoning people to bring pans for us and so on and this is how it went on.'

The trip was 'memorably marred' as a personal and deep loss for the Group. Mayat returned by aeroplane as she had a prior commitment while the rest of the Group was to return a day later. As Mayat recalls, she 'had hardly come home when my [son] Aslam came to me and he says, "Ma, I'm going to take you to Mrs [Amina] Moosa's house in Reservoir Hills". "Why?" He said, "She died." She had come from a shopping trip, went to the room where she was staying – she just collapsed and died.' This was a cruel blow to members who had known Amina Moosa for almost three decades. As Nafisa Jeewa, the Group's secretary, reported at the AGM on 23 May the following year, 'Our happiness was soon to be marred for our excitable, enthusiastic, noisy, hard-working, tolerant, sympathetic, and understanding Amina Moosa was taken away from us.'

From about 2002 to 2006, Group members were also invited to serve as judges in culinary competitions organised by food critic Derek Taylor and the *Post* newspaper. This included a bunny chow competition at the Blue Lagoon Hotel on the beachfront and a 'Curry Cup'[29] at the Hilton Hotel. Mana Rajah explains:

> Derek Taylor is normally in charge of that and they said they want three members to help judge the different curries that they had invited restaurants to prepare. I think twice it was Fatima Mayat, Shameema [Mayat] and my sister Ayesha [Vorajee]. Once I went and it was very, very interesting…Their food was very good, you know, very, very good. You know, how they prepare their bunny chows – they do it like a gourmet meal, with the little bunny in the middle, with the salads on the side – not just wrapped in paper.

On the whole, members have vivid recollections of demonstrations and other public appearances, which they regarded as an integral part of the Group's activities, something that promoted the Group, Indian culture and especially *Indian Delights*. According to Gori Patel,

> We used to go to [department stores] OK Bazaars, Greenacres, John Orrs and show them how to make samoosas, to fill the samoosas, and then I cut the strip of papers to make pur – you know pur – samoosa pur? I showed them that you must fold it like this and fill your filling inside – any filling you want. All the white customers of OK Bazaar and the Greenacres used to come and watch. And then in the church in Alfred Street behind the Albert Park – they had a church so we went there and we were the judges too like, you know. [*laughs*] They made jam and marmalade and we were the judges there to taste the food. We had a reputation. Ya, and we were very happy, a very good team we had, very, very good team. We used to understand one another. I never had a car so they used to come and pick me up, drop me at the end.

Laila Ally was among those who undertook demonstrations on behalf of the Group. She taught cooking to handicapped children at Spes Nova School and unemployed women at the South African National Zakaat Fund. She felt that public demonstrations were important in promoting *Indian Delights*. She pointed out that during the early years, 'whites were so fascinated with that book and the whole cookery process, and Indian food. It was catching on from then, you know, so they were thrilled to have us.' Despite the welcoming atmosphere, in the beginning she was

> very, very nervous, and being up against all those people. They had this auditorium, and they had a beautiful kitchen, fully equipped, and Indian food was just catching on, believe me, we used to have full classes. It wasn't as though we had to wait and see what the advert is going to be like – it's going to be a full class. And even the food that we prepared, we were three ladies, we pre-cooked some of the things because the samoosa pur now, we had to show them the beginning and the end result. You know, things like biryani take a long while to cook so we had to have it in three processes, the ingredients, a half-cooked meal and a fully cooked meal. Samoosas were a hit but they found it time-consuming and a bit of a chore to make, but you know how they love samoosas and biryani! But even simple things like fish curry, they would want to know the origin of tamarind, and a lot of people did not know what 'rough' [sea] salt was. They took it for granted, you know, they always used fine salt, so rough salt for them was new. They actually asked, 'Is this kosher salt?' You know, things like that, that we take for granted, but it was really good to see that these women were so interested.

For Ally, these demonstrations 'gave me a lot of confidence. It's not easy standing in front of a crowd and trying to teach – but it was really good to see the end result and their response to that and of course the sales of *Indian Delights* were really booming.' Fatima Mayat made a similar point about the role of food demonstrations at the *Daily News* and *Natal Mercury* kitchens in developing her self-confidence: 'It was great, it was fantastic, I mean at that time to go and drive into town wasn't a hassle. You could park right down, say it was in Field Street, go upstairs, do your demo work, come back. We did lots of fairs and I was exposed quite a bit, meeting lots of interesting people.'

The Educational Trust

The original constitution of the Women's Cultural Group was approved in May 1958. By the end of the 1960s the Group's scope and ambition had increased to the extent that it became necessary to register as a non-profit organisation. This was a formality since the Group had been formed to provide services to those members of the public that the state was failing. These included promoting educational activities through scholarships and bursaries; sponsoring lecturers in

educational and cultural fields from overseas; publishing books and periodicals 'primarily of interest to women'; and co-operating with and assisting organisations with similar aims. Income from book sales and other fundraising activities did not benefit individual members. On the contrary there was often a financial imposition on members of the Group, which was one of the reasons its critics tend to describe it as being 'elite'.

After consultations with Zuleikha Mayat's husband, Mahomed, businessman Dr AM Moolla and the Group's accountants, the Women's Cultural Group Educational Trust was registered with the Natal Deeds Trust in 1973 as a non-profit organisation. This remained the legal status until then Minister of Finance Trevor Manuel announced wide-ranging changes in 2000, which threatened the preferential tax treatment and donor incentives of non-profit organisations. Tax exemption would only apply to organisations that qualified in terms of criteria laid down for a new category of public benefit organisations. As defined by the new Act, public benefit organisations were organisations whose sole objective was to provide activities of public benefit in healthcare, education, land and housing, religion and welfare in a non-profit manner.

While the Educational Trust met these criteria, the snag was that the gross income of public benefit organisations from 'trade' had to be less than the greater of R25 000 or 15 per cent of gross receipts. Income from the sale of *Indian Delights* exceeded this. The trustees met with their auditors in October 2003 and considered forming a new Trust with three categories of beneficiaries, 'Religious', 'Education' and 'Other'. It was proposed that the existing Trust would donate monies from the sale of *Indian Delights* to the new trust. At an Education Trust meeting on 17 June 2004, members were asked to propose names for the new trust, which 'should combine an Islamic, feminist and ethnic theme'. Names such as Fehmida Trust, Makoti Trust, Sharmeeli Sisters, Ilm (Arabic for 'knowledge'), and Atminaani Sisters were proposed. They chose Ilm but, as this had already been registered, the trustees settled on Fehmida (the proper Urdu/Persian spelling of 'Fahmida') at a meeting on 30 May 2007. However, this turned out to be unnecessary as the Education Trust was officially granted the status of a public benefit organisation in February 2009 after submitting a motivation listing its objectives and activities since being formed.

Ten trustees had been elected for life to the Educational Trust in 1973: Mariam Motala, Fatima Loonat, Zuleikha (spelt legally as Zooligha) Mayat,

Hafsa Mahomedy, Hawa Paruk, Amina Moosa, Mary Grice, Fareda Habib, Sakina (Bibi) Mall and Zohra Moosa. The composition of the Trust changed over the years as members relocated from Durban, resigned or passed away.[30] Only Zuleikha Mayat, Hafsa Mahomedy and Zohra Moosa remain of the original ten trustees. Many of the trustees had forged a bond going back many years and the loss of members was deeply felt. When Hawa Moosa died in 1993, the president's report noted that 'we feel the pain of separation and we keenly miss her presence'. In her 30th AGM report on 13 June 2002, Mayat was sad to 'bid adieu those who were recalled by Allah for rest in a more blissful environment' as well as those who had resigned or relocated, adding that 'they remain constantly in our thoughts for we can never forget their vital role in our activities over the years, activities that called for great sacrifices of time and energy'. Turning to the surviving members, Mayat offered thanks 'for the ongoing ties of sisterhood that were first forged nearly half a century ago'.

Prudent investment strategies have been crucial to the Educational Trust building up its financial resources over the years. In the formative years funds were mainly placed in conventional banks such as Nedbank, the New Republic Bank, Standard Bank, Marriot Bank, Habib Bank and the Natal Building Society, with funds deliberately spread among the various banks to reduce risk. The opening of the Al Baraka and Islamic banks in 1989 and Oasis Investments in 1997 provided additional options and the Educational Trust, cautiously at first but with increasing confidence in the case of Al Baraka, invested considerable amounts in these institutions. Zuleikha Mayat eventually served as 'Special Advisor' to Al Baraka Bank from 1990 to 2005.

In the 1970s, the Educational Trust had wanted to invest with Trust Bank but did not do so because of racist attitudes experienced by the Group at the Durban branch. Mayat wrote to Jan S Marais, MD based at the Trust Bank Centre in Cape Town, in September 1971 to complain that she had visited the Durban branch with Mariam Motala and Fatima Loonat to discuss investments. When they got to the branch they saw a 'Non-Whites' sign at a counter. They proceeded to the reception counter but were 'being ignored and later arrivals were being seen to because I was standing at what seemed generally to be accepted as the white counter.' They asked to see the manager, who was on the first floor. The lift attendant did not allow them into the lift for passengers and instead directed them to the goods lift, which was reserved for 'non-

whites'. Mayat, Motala, and Loonat refused on principle, and left. They wrote a letter of protest to both the Durban manager and to Marais, which was signed by all the members of the Group. Marais replied on 17 September 1971 that the bank's approach was 'non-sectional, non-racial, non-religious and non-political' and that he would take it up with the branch. The Natal Regional Manager sent the Group a letter of apology on 17 September 1971 in which he wrote that 'it is a strange fact of life that one is not always able to create the impression that one intends…We feel sure, however, that you will agree that the intention is always of greater importance than the impression.' In her handwritten notes, Mayat wrote that her letter did not 'detail impression. They contained facts and the tone of the reply to me seems we were not taken seriously. Since there were two notices reading non-whites then it is not too clear what the 'intention' of the bank is. And there are separate counters even though they may be ignored.' Mayat recalls that Marais instructed the Durban branch manger to visit her at her home and that Marais was flirting with the Progressive Party at the time, which got him into trouble with the Afrikaner Broederbond and the National Party.

From the mid-1970s the Educational Trust invested in the stock market through the National Growth Fund and South Africa Trust Selection Shares. The experience proved negative as the Group lost R3 010 in 1975. Mayat commented in the treasurer's report on 29 February 1976 that

> not so rosy has been the loss the Group suffered in the share market. Some years ago we were advised to speculate on the market and get rich quickly. After seeing our initial investment growing less and less by the year we decided to cut our losses. We will leave all speculation to the Bulls and Bears and stick to regular dividend producing investment.

The Trust published its first balance sheet for the year ending February 1977. Proudly presenting it at the 23rd AGM in June 1977, Mayat commented:

> Before you accuse the executive of splurging money let me explain. Since so many husbands and VIP's were attending the dinner at Elangeni, it was felt that in order to impress on our men that we do work and not just play at meetings, we show them our Balance Sheet for it reflects a very sound state of affairs. We also wanted the public to know that unlike other

> organizations we do not draw on them for donations when we sponsor tours, but that we work hard to earn the money for such projects.

Trustees continued to explore ways of diversifying the Group's portfolio to minimise risk. While dabbling in the share market did not yield appropriate rewards, the Trust has enjoyed better returns from investments in property syndicates.

From the mid-1990s, in fact, the trustees resolved to actively restructure their investments and place more of their funds in property syndicates than in fixed deposits. This was partly because they were deemed to be safer (the old adage 'safe as houses' is used in reports) and have more growth potential and also because, from an Islamic perspective, the income was regarded as shariah compliant. Discussion at committee meetings reflected the fact that they expected healthier yields since the investment was based on rental income, which usually increases over time. One downside, as the minutes of several meetings noted, was that property investment was not liquid. They overcame this by placing part of their funds on call to ensure that money would be available at short notice. Early optimism and faith in the property market also seemed to wax and wane with the national economy. The Group's treasurer reported in July 1998 that 'all was not well' with this strategy and with the Group's investments in general:

> The country is going through an economic crisis and daily rentals from property syndications are falling down at an alarming rate. This is bound to impact not only on our income but as well our investments, so we need all your prayers to see us through these troubled times and we must also pray for our community which is reeling from overdraft blows. Fortunately for us, we have never asked for credit facilities. Often we wondered if, like others in the business world, we should not take advantage of loaned funds from banks. Not having succumbed to temptation, we can still enjoy our sleep.[31]

No investment is risk free, as trustees were reminded every now and again. A committee meeting noted on 10 May 2000 that the Educational Trust had lost its investment in Victory Park, which was taken over by property group Seeff which only paid them out a portion of their original investment. When they

tried to reclaim the full amount, Seeff gave them the option of investing hundreds of thousands of rands more to refurbish the property. 'This has been the Trust's major investing disappointment and Trustees hope that there would be no further setbacks,' the minutes of the meeting noted. This avenue of investment remains a key aspect of the Group's portfolio even though the property market has plummeted since mid-2008.

Even banks proved risky. While the global financial meltdown may have brought this into public consciousness in 2008, the collapse of banks has had a longer history in South Africa and the Trust was not immune to this danger. The New Republic Bank, one of the few banks with a majority of Indian directors, became insolvent in 1998. The Trust had investments with the bank totalling almost R750 000 and had a 'lucky escape' as they had withdrawn most of the funds shortly before the bank's collapse to pay for an order of books. A relieved and grateful Mayat noted in her presidential report in July 1999 that during the 'past year Allah's Bounty on us has been truly tremendous. For that we make Shukar and beseech Him for continuous Guidance and Favour. If we begin to count His blessings we will need a calculator.' There was a similar escape when the Trust withdrew its funds from the Islamic Bank in 1997 amidst rumours that the institution was facing financial difficulties. Less fortunate was a small investment with Jaame Ltd, another Islamic initiative, which collapsed in 1989.

Given this history, the Trust initially treaded carefully with Al Baraka Bank, starting in 1989, and with Oasis Holdings, a shariah-compliant investment company started in 1997. The relationship with Al Baraka has been largely trouble free though there was some consternation in 2000. Mayat's treasurer's report for that year noted that with the financial problems of clothing companies in the face of cheap Chinese imports,

> rumours floated around that Al Baraka was on the verge of insolvency. The rumours caused such panic that there was the threat of a run on the funds of the Bank. Knowing that our trustees would be concerned I addressed the issue at a monthly meeting, explaining the situation and emphasized that Trustees must decide whether we should withdraw funds or retain our confidence in the Bank…Alhamdolillah the rumours seem to have died down, the Bank is functioning as usual and its affairs

> appear healthy. It is a compliment that the Trustees did not panic and calmly arrived at a decision.

A special Trust meeting held on 20 March 2002 decided that in the wake of insecurity in financial markets, investments should be spread between various financial institutions. This has continued to the present. As Zarina Moolla points out, as far as investments are concerned, 'the group is very conservative so they won't go where there's any sort of risks – they'll only go for the major stuff that everybody's going for and things like that'. Decisions are made with the involvement of all trustees, especially old hands such as Zuleikha Mayat and Zohra Moosa. But cognisance is also taken of the views of new trustees such as Zarina Moolla, who describes herself as 'very much into the markets. I watch Summit TV every night on Bloomberg. I mean that's like a sabbaq as I call it, for me.' This conservatism or 'better safe than sorry' attitude extends even to the embracing of modern technology. Zarina Moolla points to the example of internet banking: 'Mrs Mayat, you know, I've been trying to talk her to go onto internet banking. She just won't do it. She's too scared that somebody's going to pilfer money out of the account.' The motto of the Group can best be summed up by a resolution adopted at a committee meeting on 16 November 2005: 'We stick to tried and trusted investments instead of investing in any new deals.' Despite the financial difficulties in the market, the Trust's investments reached what members then called the 'magic' one million rand mark in 1994 and has continued to climb steadily. This is due to being prudent, exercising options that minimise risks even if the returns are lower, and regarding funds as an amanaah which should be treated with utmost care. This approach is likely to continue as long as the likes of Zohra Moosa and Zuleikha Mayat are around.

Financial stability and new leadership

While expressing sorrow at the loss of members over the years, Mayat also referred to the mutation of organisations and leadership. Following the loss of Hawa Bibi Moosa in 1993, Mayat wrote that the Group was 'extremely fortunate that her place has been filled by an enthusiastic, younger and energetic person in Ayesha Vorajee'. In her presidential report of June 1997, the 25th year of the Education Trust's existence, Mayat wrote:

From left: Zuleikha Mayat, Fatima Meer and Hajra Seedat were prominent in public life at a time when this was frowned upon by the local Muslim community.

> It is the law of nature that the old must give way to the young so that life and events carry on…It pleases me to see how gradually Zohra Moosa, Fatima Loonat, and myself are handing over affairs to younger and very capable hands. That is how it should be for river waters can only ripple smoothly when the channels are kept free of obstruction.

At the 1998 AGM, Mayat said that

> old age makes one cranky and overcritical of younger, more spirited youth. Old persons are reluctant to let go of their responsibilities for then they fear being marginalized. But wisdom dictates that one gracefully slow down in activity, make space for younger blood and indulge in duas praying that the young do not repeat the mistakes of committees earlier. And mistakes there have been, you can rest assured on that point.

In the July 1999 presidential report, Mayat commented on the 'well-motivated new crop that are now slowly taking over the affairs of the Group. I certainly do not see them as a threat, which will displace us. I see them as an added force, expertise and energies that can only be of benefit to us and the community.'

However, despite these statements about passing on responsibility to younger members, Group founder Zuleikha Mayat remains the public face of the Group and a key decision-maker. Some believe that the Group will fade away without Mayat's strong style of leadership, as was the case with the Islamic Propagation Centre International under Ahmed Deedat and the Arabic Study Circle under Dr Daoud Mall, organisations that did not have clear succession plans or atrophied by having the same leadership for decades. In the case of the Women's Cultural Group, it may be argued, the addition of new trustees and appointment of administrators has put into place a sound administrative team and bureaucracy that will ensure continuity. Those who have joined the Group share a common mission and vision even if their approaches may differ. When Mayat steps down, her five decades of influence and wisdom will leave a void but younger members were appointed with the intention of bringing on board persons with a range of desirable professional experience and leadership skills. They were 'recruited' for their ability to make an effective contribution through their ability to organise fundraising events, as well as their bookkeeping skills, understanding of investments or general management expertise. The experiences that the new and considerably younger trustees gained through their involvement in other organisations or businesses was deemed by the incumbent trustees as being important and valuable and as lacking in the Trust, especially as trustees such as Zohra Moosa and Zuleikha Mayat were getting on in years.

Second- and third-generation leadership

Younger members bring new energies and new ideas to the group. Hajira Omar is one example. Hajira Omar was born in Kliptown and married cricket star Yacoob Omar in the 1970s. The couple lived in England for two years (in a caravan for much of the time) while Yacoob played cricket there, before settling in Durban. Hajira met Shameema Mayat through Yacoob and later met Zuleikha Mayat. She was 'captivated by her [Zuleikha Mayat's] energy and foresight, I mean, just getting a group of women together. They might have had skills that weren't being brought to the fore because of their situation and she harnessed those skills and I think that's admirable.' Hajira did not join the Group immediately as she was involved in the family business, ran a skills project

for unemployed domestic workers at the Ecumenical Centre, co-ordinated a skills project in Imboza run by the University of Natal, and subsequently ran a skills-training project for the Crescent of Hope. She attributes her involvement in community work to the influence of her father, Solly Desai, who was involved in the non-racial Congress movement in the 1950s. She recalls that the family 'always struggled as kids. But in a way Dad instilled something because there was an Urdu saying he used, that humanity is godliness, there is no other way of spiritual development but through your humanity.' Hajira eventually succumbed to Mayat's overtures and became involved in the Group, 'using my administrative skills because I don't have any cooking skills – none whatsoever!'

Zarina Moolla become a trustee relatively soon after joining the group in 1996. Zuleikha Mayat noted in her July 1998 report that Fatima Loonat was not well but that 'failing eyesight and sore bones has nothing to do with mental alertness and Fatoo has plenty of mileage to enable her to oversee the Bursary portfolio.' However, Loonat, who had given sterling service over many years, was gradually forced by ill health to pass on some of her bursary-related responsibilities to Zarina Moolla. It 'passes from one pair of good hands to another,' Mayat noted. This was made official at a Trust meeting on 10 February 1999, and from June 2001 Zarina was given power to sign bursary cheques. In May 2004 she became one of the five signatories with powers to sign all Group documents. While the other four signatories – Zuleikha Mayat, Zohra Moosa, Shairbanu Lockhat and Ayesha Vorajee – had been members for four to five decades, Zarina had been a member for less than ten years. Zarina Moolla's route to the Group was via Johannesburg and London. She was born in Johannesburg in the 1950s, but at fifteen she went to live with her brother in London to complete high school and it was there that she made her first 'connection' with *Indian Delights*:

> My brother was part of a private banking company called Finance Intercontinental. He used to bring these 'heavyweights' home for dinner and tell me, 'Make some lassi,' and I'd never made lassi in my life and I didn't even know what it tasted like and I'd quickly go to the kitchen, check the *Indian Delights* and run to Harris's, which was across the road from the house, and get the ingredients and make the lassi and things like that. So

> my very first introduction to cooking was through the *Indian Delights* – even the samoosa pur was made by me, which I've never done again since I've come home. What my cooking is today is because of [that] book.

The London experience was important for Zarina, as it was there that she socialised with white people for the first time. Given her apartheid upbringing, she initially found this 'daunting. My brother still laughs at me. The first day when he went to enroll me at school I asked him, "Are these people the same as us?"' When she returned, Zarina completed a BCom degree and served articles with JH Smegg & Co. Marriage to lawyer Ebrahim Moolla brought her to Durban and, through his political work, she became involved in the United Democratic Front in the 1980s. She spent time in the poorer Indian township of Chatsworth and, through her political work, she met people such as the late Minister of Justice, Dullah Omar, and retired Constitutional Court judge, Albie Sachs.

Zarina was drawn into the Group through Shameema, as their children attended the same school. She soon met Zuleikha Mayat, who persuaded her, inevitably, to help informally with the Group's administrative matters. When Fatima Loonat took ill, Zarina assisted in allocating and overseeing bursaries, 'updating the books and so on and before I knew it [I was] drawn into the Educational Trust'. She welcomes Zuleikha Mayat's support: 'She's given me a very free rein on the books and she'll respect my decisions quite happily and if I say "No", she accepts the no.' Mayat fast-tracked her 'apprenticeship' in trusteeship. Even though there was consensus among trustees, some members did feel that the vacant position should have gone to a more senior member of the Group who had served 'her time'. Zarina Moolla's tongue-in-cheek comment in the 2004 jubilee brochure that the founding members 'take on the role of tormentors rather than mentors' may have been written in jest but points to the strong influence that older members continue to exert.

Fatima Randeree attended Durban Indian Girls' High but left in Standard 8 and, shortly thereafter, married psychiatrist Dr Farouk Randeree. She was involved in the general administration of her husband's office and in co-ordinating his research projects. She was a 'latecomer' to the Group, joining in around 1998, when she was introduced by her relative and long-time member Fatima Mayat. She did not have a formal association with the Group prior to

that even though she knew some of the members. She was probably put off by intimidating 'stories about the Group being a "Who's Who" of our society' but is now glad to have joined. As she explained, 'Clannish behaviour is the nature of most groups so that does not bother me. I marvel instead at what has been achieved…You can't throw out the good because of the little you don't like. Each of us can't do what the Group can do together.' Randeree described herself as a 'doer. There is a lot of running around to do, like picking up books from Sartaj and dropping them off somewhere. I don't mind getting my hands dirty.' It is precisely this type of approach that has sustained the Group over the years.

Shameema Mayat was born in Pietermaritzburg and completed her BA and BA (Hons) degrees at the then University of Durban-Westville. She then obtained a teaching qualification from the University of Natal. She taught for many years at Bechet High School and subsequently at a girls' madrassah run by Mawlana Yunus Patel, which she in fact helped to get off the ground by being one of its first members of staff. Shameema joined the Group shortly after her marriage to Zuleikha Mayat's son Aslam. The couple has lived with Zuleikha since the death of Mahomed Mayat, forming an extended family household – the exception rather than the rule these days. She was appointed to the Trust in 2003, after an 'apprenticeship' of almost twenty-five years with the Group. Fellow members who were interviewed described Shameema as 'enthusiastic', 'committed' 'hard-working', and an 'outstanding organiser'. In fact, several opined that it is because she is related to Zuleikha Mayat through marriage that her progress within the Group has been retarded. Mayat maintains a rigid principle against nepotism and this may be a reason for Shameema's delayed progress; another possibility may be that, in a household of two exceptionally strong-minded women, household tensions cannot but carry over into Group dynamics. Ayesha Vorajee, a member for five decades, feels confident about the Group's future in the hands of younger members. 'No, there is a core that is very, very efficient,' she explained. 'And, of course, there is Mrs Mayat's daughter-in-law, you know, Shameema, who is very good, although not as experienced as Mum.'

Women such as Zarina Moolla, Hajira Omar, Fatima Randeree, Shameema Mayat and Safoura Mohammed, the administrator, are using their skills in different ways to introduce new and more efficient systems and controls. For

example, Hajira Omar and Safoura Mohammed initiated the move to put the *Indian Delights* accounts on Pastel during 2005. A grateful Mayat commented at a committee meeting on 16 February 2005 that 'there is no longer a need for me to fiddle manually as I have been doing for fifty years'. Hajira Omar described the old ledger method as 'incredible. She did this accounting system by hand with a ledger that you haven't seen for, God, thirty-odd years and she had it down to the cent.' Initially Mayat ran her manual system while they put the accounts on computer but after a couple of years she accepted that the computer was as accurate as she. Safoura Mohammed and Hajira Omar felt 'very proud that now, finally, she doesn't check that the VAT is correct or not. She accepts that it is correct and we submit it.' Mayat reported to the Group's AGM on 18 July 2007 that 'the office load used to be burdensome but sharing it with Safoura, Zarina, Shairbanu, Shameema and Hajira means that there is a team of five now yoked to the task'. She was especially complimentary of Safoura, whose 'input has been laudable, her co-ordinating skills have been fine-honed and she has learnt not to lose her cool'. And she also complimented her 'Kitchen Team' of Fatima Patel and others for their unstinting support in carrying out the functions of the Group.

The Group was helped by the fact that it could call upon the human and material capital of members. Until at least the 1980s the creative Mariam Motala would usually take charge of decorating venues for dinners and events. She and her band of volunteers would cut roses, bougainvilleas, aloes and ferns from members' gardens, as the Group was 'not wealthy enough to buy them'. Fatima Patel and Farida Chenia were also adept in floral arranging. They also borrowed carpets, Kashmiri screens, ornaments and brassware from members. The articulate Fatima Loonat was usually the master of ceremonies. All of this reduced costs. As Shameema Mayat points out, members still 'do our own flower arranging, buy our own serviettes and decide our own colour schemes so that we project the identity and image that we want'.

What the Group is able to accomplish in terms of fundraising relies on thrift but is also premised on an existing resource base. Their innovation is to make use of what is available to them to suit their own purposes. Critics of the Group who speak in terms of elitism and tokenism fail to capture the full analytical picture with such labels. It is true that part of the reason for the success of the fundraisers was that members bore many of the costs – and that this may have

prevented other, less privileged women from joining the Group, thus constituting a structural exclusion. Yet, on the other hand, their heavy tax on themselves and their families is also an acknowledgement of class privilege and an ethos that has become increasingly rare in the age of self-spending commercialism. While the Group's fundraising activities might, through one lens, be viewed as replicating class and redistributive paternalism without challenging the economic structural foundations of capitalist class production, such a heavy-handed critique leaves little room for acknowledging the enthusiasm for civic involvement and the spirit of personal and collective satisfaction that has driven and continues to drive this group of women. It also downplays the involvement of members such as Gori Patel and others, whose main contribution has been to give of their time, a valuable commodity which complements the resources of other members. The collective effort of the women has been an important factor in the Group's financial power.

In looking at the Group's achievements it may be suggested that it failed to exploit its full commercial value. At different times the Group has made atchars, methi masala, sweetmeats and fish masala for commercial sale. But as soon as someone else began producing the same item, they stopped and switched to something new. Yet, according to Shameema Mayat, members felt that if 'others are catering for the community and are needy, there is no need for us to be in competition with people who are struggling financially. For example, we did catering at one stage. Then we taught women from the South African National Zakaat Fund to cook. We don't want to duplicate others.'

Despite the difficulty of some of the physical work involved, most first- and second-generation members that we interviewed, as well as the minutes of meetings and brochures that we examined, suggest that the women found such work satisfying on a number of levels. One theme that cropped up regularly was that theirs was not an individualised activity but one with social and communal value. According to Fatima Mayat, she and the other members remain keen to host dinners and brunches (even though it involves a lot of work with relatively small returns) because it provides them with opportunities to work as a team, develop camaraderie and relax. For Zuleikha Mayat such events provide a signal that the Group is 'still around and continues to provide benchmarks for excellence'. In similar vein, Shameema Mayat pointed out that the 'social activities make people aware we still have our finger on the pulse'. The excep-

tional success of the fêtes provided public acknowledgement of the Group's work, which gave some members an inner satisfaction. Equally fulfilling was that the financial proceeds of fêtes, fairs, and dinners allowed them to assist various organisations. The 1983 Meena Bazaar brochure would record:

> The many institutions, societies and individuals that we have helped may be impressive, but the friendship and goodwill we have gained from South Africans of all ethnic groups by far outweighs what we have given. We have sweated over stoves and toiled over tables; shoes and tempers have worn out arranging mushaeras, debates, lectures, dinners and fêtes and all this to make someone else's journey through life a little easier.[32]

Sixteen years later, Mayat would express similar sentiments in a pre-Ramadan newsletter dated 8 December 1999, which provided a succinct summary of the value that they attached to their work:

> We make Shukar that the time and energy that every one of us has expended for Group activities has benefited disadvantaged persons and societies. We have a feeling of satisfaction that our sweating and toiling, which landed us with blisters on our hands, and gave us sore feet as we rushed to get things done in time, was well worth it. By choosing to work collectively, we have become a household name. Together, we have helped numerous societies and launched hundreds of young men and women into professions that are of benefit to society. And we also give thanks to the Almighty for not only have we been able to help others, but we ourselves have learned much from each other and forged bonds of sisterhood that are very strong indeed.