UNIVERSITY OF DURBAN-WESTVILLE

DOCUMENTATION CENTRE

ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

"VOICES OF RESISTANCE"

INTERVIEWEE: RONNIE GOVENDER

INTERVIEWER: MWELELA CELE

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MC: Good morning. My name is Mholele Cele. I am doing this interview for the University of Durban-Westville Documentation Centre, Oral History Project. Today we are interviewing Mr Ronnie Govender. Mr Ronnie Govender is the former vice-president of the Natal Congress of South African Races, COSAR. He is the co-founder of the Shah Theatre Academy. He is a well-known protest playwriter and producer. He is a former journalist, he used to teach. Yes, hello Mr Govender.

RG: Hello.

MC: I am pleased to meet you.

RG: You left out something. I am also a booze pedlar. I worked for South African Breweries [laugh]

MC: Can we start by this question? Tell us when and where were you born?

RG: I was born on the 16th of May 1934 in Cato Manor, that is Durban.

MC: And where were your parents born?

RG: My parents were also born in – my father was born in Cato Manor, my mother of course, in, I think it was Finlands in Durban.

MC: And what about your grandparents, where?

RG: My grandfather and grandmother came from Puliwur in South India, that is my paternal side. On my maternal side my grandfather came from Tanjawur, which of course, is called Tanjur.

MC: Did your family have a choice as to where they wanted to live, your parents?

RG: I think at a certain stage with my grandparents, of course, chose to live in Cato Manor after they gained their freedom from indenture. You know, they bought a small piece of ground. They hawked their lives, actually, for that piece of ground to develop a market garden. That is from my paternal side. And my maternal side, of course, my grandfather I think he was an interpreter or a court interpreter. I am not sure about that. And he also, I think, chose to live in Cato Manor. But after that there was no choice.

MC: And what work did your parents do?

RG: My father was a Baker's van man. My mother was a so-called housewife. Ja.

MC: And did you have siblings?

RG: Ja. I think I have got to count them now, ten ja.

MC: And where did you go to school?

RG: I went to school in Cato Manor. There was the Cato Manor Government Aided Indian school and then I went to Sastri College and I spent a year at the University of Cape Town. And then I went to the Springfield Training College.

MC: Can you describe life, or the atmosphere in your school in Cato Manor?

RG: Yes, certainly. Cato Manor was a working class area, of course - those who found work - because unemployment was endemic and TB was rife, at the time. There was no real cure for TB, and people were very impoverished but they were great survivors. They, as a community, you know, they rallied and they helped one another. It was a tremendous time of community; of self-help. They built their own schools and things like that. But for us kids, I mean of course you know, despite the poverty we had some very wonderful memories of Cato Manor. You know, and so when Cato Manor was destroyed in 1958 by the Group Areas Act, it was a traumatic moment for all of us. Ja I have had some wonderful memories of Cato Manor despite the poverty.

MC: And in school - I mean what was the standard of education, how was it? I mean did you receive good education in your high school?

RG: Ja we had some very committed teachers. Of course, in those days, rote learning was the order of the day. You

know you didn't – you taught arithmetic to Moonsamy. Instead of teaching Moonsamy arithmetic. It was a good old method of teaching with the cane, you see. Nevertheless, I mean there were some very, very committed teachers. One of whom was our principal Mr Barnabas, whom I recall in my plays. In my plays: At The Edge; in '1949'. He was way ahead of his time as an educationist. And in fact, it was through Mr Barnabas that, you know, my interest in literature was nurtured.

The other teachers, of course, were very committed in their own way. And I would say that the standard of education was, you know, if you had to make any comparison, that type of education was very good.

MC: And your interest in literature started in high school?

RG: In primary school.

MC: Primary school?

RG: Mmm.

MC: Is it possible that maybe you can remember a few of the books that you used to read at that time?

RG: Well, I used to devour any kind of reading material, at that time. I think it was a kind of family tradition in that respect. My father, despite the fact that he only went to standard two, would read the newspaper from the first letter to the last full stop. I recall this, and in those days, I mean it was during the war years and things like that, and it was difficult to get comics but he some how - I think he

also worked at that time as taxi driver - and he would bring us comics and that sort of thing and we would read them. And I would read almost anything. But of course, I mean there was the odd book by Charles Dickens around, apart from the books that we encountered at school, you know, all the great sort of great English literary works. And ja Dickens and …

MC: And at this time when you were still in primary school did you have a chance maybe to go to Hindi classes or Tamil classes?

RG: Ja Tamil, I am from a Tamil speaking background. And I think, over sixty percent of the people at that time were Tamil speaking. Ja we went to, in the afternoons - to Tamil school, which we considered as a tremendous burden. And which again I reflect in one of my plays, '1949'. We were not able to appreciate, at that time you know, the efforts made by the elders. Particularly our parents and those people who taught Tamil voluntarily, you know, to keep the language alive. We did not quite appreciate that. I particularly, did not appreciate that and I regret that to this day. But when we finished English school we used to troupe along to Tamil school and it was sheer drudgery because the Tamil schoolteachers generally then were very authoritarian and that disenchanted me.

MC: And at high school, at Sastri College, can you describe the atmosphere there?

RG: Ja it was difficult at that time, to get into high school because there were just a couple of high schools around. I think one was in Woodlands in ‘Maritzburg, and the other was Sastri here. And I can’t remember any other high schools at that time. And there was this tremendous thirst for education in the community, which to an extent was the saving grace of the community. Despite the poverty, they built their own schools. You know, although they paid the rates and taxes, schools were not provided for them so they built their own schools. And it was inevitable that there would be a need for more high schools. But the Natal provincial administration, which was largely English did not provide high schools. Sastri College was built through the efforts of Srinivasa Sastri, an agent general from India who came along and saw the need for a high school. And the community rallied and with the grant in aid Sastri College was built.

So I guess I was lucky. You know although I wasn’t a very good student or pupil at primary school I somehow made it into high school, just barely. I remember going to school, I think towards the end of February which was quite late, going into Sastri College. Never was a great student at Sastri also because when I went in I was confronted by these stern teachers, you know. And one of them suddenly confronted me and said: “Conjugate porto.” I didn’t know what he was talking about and I got punished. That

switched me off Latin and, of course, I dare say Maths and things like that. But you know again I just managed to scrape through Sastri.

There were some great guys at Sastri, one of whom was MJ Naidoo. The other was my brother Gonnie, who was ahead of me at Sastri. And he went, of course, to London later on. He was one of the pioneer journalists. He was a pioneer journalist on the Drum magazine and he went across to London. And he worked on Fleet Street. He worked for the BBC, a tremendous journalist who got disenchanted again, not only with the political situation in the country, but also with the lack of support from his own community, because he wrote a book called 'Shadows Grow Taller', which bemoaned the plight of the Tamil people, particularly. And of course, certain members within the Tamil community did not quite like his radical views on the Tamil culture. He felt that Tamil culture was one of the oldest in the world. And he had researched it and he found that they were linked to the Dravidians who lived in the north of India. And who had a civilisation running back about five to six thousand years and which is only now coming to the fore. He had uncovered this you know - this through his research and had written a book about it called 'Shadows Grow Taller.' And ja what was the question again?

MC: You were describing the atmosphere.

RG: At Sastri College ja, and I went on talking about my brother. What I meant was that there were some tremendous people at Sastri. I was always on the margins, of course you know, and I used to marvel at some of their accomplishments, their academic accomplishments of many of these guys, who later on, like RA Pillay became a leading heart specialist, Doctor Patel, PL Patel, was with my class; another leading heart specialist. Tremendous achievers in all the different aspects of life and many of these people, of course, came from totally disadvantaged backgrounds. You wouldn't say it if you look at them, where they are now and what they have achieved.

For me, of course again you know, I couldn't cope with this kind of rote learning. You know I used to seek out those aspects of education where I would be excited you know, like in literature and that sort of thing.

MC: And what kind of literature were you reading at this school?

RG: Again I used to devour all kinds of writing but we you know - the libraries then were stocked with all the old familiar kinds of writers, which I think was an extension of this whole colonial thrust.

MC: And your brother did you sort of look up to him as he was...?

RG: Oh yes, he was certainly a marked influence on my life. I mean he was a writer of no mean stature, himself. Okay. Ja

and he had a tremendous influence on my life and again this fostered my interest in literature.

MC: Did you sort of write together some time when you were still in school do you have this hobby of writing essays or?

RG: No. One of the things that I forgot to mention was in primary school was Mr Barnabas was very far-sighted and the school had a magazine. And I think, it was the desire of every child in school to have his essay selected for the magazine together with a photograph. And I recall that my brother was one of those people whose essays was chosen. So his picture was put alongside his essay. And that was a big thing for us. And I aspired to that and of course I was fortunate to have had my essay chosen twice. And I think those things were sorts of you know kind of incentive for children.

MC: And when did you feel sort of encounter racial oppression?

RG: You know, while in many ways our childhood was idyllic within the home situation, one became conscious of the tremendous disparity of your fellow citizens, the Whites and of course of African people who lived in Mkhumbane, you know a squalid shanty town. And then there were African people who lived in Cato Manor itself, and as is inevitable in a working class situation we lived cheek by jowl with African families and so-called Coloured families. And I think a kind of very, very clear bond was being established there but for political developments. But as a

young man I would look across at the Berea, which was just across Cato Manor Road from my house across the hill I would see these splendid homes you know, in park-like surroundings. And then I clearly recall at a very early age looking at the kids playing in the Marist Brothers' College, with their very well tended sports fields. Amazing, huge sports fields, rugby, soccer grounds and things like that. And then we used to try to play soccer on our grounds, which had you know I mean - there were no grounds actually. It was hilly and we used to stub our toes constantly on you know tuffs of grass sticking out and that sort of thing. And you couldn't really play a game of football in those kind of conditions. It wasn't football actually. It was a little tennis ball. And then you would come of this situation and you would look at this tremendous, you know very beautiful facilities that these Whites had. And that you noticed that, immediately.

But one of my, you know, earliest memories is when I think a White man entered our house. He knocked and it was something to do I think you know at that time electricity was just introduced. And when he came into our driveway I looked around and I could feel the awe in which this man was being treated by everybody around. A White man has entered the place. And I couldn't understand this, this kind of thing. I suppose those were for me the kind of

introduction into the dichotomy that existed within the South African situation.

But of course I was to have, much later, many you know rude kinds of experiences; some very aggressive kinds of experiences, which impacted on my life and clearly reflected that racism was rampant in our society. When I was very young a friend of mine, myself and a friend went along to Durban City Hall on New Year's Eve. We were all very nicely dressed for the occasion and that was one occasion where you know, with the changing of the calendar despite the very clear segregation, where everybody celebrated the changing of the calendar. It was in Durban City Hall itself. And so we were all dressed up as two young teenagers and we got onto this bus, and this burly White man looked at me and said: "Hey, Sammy you are very nicely dressed, hey," affecting the Indian accent and all that. And you know, he went ahead and everybody laughed and I was then in the middle of the bus; it was a double-decker; I remember this clearly. So, I couldn't say much and I was a skinny young man, a teenager. And I couldn't react. And then we pressed the buzzer for the bus to stop; it was just on Berea station. I then got onto the landing waiting for the bus stop and I looked back at this burly Englishman and I said: "You don't look bad yourself, pigface." And I jumped off, not knowing that this blighter would get off the next stop. He got off at the next stop and

he ran towards me and he caught me on Berea station, on the bridge and he grabbed me. And he was going to throw me over, you know. Before that he slapped me and my glasses flew onto the pavement, and fortunately there was a lady sitting in a car not far from there, white lady, and she screamed. If she hadn't screamed he would have thrown me over. He would have thrown me over the, he meant to do that. And she screamed and he looked at her and he got scared of course and he left me. And that was my first experience. I have had many other such experiences. More so because I have also had a big mouth in a way and I wouldn't tolerate any nonsense and I came up against such incidents again later.

But I recall that my father was a Baker's vanman, who worked very, very hard and he only worked for five pounds a week. I still don't know how he built a home and sent all of us to school. And we were among the few kids in the area that had shoes. I don't know how he did it but he did it. And then I recall him losing his job and he worked there for thirty years and gave his life. And you know - I mean he was treated very, very shabbily by these people. But I didn't know that he was one of the people who helped to form the Bakers' Trade Union. I recall the RD Naidoo, a great trade unionist and who also worked in the Bakers' Union lived in the district held a meeting and the meeting was held in our cellar. Because I mean Special Branch

activity was very, very intense at that time. So they held this meeting to launch the bakers' trade union. And I then got to understand what the struggle was all about you know, in more ways than one.

MC: And when you completed high school you went to Cape Town?

RG: No. When I finished my matric there were no jobs. It was very difficult to get a job and we didn't have any money for me to pursue my studies at university. And we looked around desperately for a job. And my uncle managed to get me a job. He was working for a packaging firm in Congela. And it was just after the 1949 riots, just, just immediately after that. And I got into this train to go to my uncle's firm and these two guys and I went into the coach and I was alone and I sat in this coach. And these two guys came in and you know, I could feel that there was something wrong. And before they could close the door I put my foot in between the door and so that the door couldn't close. And they didn't see my foot; they were inside. And the one guy grabbed me. I think the intention was again to throw me out of the window. You know that was the intention. And I screamed and the conductor came and he said: "Hey, what is going on here?" And he quickly opened the door and I said: "No, these guys were trying to throw me out of the window." And it was once more I think - I was very lucky. I escaped injury. Ja I just mentioned that.

I didn't go along, that frightened the hell out of me and I got off and I went back home. But I then got a job as working for an agricultural implements company and I wrote for and I did part-time sports writing. I started writing for the Graphic, earning ten shillings a week. Writing a boxing column because I was very keen on boxing. Both my uncles were South African boxing champions. The one was uncle Jack Govender, who won the South African Bantam Weight title the good old days; and then his younger brother uncle Sonny Govender, who won the South African Featherweight and Light Weight boxing champion. Anyway, we were keen on boxing and we did a little bit of training ourselves and so I used to follow boxing. And then I wrote a little boxing column for the Graphic and I used to write other stuff also.

MC: And what did you feel about racism in sports, at that time?

RG: Oh ja that gave me a clear insight into how we were aiding in our own oppression. In the sense that the Black sports organisations were all separated. You had an Indian football association, an African football association, Coloured football association let alone the all White football association. And that appertained to all other sports also. And it was at that time that I engaged myself in this. Wrote several articles attacking this kind of division within Black sport. And I dare say that there were people at that time and this continued over the years but it

started then. There was a remarkable man called Siramori Lutchman, whom you will interview. And then there is another remarkable man called RK Naidoo, whose contributions to sport are immense. Not just to sport I think to South Africa. But that came a little later and which we will talk about.

So just to continue with what I was doing at that time. I wrote about these things. I attacked this kind of division within ourselves; and I attacked racism in sport also. And I think at that early stage, I had also attracted the attention of the Special Branch. Because my articles were quite outspoken about this kind of racism and the fact that I mean Blacks couldn't represent this country. You know I had come across a remarkable man called Baker Naidoo, who was probably the first South African to play English first division football. He played for Shamrocks in the Durban league, which was of course, the Indian football association. A remarkable player and there were several other such people. So you know, all these kind of things, I felt that this was grossly unfair, unjust and so I wrote about them.

MC: And did maybe the police or the Special Branch attempt or try to arrest you or did they try maybe to such as that your articles had to be censored or something?

RG: No well they breathe down your neck. They made that pretty clear. I mean I would bump every now and then into

a Special Branch man, an Indian Special Branch policeman. And he would say: “Ja we are watching you. You just be careful what you write,” and all that kind of thing you know. And of course you know I would laugh that off. Sorry I think this was after matric not after primary school.

MC: Yes.

RG: You know after I finished primary school I went into matric and then after matric this is what I am talking about.

MC: And did you also write maybe a sort of obituaries of certain sports people? Because I am not sure but I think I came across an obituary that you wrote about a certain soccer player who once helped you.

RG: Dharam Mohan.

MC: Yes.

RG: Yes, that was much later. Dharam was again one of the great soccer players of this country and you know this is something that we have not yet researched and recorded. Because there were tremendous sportsmen whose gifts were wasted or destroyed by Apartheid. Lack of opportunity. Some of course escaped the net and out of their own kind of initiative and enterprise went overseas and did a lot of things. There was a weightlifter called Reuben Govender, body builder who was a waiter. Now you know, when you are a waiter you don’t have much time for yourself. Because it is all long hours and odd hours and he came from a place called Magazine Barracks. Real sort of

working class, what you would call a location. And Reuben trained hard in the little time, spare time that he had despite the fact that he was poor. Trained very, very hard and did well within the South African I think it was non-European weightlifting association, federation. I think he won a couple of competitions and then decided to go overseas because he couldn't represent his country. He went overseas and he participated, and I think he became a naturalised Englishman and he won the Mr Universe competition - the short man class. And I can name many other such sportsmen because as I said, I was a sports writer and I know about these great guys.

There was Milo Pillay, in the old days of course, who was a weightlifter and he had, before you know Apartheid, was institutionalized. I think he was one of the few who was allowed to represent the country in weightlifting. And he was in Port Elizabeth. And there was another man called GK Rangasamy who became involved in the fight against Apartheid later on. He was a close friend of Dennis Brutus who supported the formation of SACOS of which I got involved in.

MC: And Mr Govender, can you also tell us a bit about the incident here in Durban, in town, where you were helped by one of the sportsmen that you mentioned earlier - you were helped by him? And you mentioned that...

RG: Oh ja okay. Well, what happened was that I know I had known Dharam Mohan as a truly great soccer player together with other great players like Strini Moodley and Sewnarian Lall, both of whom were given a trial with the team, the European team, Real Madrid. For any soccer player to be given a trial is quite an achievement. They were spotted because at that time, when we had launched professional football and truly integrated, an integrated fashion many years later these players emerged. Some truly great players like Sugar Ray Zulu and Black Cat Cele, Scarawanda, Kenneth Gama, Hector Finn, Derek Desplase, tremendous players, Benny Crowe and so these two players were off for the trial. But they couldn't take it up because they had family commitments and what a pity, what a waste you know of talent.

Anyway Dharam was a great player and he was built like an oak, you know, a very well built guy. And I recall stopping my car one day in Victoria Street and double-parked to run into the jeweller's shop or somewhere to collect a little parcel for my wife. And then suddenly this SAP van stops, sees me parked there and he was quite right, I had no right to do that. It was illegal. But he wasn't a traffic policeman, you see, he was a constable. And then I ran out as soon as I saw this and he says: "Hey Coolie you have got no right to park your car here like this." So I used some choice egg splitters I said: "Look if you want to fine me, fine me, but

you have got no right to talk to me in that fashion." And it got heated a bit you see and I stood my ground. And he said: "I'll arrest you." I said: "you go ahead and do what you want to do." And suddenly from the back a small crowd gathered. I heard again with some choice egg splitters a loud voice saying: "Moer him Ronnie!" [laugh] and Dharam stepped forward. And this cop looked at Dharam and he got into his van and got away. But for that, I might have been in jail.

MC: And when did you go to Cape Town to study?

RG: After I finished my matric I spent about a year here as I told you I tried to get a job. I got a job working for an agricultural implements company and then also writing sport. And then there was the agricultural firm had you know I was in the office and they had a factory I think out in Jacobs and I overheard the boss talking to the guy in the factory. Apparently one of the guys hadn't turned up for work, it was key guy, an Indian guy. And this guy said: "You know, these damn Coolies you know." So when I heard this I was sitting down and typing and I heard this and it was very hard to get a job. I finished my work, I got up, put on my coat and I said: "Just make out my pay for the end of the week I am leaving." And the guy says: "Why are you leaving?" He says: "What is wrong?" I said: "Well you know obviously you don't want Coolies to work for you." And he said: "Look I was just angry." And I told

him: “No, I am sorry I don’t want to work for a racist like you,” and I walked out. And of course I had nothing else to do besides writing sport again part-time that didn’t pay very much.

In the meanwhile an uncle of mine of course was in Cape Town and I decided to go to Cape Town. I think more because I wanted to have an operation on my eye and enrol at university.

MC: What happened to your eye?

RG: You know I don’t want to make this sound like I am some kind of hero. But there was a, I tried to make a bomb when I was about thirteen. I put some dry ice into a bottle. The thing exploded and cut me there and of course my eye got affected. So I had to go and have an operation.

MC: And what this bomb that you were making what was the?

RG: No I had heard as a kid when you put some dry ice into a bottle and it will explode you see and I did that and I was about to throw it and it exploded in my face.

MC: And then okay so?

RG: Ja it is more because of that that I went to Cape Town. My uncle was there because my mother wouldn’t allow me to have an operation here. It was a serious operation and she was scared of course, because you know, in those days I don’t think they were as advanced as they are now to have that kind of operation. So I went along to the University of Cape Town. My uncle was very good and then my brother

was also instrumental in helping me to get a job with the New Age as sports columnist and I paid my way through varsity then.

MC: And what did you register for?

RG: Law. Thank god I didn't complete my studies. I might have been a fat cat lawyer today.

MC: And can you describe the atmosphere at the University of Cape Town especially towards ..?

RG: I think those were stirring times and resistance was just growing apace. You could feel it. It was in the air. I am talking 1954 now. And one could feel this and there were some great people there. There was Max Hlaba, from the ANC and of course Albie Sachs and people like that and we formed the Students Democratic Association. I was treasurer of the Students Democratic Association. I don't know why they made me treasurer because you know I am not all that good with money. But that association was formed to protest against the exclusion, they just passed a law to exclude African students from outside South Africa attending universities in Africa. There was a friend of mine Mr B. Luta from Kenya I think he was, I don't know what had become of him, who was studying at the university and I remember how this almost shattered him when he realised he had to leave university and go back home. AB Luta.

And then we formed the Students Democratic Association to protest against this and we held placard demonstrations

and all that and once more that went into the Special Branch files again. And ja.

MC: Before you formed this Student Association were you...? [intervention]

RG: I didn't form it. It was formed by a group of people.

MC: And before that were you involved in any other political organisation?

RG: Not directly, although I used to attend meetings. I recall attending meetings addressed by – my father used to take me along to listen to the great Albert Luthuli, people like that you know. Just coming out of the era of Passive Resistance listening to Monty Naicker, great man, stirring speaker and Doctor Dadoo, Billy Nair, a young Billy Nair at that time, Doctor Goonam. Listening to all these tremendous people being inspired by them you know. There was jackboot oppression at that time, the Special Branch gave no quarter, they would pounce on you. Despite that these people emerged, very strong people and from within the Indian community there were an amazing amount of activists who came along, especially amongst the women, that is not recorded you know, sadly. There was a tremendous person called Sister Poomanie, who I met later on. And she was a fearless woman, totally selfless, dedicated to the struggle and she lost her lung in jail. You know they treated her something awful and she emerged as a strong fighter and a number of people. I went along to – I

wasn't directly involved in those kind of things. And I recall also young Ismail Ebrahim, very strong Youth Congress man who became a part of Umkonto we Sizwe and of course, we know the rest about him. People like that I had always sort of been in touch with both as a journalist and as a supported of the struggle.

MC: And in your association at the University of Cape Town, did you achieve the goals that you?

RG: Well this was all part of the process of politicisation you know. We might not have achieved immediate objectives. Of course we couldn't defeat that law; that law stayed on the statute books. But what we had done I think in the process was to conscientise, politicise people and that contributed to that. Albie Sachs was the president of that association, Students Democratic. One of the many organisations on board and I remember of course the battle to gain control of the SRC. You know all the different political organisations were there. The ANC were not banned at that time and they had an organisation together with Non-European Unity Movement and I think ja the Non-European Unity Movement and then you had the Liberal Party, Alan Paton's Liberal Party, the United Party and the Nationalist. The Nationalist of course were very, very strong.

MC: And what happened in Cape Town that made you decide to come back to Durban?

RG: Well I was writing the sports column for the New Age. I had written my exams and then in October I think it was, the paper got banned and so I couldn't earn any more money and I couldn't pay my fees. And although I know that I got through my exams I still don't know my results, I had to come here.

MC: Why was your paper banned?

RG: It was a political newspaper in many ways. I mean you know it was, it followed the Guardian Newspaper, a so-called Communist newspaper. The New Age was a so-called Communist newspaper also.

MC: So you came back to Durban?

RG: I came back to Durban and enrolled at the Springfield Teachers' Training College, and I qualified as a teacher there.

MC: The atmosphere there at the Springfield College, politically?

RG: Ja I mean everything was you know at that time was affected by Apartheid you know and I was always resentful of White authoritarianism, which was very evident at the college. You had a principal called Mr Levine and it was inevitable that I would fall foul of him and other people there. And I was hauled up to the office a number of times for the fact that you know, that within the student bodies that existed at the Springfield College I spoke out against many things. And as I said, this didn't endear me to the

authorities there. In fact I was told that I was sailing very close to the wind and one more transgression and I would have to collect my books and leave.

MC: So at this time most of the things that you were writing were newspaper articles or have you written the plays?

RG: Ja I continued doing sports contributing, especially in sport to the Leader. When I started teaching I became sports editor of the Leader ¼(indistinct)

MC: So at this time you were not writing plays or had you?

RG: No I did indulge in a little, I wrote a skit or so at Sastri College but which the students put on.

MC: But were you sort of interested in plays, where you go into theatre?

RG: Sorry?

MC: At this time when you were at UCT and at Springfield College were you going to market to theatres and watching plays?

RG: No there was absolutely no theatre of any kind and you know for Blacks. And whatever theatre there was, was sort of racist White theatre that was heavily subsidised by the government. You know your performing arts council later on. The Alhambra Theatre was around and there was absolutely no theatre, and whatever cultural activity there was, was largely to the peoples' own efforts you know. Within the so-called Indian community you had some tremendous people like Mathimugam Pillay, Bell

Moonsamy, PR Singh, you know Riverside Sungeeth and people like that; and then you had Mrs Govender from the Umgeni Road Temple. There was a lady called Akka Vathiar, a remarkable lady. Another lady called Rookmanie Naidoo, who all did their best to keep culture alive in one form or the other. And this, more often than not, in the theatrical arts you know.

MC: Sorry to interrupt you Mr Govender, we are just turning the tape.

RG: Oh okay.

END OF TAPE 1 SIDE A

RESUMPTION ON TAPE 1 SIDE B:

MC: Okay we are back. So Ronnie you were still telling us about the people who were sort of trying to organise functions and plays?

RG: Ja what I was saying is that you know I think up to about the fifties there was very little South African theatre. I mean the races were kept very, very you know, strictly they were separated they were segregated. And of course this was passed into law with the coming of the Group Areas Act. Before that you had the Pegging Act in Durban, which of course was passed by an English dominated Natal Provincial Administration. And the Pegging Act of course, was aimed at the Indian community. Because what was happening was the Indian community had picked itself up by it's own bootstraps and were emerging as a force in

more ways than one politically as well as economically. In 1949 before the 1949 so-called riots before then you had a signing of the Doctors' Pact, which brought the Natal Indian Congress and the ANC together as a strong political force, resistance force. I mean this didn't of course go down well with the regime and they sought to separate the communities. Before they passed you know the statutes to do that you know, they engaged in various kinds of neferious activities.

In 1949 there were some tensions in Cato Manor and other places. Because I mean where you have had people living in poverty, communities living in poverty and you know, battling for existence and fighting for the same scarcity of resources you would have these tensions and there were also the cultural baggage of both communities and bedevilled the situation. And there was some a little violence had occurred in the Indian Market. But that was seized upon and a third force exacerbated the violence you know. And so hence you had the so-called 1949 riots.

And although I mean many Indians died and were raped and houses were burned and things like that, more Africans died and I mean this is not one of those things that was made clear. Many, many Africans died. More Africans died than Indians and many Africans gave their lives saving Indians. Because as I said, a close bond had developed. And if it hadn't been for these factors I know I believe that

the Indian and African communities, particularly, would have grown closer together. However I mean political intervention of one sort or the other saw to it that this didn't happen. The races were kept apart. So you did not have a growing South African culture in that sense.

And the indigenous cultures were very badly neglected, you know. Only recently have you had Skatimiya coming to the fore where languages are being now given room to develop, etc, etc. Amongst all those communities you didn't have that you see. So you didn't have a South African culture developing where there was a meeting of all these different cultures. Which has happened over the years in all other countries in the world. And there is no such thing as a pure race or a pure culture. And in South Africa as in Brazil if we had that opportunity we would have had a kind of national culture but the regime saw to it that this didn't happen and they put in a lot of money behind White culture, Eurocentric culture and you had performing arts councils.

And all this struck me as a young man, and I said no it is time we formed our own theatre groups and things like that. And before I left for Cape Town I formed a Durban Theatre Association I think it was called with the people like Slim, the late Slim Modley, Muthal Naidoo and Prem Singh. And then we produced Antigone, the South African version of Antigone. That was in the fifties. And again this

attracted the attention of the Special Branch because I mean it reflected the South African political situation. And then of course I went away to Cape Town to go and study law at the University of Cape Town. And I think Durban Theatre Association then folded up. So when I got back and started teaching a group of enthusiasts, a group of politically conscious people like Fatima Meer and Ismail Meer, and others backed an initiative by the Union Artist who are based in Johannesburg and doing work at Dorkay House, which was about the only institution where free cultural activity was taking place in terms of a South African ethos. And they brought out an eminent American director called Krishna Shah. And he came down and he was ostensibly brought out I think, to direct and to put on his play 'King Of The Dark Chamber' written by Rabindranath Tagore. It was a great play. And then also to direct 'Sponono' by Alan Paton. But he was persuaded to run a three-week clinic on different aspects of theatre. And I had written a story then, as a sports writer, on one of the people who had taken part in "King Of The Dark Chamber", remarkable dancer called Bashkar who was also a boxer, and I had written a story about him. And Krishna liked the story very much and he persuaded me to join this clinic. Because at that time I just felt at that clinic again you know they had only selected people from the upper middle classes. It was very bourgeois you know. And I was

reluctant at first to join this thing because they had already been handpicked. And Krishna Shah persuaded me and said: “Listen you know, “ because I had made it very clear to him. I said: “You know what, this thing won’t have any meaning if it is not really relevant to the people at grassroots.” And Krishna Shah said: “Look I am in the hands of different people and I really can’t talk about those things and you know and I want to work with the people and I would like you to join.” So I joined. And I got you know some very clear insights on the structures of the theatre, the technical aspects of theatre and he liked very much the work that I had done. I had written a play, he selected three plays one of which was ‘ Beyond Calvary’ at the end of this three-week course. And he staged ‘Beyond Calvary’ was staged.

MC: Can you sort of tell us more about the ‘Beyond Calvary’?

RG: Ja it was actually based on the story of - well there was a colleague of mine while I was teaching who was Hindu and there was a girl who was Roman Catholic, and I think they were attracted to each other and there were some complications. And this formed the basis for my play. And of course I took a lot of license with it you know, and what happens in the play because of the love for each but because of the fact that they come from two very different religious backgrounds there is a complication. There is conflict and there is a crisis in the play, which drives them

eventually to seek for the meaning of life beyond the symbols of religion. That is why the play was called 'Beyond Calvary.'

MC: Okay and can you also tell us about - I mean the reason I mean why at a certain stage in your life did you decided to be an atheist and then from then becoming a Hindu and then?

RG: I didn't decide to become atheist. I was you know - I come from a very orthodox Hindu background and you know, while I was of course, have some deep memories of my mother's spirituality and so my grandmother's also there, a tremendous spirituality of both people. I guess I was disenchanted by the ritual, which I found meaningless, in many ways, you know. And for me religion did not have any answers to the suffering of the people quite clearly, you know. I mean you could break all the coconuts in the world if a group of people don't get together and say: "You know what this is wrong people are being paid very little for the work." No boss would say yes let's give them because god told me to give. I guess that is a bit cynical, but for me it didn't hold any answers. And again I think many young Black people, at the time, sensitive to the ravages of Apartheid and the tremendous poverty that was around, would have felt the same way. And so I couldn't really now, you know, subscribe to something that to me at that time didn't seem meaningless. Mind you, over the

years with the experience and with hindsight, I think with far more experience, I am not so cynical about these things any more. I have had some experiences myself, which have emphasized the fact that we are all spiritual beings. That while the outward symbols of religion don't satisfy that there is no denying the fact that we are spiritual beings and there is a greater truth out there, perhaps which we are not able to see right now and articulate or describe. I think if you look at the manner in which love has so altered the course of life in many instances. And if you look at the kind of leadership you have had in this country in recent years throughout the struggle and you have this tremendous kind of love shown by somebody like Madiba, who after having spent twenty-five years in prison and comes out and still loves the people that did this terrible things to him, indicate that we are spiritual beings, you know. We have seen this all over the world.

MC: And can you sort of tell us about going back to 'Beyond Calvary' I mean how did people receive it?

RG: Ja it was interesting because you know this was again put on initially for the glitterati, you know the top people were there and with tremendous reception. One of the people that was there was Alan Paton. He was very, very impressed with it. So was Fatima Meer. But the papers ignored us, the newspapers, the White dominated newspapers ignored us and I think there was just one line

in Eight Point Print about this play, which was a conflict of religion that was being staged at this place. That is all and it wasn't a conflict of religion. Because I mean the play was a conflict of something deeper you know.

MC: And can you tell us about your second play?

RG: Now which was my second play? I had written quite a few. Ja I think one of the plays that I wrote at that time was a play called 'His Brother's Keeper.' It was based on the life of a singer called Eddie Gratino, who - my brother introduced me to him. He brought him along and said: "Look this guy is out on the streets and he is a nice guy. Can't we keep him at home?" I said: "Ja there is a spare room. Let him come and live there." And Eddie was actually an African guy who was pretending to be an American. You remember Eddie Gratino, who was pretending to be an American singer? I mean life was so terrible that people were running away from their identities, you see. One could hardly blame him. I knew this you know and of course the man was earning a living as a singer at the nightclub. He wasn't a particularly good singer but I mean you know at least he was living by it, he was earning. And I found this to be you know an interesting story, used some license and then the play 'His Brother's Keeper' emerged.

MC: So it was about the identity crisis?

RG: Ja.

MC: And can you tell us ...[intervention]

RG: Then of course the next one was – I don't know why they were all sort of biblical, at the time. The next one was "The First Stone". "The First Stone" was about, I think in a sense, male chauvinism in a way. Where this woman was accused of adultery with no real sort of evidence, and the child that came from this marriage suffered because the parents separated and the play was about that.

MC: And can you tell us about the Larney's Pleasure?

RG: Ja before the Larney's Pleasure I did - a Swami, which was based on the life of Swami Nishkalanandha, who was a storehand and he went to India to pursue Hinduism and became a Swami. You have to be initiated to be Swami, to being a Swami, to a RamaKrishna Centre, that is what he claimed when he came back. And he revolutionised Hinduism here, took it away from its ritual and showed that Hinduism was far more than just ritual. It is just the unity of all life and that the divine rests in every living creature. And he got tremendous support because he was a charismatic speaker, this guy. And one thing that struck me about him, was the fact that unlike other religious people, he appeared on Natal Indian Congress platforms and that appealed to me as a young man. What also appealed to me as a young man was he was also a driver; he could drive a car. You know he wasn't a recluse, a Swami who was right on top of some mountain cave or something like that. He

participated in life. And suddenly after he – and the other thing that he did was he gained the support of the worker section of the Indian community. Particularly the Gujarati business community, who had stayed aloof from the Hindu community and the rest of the working class Hindu community but he brought them all on board, got their support. And he bought this chalet in Avoca, turned it into a retreat where they practised yoga and that sort of thing you know at the RamaKrishna Centre and then there were accusations that suddenly he was womanising and all that kind of thing and he was abusing funds. And there was newspaper that carried out a, I think it was a vendetta, they attacked him and they exposed him as being a fake. That he wasn't really initiated as a Swami and one thing and another. And suddenly one day, I saw this strong man broken and crushed and this struck me, you know. And then I was editor of a newspaper called the Herald and I felt all this washing dirty linen in public was not good; it was a very exciting editorial. But the change in the man struck me and so I wrote this play called 'Swami'.

MC: And after that you?

RG: 'Larney's Pleasure', ja. I of course, I could see that in teaching the forces I mean or the regime was closing in on me because I was not teaching according the prescribed text you know. At training college I did a little play on Dingaan, where you know I challenged the notion that

Dingaan was a savage and heathen as portrayed in the history books. I said that he was a great king who stood by his people and so I taught this to the kids also you see. And of course the system didn't quite like that. They didn't like many other things also that I stood up against. And my days were numbered as a teacher.

So I got a job with the South African Breweries as a representative for the breweries. So it was during my job as a representative that I went along to this Indian bar in a White hotel, the Whitehouse Hotel in Mount Edgcombe and all the bars at that time were of course White, all the hotels were White. And they just had on the side a little grimy little pub, which was for Indians and Coloureds. Africans were not allowed on the premises at all to drink or anything like that. So I went into the Indian and Coloured section of the bar, called the barman and said: "Broe, where is the larney here. I want to introduce myself?" Larney, meaning the White boss, hey. Now the barman served two bars, there was partition, he served the Indian bar and on the other side he served the White bar. So he called Mr Souso, he was an archetypical Englishman, handlebar moustache, tweed jacket and permanent scowl on his face and he said to me and he looked at me through the partition, through the door there in the partition. And I said: "My name in Ronnie Govender from the South African Breweries. This is my first visit here and I would

like to introduce myself." And I put out my hand. My hand hung in limbo; he didn't take my hand. He looked at me and he walked off. Before he could walk off I turned to the barman and I said: "Broe, where is the tap here, maybe if I wash my hand he will shake it." You know, and he just looked at me and he walked away. I almost lost my job because that was my first visit there. And I wrote a play and that inspired me to write the 'Larney's Pleasure'.

MC: And can you sort of tell us a bit about the play? I mean the play itself how did you sort of tell the story about this incident?

RG: Ja you see I had gone there again and there was another incident coupled with this one that formed the basis for this play. There was a worker in overalls would come and I had gone in there just during lunchtime and there was nobody in the bar, just myself. I walked in and I did my usual things with the barman and all that, checked on the beer stocks and whatever. And then I ordered a braised chop. That hotel had a speciality for braised chop, and a pint of beer. And I was just about to tuck into it when this forlorn figure just walked in wearing overalls. From the moment he came in he was looking at me. You know he looked at me from the corner of his eyes and he was counting a few pennies. And I didn't look at him but I noticed his presence there and then he kept on counting these pennies you see. And the barman wasn't there at that

moment and then he looked at me again. And for a moment I looked at him and I felt a bit conscious of that and I carried on eating. Then the barman came and then he said: "Give me a glass of wine." And while the barman was pouring it out he looked at me again and at that moment I looked at him. And the look told me that he resented my looking at him. As if to say: "If I want to drink wine it is my business." And that is a line from the play. "You think you are big shot because you drinking beer or cane or whatever," that was the look. And that is another line from the play.

MC: And then I have seen in several newspapers when they describe ...[intervention]

RG: Sorry before I finish off with the 'Larney's Pleasure', are you still carrying on with the 'Larney's Pleasure'?

MC: No, go ahead.

RG: One of the lines, the last few lines of the play is; "One day White man, one day." That was written in 1972.

MC: Can you tell us the last line again?

RG: Ja the stranger comes into this bar and this figure Mothi, whose daughter has run away from home, he is a widower. His daughter has run away from home ostensibly with a young man who is a ne'er-do-well and he comes to the bar to drown his sorrows and drink. Because the police haven't been very helpful and as he grows increasingly drunk the conversation elicits laughter from the White side you see,

because they could hear through the partition. Then the larney is called in. The larney comes in, in his superior fashion and of course warns this guy not to speak so loudly and then of course, is drawn into this whole thing. And there is a kind of mocking of this man's miseries while ostensibly trying to give him some kind of help. And again it was this, the pleasure that the oppressors take from the misery of the oppressed while seeming to sort of patronise them you know - the larney's pleasure.

The stranger, the guy who comes in notices all this and he is a much more conscious kind of Black man and eventually something happens and there is an eruption. And the stranger warns the larney as he leaves the bar: "One day White man, one day."

MC: Now you have answered the question that I was about to ask you. And can you tell us about the play that you wrote after the 'Larney's Pleasure'?

RG: Ja I wrote, then in I think in about I wrote some other stuff. I am not quite certain what I had written but in 1984 the government sought to make a buffer of the Indian and Coloured communities because of the growing kind of resistance that was happening and growing unity of the oppressed masses. And so they sought to make a buffer of the Indian and Coloured communities by giving them an inferior parliament. And they thought that this kind of patronage would gain the support of these communities.

And alongside this while the media, the established media, played its role in supporting in a very, very subtle way more often than not in a subtle way. In other instances they were quite blatant in supporting the introduction of the Tricameral parliament. The government acted swiftly and banned leadership within the Indian community. They didn't ban the NIC at that time, but they banned the leaders. So that there would be very little conscientising of the people okay, if any. But of course, they reckoned without, I think, that the strong consciousness within this community. And I felt that the theatre would play a vital role in being part of this conscientising of the politicisation of the masses. The students rallied, particularly women in the trade unions rallied you know, they went out into the communities. And I wrote this play called 'Offside' because Rajbansi was a soccer referee. In which I lampooned Rajbansi and Pat Poovalingam and all those who supported the Tricameral parliament. The play proved to be very, very popular. It was musical comedy. It made them look like a bunch of jokers. And ...[intervention]

MC: Sorry, can you tell us the names that you used, the names of the characters?

RG: Buntrasy and Pookadinkum. Pookadinkum is not a very nice word in Telagu. [laughter] And so is Bantrasy, in Hindi.

MC: So or that was tit for tat Pookadinkum?

RG: Ja and Buntrasy. And of course, everybody knew who these characters were and thousands saw this. Thousands, literary thousands, it became part of the Campaign. And you know I mean one of the things that is unrecorded also doesn't seem to be taken into consideration as are other factors. Is that fact that I think the poll was a mere four percent which was the lowest for any election of its kind. Not only here compared to Buntustan elections, for any election of its kind in the world, remarkable. And this is another thing that makes me a little upset with Mbongeni Ngema when it is not understood that this community rallied like this when the call was made. It rallied also during the Passive Resistance Campaign. This is not to dismiss any kind of racism that there is in the community and this is racism that we within the community have fought ourselves. But I mean these things are obfuscated in the general run of things.

MC: And then you did a sequel to 'Offside'?

RG: Ja I did 'Inside' 'Offside' and then I did 'Inside.' And I tackled JN Reddy and other stooges also together with Rajbansi. This time by name of course you know quite clearly. It showed how, there was one scene there where P.W.Botha is ushered in. He meets the Indian community and he is put on a table and he is garlanded and so on and

we have this two clowns bowing to him on the floor, you know shining his shoes, and all that.

MC: And when you were doing these two plays you were not harassed or?

RG: Oh yes, I mean on the opening night I was harassed by a very familiar voice who threatened me that there would be – and I know this voice was behind the murder of two other people. One of whom would have been some kind of opposition to this guy. I think you know who I am talking about. And he threatened me something awful you know. And I told him: "Before you do all those things come along let's have a beer together and then you can do what you want to do." And of course, they grabbed my script and all that kind of thing.

MC: And they also lost some of the actors they suddenly quit? I am not sure but according to a certain newspaper one of the lead actors and actress she had to, she decided to quit. Was it because of harassment? According to the newspaper she quit because she had to write an examination or?

RG: Ja I would rather not go into that. I mean that is in the past now ja.

MC: Okay, so were there any people who were sort of trying to I mean did the police try to maybe arrest you or sort of bring up some charges, false charges?

RG: No I think I turned the thing the other way around. What happened was that I was threatened that I would never

enter Chatsworth again. The voice on the phone said: “You think the other people are your leaders hey. Billy Nair and George Sewpersadh are your leaders. You don’t know who your leaders are. You no put your foot in Chatsworth.” So meaning that of course – you know what had happened was that a lot of people got beaten up in Chatsworth for resisting this man, you know. So obviously this was on the cards. So what I did was I knew a policeman here at Sydenham, who was a policeman and I don’t think he was with the system. But he was a policeman just doing his duty. I think he was colonel;, he was a senior policeman at the time. So I said: “You know what, I am going to do my play in Chatsworth. I am doing it in an area that you know is pretty rough. The community centre and I just want my actors to be protected. Can you contact the Chatsworth police and tell them please, you know, patrol the area?” So they sent a carload of policemen. And these guys came, they came inside, they saw the play, they ended up enjoying the play, they laughed and laughed their guts out. And they were there every night.

MC: There is something that you just did a few minutes ago, the way you were imitating and it reminds me of something that I also read about some of your plays. The way you are so good in sort of directing your actors to portray certain mannerisms and speech of South Africans of Indian origin. I mean how did you learn that?

RG: Okay I think that is a very interesting question and that has stirred up a lot of controversy also. You see one of the things is that we had to tell the stories about ourselves, our own lives. And one had to transcribe on stage the way people, the speech patterns that were used by the people, etc. I mean this is done throughout. I mean JM Singh has written 'Riders to the Sea', which is written in very heavy Irish brogue and yet it is very lyrical on stage and it is understood, despite the fact that it is culturally specific. And you also have various plays written by Tennessee Williams and Arthur Miller, which reflect those kind of rhythms and speech patterns of different dialects.

Now I felt that we should talk as we talk on stage, you know. Of course I mean you know there are ways in which this is done. You don't take it literally doing that, you know trans-literal kind of thing. And that is a challenge. So we had worked on this before then and so the first play to do this was 'Larney's Pleasure', where I transcribed pator or the speech patterns of the so-called Indian community onto the stage. Now there is the laughter of identification and people come along, they identify immediately and you get laughter, laughter in the kind of the things that they recognize easily and the way they speak, etc, etc. Now this is different from ethnic ridicule. Now what has happened subsequently because of the success of the thing, this is why I resisted writing again after that you know

transcribing this because I just wanted this to settle a bit. And then you have people who saw that this could be a commercial success and they just went out and abused this what I think is a very powerful instrument on stage. And they appealed to the lowest common denominator, where you don't have the actual speech patterns and the rhymes, which are very beautiful. I mean if you go into an Indian home and an old lady tells you "I am only saying for a word." I mean and that is very beautiful. She is saying it in a way that not to offend you. It springs from the generosity of her culture and her being and she says: "Have tea and go." You know and they mean it. You go to an Indian home as I suppose you go into an African kraal and people will tell you partake of what is there and this is the beauty of so-called tribal life. You know, where people are close to the heart and close to people, you know ubuntu and that sort of thing and traditions of people. Which of course, have been impacted on by the alienated kind of western culture in a way, you know.

So what has happened is when things are taken out of context and used just merely as the lowest common denominator just to get laughs, then it is vulgar you see.

MC: Thank you, and Ronnie in 1987, you were invited to participate in a culture, in another South Africa conference in Amsterdam and you wrote a play for that. Can you sort of tell us about it, 'Blossoms from …'?

RG: ‘Blossoms from the Bough’. I had written the play before that. ‘Blossoms from the Bough’ was based on the life of a young lady called Lily Felito, who was an honours student in Speech and Drama at Natal University, and she was the common law wife of a fifth year medical student. And both of them were from Wentworth. And he was very politically involved and police had arrested him. And she was in a parlous state, I mean she couldn’t pay her rent. She was living in a flat in Overport, and this was brought to my notice and I helped her out you know, by paying a couple of month’s rent and all that. And she was interested in the theatre and I said: “All right let us talk about your life and your interest in theatre.” And she talked and I saw a play there, you see. And I based the story on her life – ‘Blossoms from the Bough.’ It was a one-person play. She did remarkably well and she got very good reviews for the play. And then I went overseas to represent COSATU in ‘Culture in Another South Africa’, amazing conference in Amsterdam, which was then the anti-Apartheid capital of the world. And this play was, you know - unfortunately I couldn’t take Lily Felito along, but I think it was the ambassador to Britain, I just forget her name. No Mbusu, no I forget her name. She did a reading from the play, at the conference.

MC: And can you tell us more about the conference, and the way people received the play?

RG: Oh ja. No, the conference went into all aspects of culture that existed within the South African situation and all the conditions that pertained to it you know. And it was a kind of aspirational thing; where do we go from here? That is why it was 'Culture in Another South Africa'. And of course, all of us who were cultural workers at that time participated in this. I think it was a landmark kind of conference internationally to focus on what was happening in terms of culture in South Africa and how in fact it was being manipulated to serve the regime and to serve an ideology. And what could be done to in fact foster a true South African kind of culture and initiatives were launched there and the cultural boycott was strengthened. And of course that was the forum to which internationally the cultural boycott gained the kind of support that it deserved.

MC: And can you tell us about the internationally acclaimed, 'At the Edge'?

RG: Ja one of the things about the conference of course, also was to declaim works that sought to represent either indigenous cultures or so-called South African Black culture you know. And we were pretty strong on those people. Even if they were from within the Black communities who went out in defiance of the cultural boycott and we brought this to the notice of the world to say that these people didn't really represent us. And one of the reasons, I mean one of the gangplanks of the cultural

boycott was that we did not ourselves respond to invitations from outside in order to defeat this co-option and patronage and that sort of thing. And this is one of the reasons why I was so upset with Welcome Msomi many years ago, when we started the cultural boycott. And Welcome of course was from the group that I started here the Shah Theatre Academy and then Mbatha was a particularly good play and he had received great notice when it went to England. Because it was for the first time it showed some aspects of Zulu culture, it was a translation of Macbeth into Zulu. And the play was acclaimed in London. But Welcome made the mistake of accepting an invitation by South Africa House, which now sought to tell the world that this is what we are doing for the Blacks in the country. And he broke the cultural boycott at that time. And I made my views very clear to him when he came back. I said: "You sold out on us." And of course that didn't endear him to me, and so when he held a Nelson Mandela concert I wasn't invited, understandably, ja. He invited Kessie Govender.

MC: And when did you write this play called 'At the Edge'?

RG: Look I had written stories after 1958 about Cato Manor. It was destroyed and as I said it had a traumatic impact on us and I remembered a wonderful district, wonderful people and then I wrote these stories and put them away. And in the eighties I collected them and then I looked at those

stories again and I said this would make I think a good play if I took four of the stories and dramatise them, which I did. And there was young Pat Pillay, who was at the university and I had noticed in one or two student productions, and I offered him the part. I had gone to Kessie of course, first and offered him the opportunity. He was busy at the time or for some reason he didn't do it. And I then got hold of Pat Pillay and he balked at it because he felt that it was too much of a challenge for him at that time, but eventually he accepted.

And the four stories were dramatised. The last story was 'Over my Dead Body.' It was a true story of a man who refused to leave his home and he said: "They would have to bulldoze my house over my dead body." And that play was based, or in fact all the stories there were based on real life events, real life people, although I did take some license in writing that play. And then the play was put on at the ML Sultan Canegrowers' Hall. Then of course I mean, you know, in terms of the boycott I had refused an invitation for 'Larney's Pleasure' to be put on at the Alhambra Theatre, although I was offered a lot of money then. Because I mean I refused to play under permit you see.

So in pursuance of that we kept away from these other institutions, which were now seeking to co-opt us and making attractive overtures for us to come and play there to give them some kind of respectability, you see. But I

said, 'No, we will continue playing in those makeshift theatres and places like that, even playing in the open etc. And then we played at ML Sultan and then John Slemin from the Baxter Theatre came over and saw the play, liked it very much and he invited us to Baxter. And I turned the invitation down because I said: " Look, Baxter is as far as I am concerned still part of the establishment." And he tried; he was at pains to tell me no it wasn't. And then of course the Peoples' Cultural Congress from the Cape were putting on a festival and it was I think, in the early nineties when there was a thawing of the boycott itself. Or a lot of grassroots organisations to get into some of these institutions and then to change them from within and they declared Baxter as a kind of kosher venue. And then I accepted the invitation and went along. And then I was invited to the – because the play did very well there. It got excellent reviews and it is quite ironic because up to this point here in Durban critics here, the White critics were not very kind to me for obvious reasons. They either ignored me or they didn't have very complimentary things to say.

Then I went, then in Cape Town I got these tremendous reviews and I got an invitation from the Grahamstown Festival, which hitherto I had boycotted.

MC: We will take a break.

RG: Okay.

END TAPE 1 SIDE B

RESUMPTION ON TAPE 2 SIDE A:

MC: We are back. Ronnie can you tell us about this play that you wrote, the title of the play is 'Your Own Dog Won't Bite You'?

RG: Ja. No, before we get to that, I think 'At The Edge' you know - so it will lead you to the other kind of questions that you ask. What happened was that I finally accepted an invitation to Grahamstown Festival and once more the play did very well and we got outstanding reviews and then we got invited to the Edinburgh Festival, which is like the dream for every sort of theatre person. But before we went there, while still at Grahamstown, the SABC asked for an interview and I agreed to an interview on condition that it was live. Hitherto I had boycotted the SATV and SABC. I threw them out of the Himalaya Hotel when they wanted to come and take a snippet from 'Inside' or 'Offside', one of the two plays. And they came in there assuming they were doing me a great kind of big favour, that sort of thing. And I said: "I won't appear on an Apartheid box," and threw them out. But this is the first time I was appearing on SABC so I said it must be live. So I went on live and then I told them what I thought of them and then I told them about my stories. And this is a wonderful thing about this country. There was an Afrikaner woman in her car in Pretoria who heard this interview and she immediately

decided that - she was small time publisher decided that she was going to publish my stories. She was trying to get hold of me for two years. Eventually, she got hold of me through Don Matera, because I was moving around all the time. I had given up my job by then and were doing a number of things. And she got hold of me and she said she wants to publish my stories and I said: “Read them first.” So I sent it across and she published it and then she told me that she is submitting it to the Commonwealth. I thought she was - I said it is a bit of a joke. And a month later I got notification that I had won a prize.

MC: How many of your stories did she publish?

RG: I think it was about twelve. I am not certain and that was ‘At the Edge’. And then we went to Edinburgh, where we got very good reviews, also.

MC: Yes, and when was this when you when the Commonwealth Writer's Prize?

RG: No that was much later after the book got published.

MC: After the book was published, okay. So about your play ‘Your Dog Won’t Bite You’?

RG; Ja there was a friend of mine, Ramesh Hassen, who I used him in ‘Inside’. He was a very good musician and singer and this called for Khawali type singing. Which is a type of religious Muslim singing but I used English words you see to give it that kind of heroic tradition that you have, this epic proportion that you have for generally Indian

films and that sort of thing. And he of course, was the narrator in the play. And I knew that this young man has got a lot of talent. And then he had some problems in his own life and he went away to Lesotho and he took up business there. And every now and then he would contact me and he says: “Please come over” and I would say: “Ja, one day I will come over.”

And then one day he phoned me and he said: “There is a ticket waiting for you at the airport. Pick it up. If you don’t want to use it, leave it.” So I had to go. He was a good friend of mine, so I went. And then we got to talking about things and during our conversation he said: “You know what, Ron,’ he says: “You know, it is all very well being artists and I am a singer and musician and all that and you being a writer and all that.” He says: “But you know money makes the world go round.” He says: “If you haven’t got money,” he is now quoting a Urdu saying: “If you haven’t got money, your own dog won’t bite you.” And I thought that was charming, you know.

And it stayed in my mind and then I wrote a play with this kind of idea in mind, called it ‘Your own dog won’t bite you.’ It was loosely a musical comedy sort of thing. I mean in our situation we could never really do musical comedies because it cost a lot of money. So it was very basic you know but I was surprised at the reaction. It was very successful. Now I have just been approached to do a film.

Which took me back to 1974 when 'Larney's Pleasure' was a hit and I turned down an invitation to London because of the cultural boycott. I believe had I gone to London the play might have been made into a film. And it would have preceded 'East is East' by three decades. It was pretty much the same kind of thing.

MC: And 'Your Own Dog Won't Bite You', can you sort of tell us about the story?

RG; Ja the story is about a wealthy transport tycoon who lives in this big posh, obscenely posh house in Reservoir Hills, with all the trappings of the nouveau riche, you know; red carpets and maroon curtains and green lounge suite or whatever. You could see that this man is – and of course his wife is a hypochondriac. And their son is one of those guys who has an independent frame of mind and his parents have something in store for him but he wants to lead his life at university and he meets this White girl. And this is about the time when again, there was change in the air in the country. And I think the laws were being - all the racial laws were being scrapped. And he meets this White girl who is Portuguese. And of course, there is this conflict and that forms the basis of the play. The mother is not very happy about it and he wants to pursue his own thing.

MC: And how did the public receive the play?

RG: Ja it was pretty successful I mean you know it enjoyed huge support, box office support from the people. I didn't

expect that. Ja I did it more as a tongue-in-cheek thing. Just because of what Ramesh told me and at that time there was a little bit of change and things like that, so.

MC: So you didn't experience problems? Maybe certain people saying that it has racial connotations or?

RG: Ja. No you know I had my detractors not only within the White critical tradition but also within the Indian critical tradition. And it is interesting to note that it comes from another playwrite, who was also a theatre critic at the time, very interesting. And then he felt that I was being racist by portraying the White girl in unflattering terms. I had always believed that I think to disabuse peoples' minds and I did this in the 'Larney's Pleasure'. When I talked about, you know, White people also smell if they don't go and bath, you know. If you don't have ablution facilities and you don't bath and you don't bathe White girls will also smell. And one of the characters in my play says: "Our girls don't smell like the White girls because our girls bath in running water." One of the characters say that. Now this is not racist in that sense but I mean it just goes to show that if you don't bathe and you don't follow the rules of hygiene it doesn't matter whether you are white, brown, pink or whatever. Naturally you won't be hygienic and I did the same with this girl. Not because she was White but as a person. I mean I don't believe – one of her flaws was that she wasn't very hygienic. And so that was it and that

caused a bit of a tension between the two lovers, you see, which I think might have been corrected later on. So this was taken as a huge big thing and suddenly Ronnie Govender is a racist.

MC: And how did you use this line in the play 'Your Own Dog Won't Bite You'? How did you use it in the play?

RG: For god's sake I can't even remember right now.

MC: Okay and can you tell us about this play that is here in Durban even up to now people are still talking about it?

RG: 1949?

MC: 1949.

RG: Ja it was a further dramatisation of four more stories from the book. One of the stories is '1949' and it deals with the so-called riots. You know of course, it was anti-Indian; the violence was anti-Indian. And as I had indicated earlier, it was stirred up by other forces for obvious reasons. But the centre piece of the story of course, the central character of the story of course, Dumisani who lived with this Indian family and this is based on a true story and he eventually gave his life in an attempt to save this family. And I believe quite sincerely that there were lots of African people who stood by their Indian friends and neighbours during the violence and some of them gave their lives. Of course in all types of mob violence reason doesn't hold sway but I think the human spirit rises to the fore in many

instances. It may be isolated but it rises to the fore and it did so in this instance when Dumisani gave his life.

MC: So I mean how do people I mean receive this play up to now?

RG: Again I am very happy with the fact that we received exceptional reviews both here and in Cape Town. And I must say that the young lady who plays the role who is the one-person presenter of the play, Jayloshi Naidoo is exceptionally talented as was Pat Pillay and Charles Pillay and Leander Reddy. Many people wondered at why I used a female to replace a male in this role. And in fact that this female had to play a range of characters both male and female and where people were sceptical about her stepping into what was seen as a male kind of thing. And I had no qualms about it because I didn't approach it from a gender-based approach. And she lived up to it and she is an amazing actress, very talented.

MC: And back in the seventies, there was a time when you stopped writing plays for about two years before your other twelve year break. Can you tell us about the two years break? I mean according to certain people you stopped because you were disappointed of certain things I mean from your colleagues.

RG: [laugh] Ja. I don't know whether we should go into that but anyway you know, what happened was I was disenchanted because we were involved in forming a group that would

talk about our lives, would propagate theatre that talked about our lives, that was South African. And our ethos was profound, therefore. You know we were up against the regime, a powerful, you know, oppressor who had infiltrated into all aspects of our life and so theatre was an important aspect that we had to foster and nurture. And right in the midst of that you know, you had personality conflicts creeping in, personal ambitions, careerism. And it was ruthless too, in the sense that some of my work was plagiarised by the very people that I had trained. And when I saw this and I saw conflict looming on personal level I said no I am not going to allow my energies to be dissipated in personal conflicts. And I just withdrew from this kind of looming conflict to engage in issues that were I think far more important. And I felt that I just had to stay out of theatre. I was personally disillusioned also. I must admit that.

MC: Will you describe yourself as a protest playwrite. I mean a writer of protest theatre?

RG: Very much so, but not in the way the word 'protest' is perceived. Not in the way – I am a political writer, but not in the way the word the politics is perceived in this country. And these terms were defined by a regime that wanted to give it certain convenient connotations, you know. I mean there have been protest and political plays from time immemorial. I mean if you go back and you look

at the works of Tulsidas and coming right down to Shakespeare they were all politically based, and they deal with conflicts. They deal with things that sensitive minds perceived as being wrong, even if they are right, you know, these things are profound issues generally. I mean some classic examples I mean Richard III was political, Henry IV by Shakespeare was political and then of course the 'Crucible' by Arthur Miller was political. Gunther Grasse in Europe a political play, nearly every writer he is informed by the entire aspect of life, and politics plays a very important part in life. I mean it sets the price of bread, the price of bread is set in parliament you know. And educationally, the kind of education that you receive is decided in parliament, that sort of thing. So you know our lives are political in that perspective. So it is not political in a narrow, parochial sense where it is like a little power struggle. And I would be unhappy if people didn't call me a political writer in that sense of the word. But not in the sense of the word that it is narrow and parochial and it is one-dimensional. That means that you get your characters to be cardboard characters who are there just merely as figures of propaganda. Whether your cause is right or wrong. I think the artist has a responsibility to see that his play lives in all the dimensions. That once you create a character on stage that, that character is three-dimensional. You put him there with

all his frailties, with all his faults and everything, even if he is saying the most profound truth. Like in my play 'At the Edge', in the one story 'Over My Dead Body', the chief protagonist there, Thunga Padayachee is not a saint. I mean he is the man who has diddled the books of the football association while he was a treasurer, and he did that sort of odd little thing to survive. But when the call came, at a certain time, the nobility in him arose and he stood up against the system. So he wasn't a one-dimensional character who was all good and all lily-white you know and then therefore a cardboard character. He was three-dimensional. So I am a political writer from that perspective ja.

MC: And before 1990, how will you describe, I mean although - maybe with some of these people that I am going to mention you didn't work with, but they were writing plays that were sort of about life?

RG: The political situation in South Africa?

MC: Ja about the political situation. So how would you describe living at the same time as those people? People like Mbongeni Ngema, Winston Ntshona, John Kani, Athol Fugard and maybe...?

RG: Ja okay, Mbongeni Ngema came a little later, but before then of course there was Athol Fugard and then of course, there was Kente, Gibson Kente in the townships.

MC: And Kessy Govender?

RG: Kessie Govender came later, much later. He emerged from the theatre group that I had, you know.

MC: Yes.

RG: At that time of course you know theatre as I said was appropriated by the regime. It served the purpose of supporting the system, Euro-centric theatre. I mean even Shakespeare was appropriated in the cause of theatre at that time. And we felt that there was no South African theatre and Athol Fugard I think had at about the same time had started his Serpent Players plays at Port Elizabeth and we had started our Shah Theatre Academy here. And we were working separately but I think the feeling was common and in Cape Town you had the Space Theatre and in Johannesburg you had Dorkay House. And we were all working separately but the feeling was almost the same. That we had to now talk about, we had to now create theatre that reflected our lives. And when I say that we must understand that at that time what was happening was that the political realities as were all other South African realities were totally ignores by writing and by theatre and by culture at that time. Because it was all sort of manipulated you see. And we felt that we had to then reflect our lives honestly and sincerely and that meant that we had to reflect political realities of life. Whether you were white, brown or whatever you know. And the political realities were such that it affected every aspect of our lives

of this country. Even if you wrote about those things that seemed to be non-political, so-called non-political. In some way or the other because life was so extensively affected by Apartheid it was inevitable that you would reflect on that. And so we wrote from that perspective. And as I said we didn't write one-dimensional propaganda stuff. We wrote about people caught up in this vicious system and I know it affected their lives from day one. And of course Fugard was writing his work, at that time, and he approached it from the same perspective; and other people also. And then John Kani and Winston Ntshona, of course, collaborated with Fugard in I think 'Sizwe Banzi is Dead.' And then there was a Black Union Theatre Festival in Durban, which was staged by the Biko group, BC, Black Consciousness Group with Saths Cooper and Strini Moodley and Steve Biko and other great figures. And they held the South African Black Theatre Festival, and I presented a one-act version of 'Larney's Pleasure' alongside 'Sizwe Banzi is Dead' at that time. It is a pity that, that festival has died because I think it was an important festival and it should have continued.

MC: Tell me Sir, were you ever arrested?

RG: Ja, no I was – what had happened was that I was certainly harassed. They had visited my home a number of times and they had threatened me and took away stuff from my place, etc. I suppose I escaped arrest and all that because I was

not directly politically involved, you know, as were say my other colleagues, at the time.

MC: And I mean, what do you think, at that time or now, what do you think about capitalism or socialism?

RG: Ja I think what informs my work is the plight of ordinary people and when you write about ordinary people it is inevitable you take into cognisance the political realities that impact on the lives of those people. And you know I think, essentially, I subscribe to the fundamentals of socialism. I mean it is not that socialism has failed, not at all. I mean capitalism has failed us all these years. I mean there is mass poverty out there, globalisation is growing apace and it is serving the convenience of again, a few people, a few wealthy people. And so - but it is inevitable that socialism will I think eventually extend all over the world. I think it will come into place because capitalism has already failed us. I mean if you look at - throughout the world the great amount of poverty. I think about four fifths of this world is living in poverty.

MC: And when we go back maybe a bit to religion. There was a time when you were a Gandhian, the religion that you sort of followed?

RG: Ja you know, I hate these kind of categories and things like that, and this cult kind of things. You know, there were many wonderful things that Gandhi gave to us. There were also some of the things that I am critical of. I mean, I think

if you look at the mess that is in India now as a result of the partition, and this was a mistake. And as great a man as Gandhi was, in many ways I mean, I think you know, one can be critical of him in that regard. And also I mean his early years in South Africa, he was not a saint. I mean there are people in the Transvaal, Tamil people in the Transvaal, who don't want to hear the name of Gandhi at all. Because they feel that he used them as a young Gujarati lawyer who had come into the country. That doesn't mean that, later on in life, he didn't become a great man. He became a very great man. I mean who says that great people are not human beings.

MC: Thank you. Sir, can you tell me, I mean do you sort of consider yourself as an activist or was there a time when you sort of considered yourself as an activist or where people described you as an activist?

RG: Ja I guess so, in a sense. I mean again, I wasn't sort of directly politically involved and I admire those tremendous people who had done so, given their lives, etc. You know therefore, when little things like the fact that I am not known outside of South Africa, as a result of the cultural boycott, that does not trouble me at all. That is a small sacrifice compared to the fact that people have lost their lives in the struggle.

MC: You were also involved in sports in such a way that you sort of encouraged people?

RG: As a result of my sort of writing about the division that existed in Black sport, and then in the early years, and then encouraging those people. You know, I was sued once, sued by ironically, by somebody within the struggle. Because in my efforts to bring about integrated football I had libelled somebody who had been obstructionist, you see. That is history now. I almost lost my job as a teacher and everything at that time, as a young man. And then I got involved in sport itself. I was drafted into it when people insisted that I join them and I became an executive member of the South African Soccer Federation. And then we assisted in the formation of the South African Council on Sport or became one of the foundation members of South African Council on Sport. And then we introduced professional football, which integrated for the first time all the different Black groups and also had some White players involved in this, you know. And that part of our history is unfortunately, not documented. There were some heroes of the struggle people like Dan Twala from the Transvaal, as I said Ramori Lutchman who was the founding father of non-racial sport; and RK Naidoo, many, many great people. SL Singh in the old days, George Singh, Charles Pillay, great people.

MC: Were you involved in the boycotts in sports?

RG: Very much. In the cultural boycott we were part of it; we implemented it. We started the whole cultural boycott here I think; Curries Fountain was where it started from.

MC: Okay, and who were your role models in the struggle against Apartheid?

RG: Again this word 'role model' doesn't sit too easily with me but there were great people, tremendous people. Because there were many people who were nameless you know - I mean, who are not even thought of, at this time. I mentioned to you this man who was no saint himself, Thunga Padayachee who stood up to the system. There were people like Soobiah; who was a trade unionist; whose name I think, will not be there in the books, but a great man. People like that who inspired me. And I am not saying of course that there aren't other great people. I mean Chief Albert Luthuli. I used to stand there I remember in Red Square and listen to this man, listen to the deep sincerity and profound wisdom of a truly great South African leader. A man of tremendous compassion and, I think, that we have been fortunate to have had leaders like that in this country. And then there was young Billy Nair, a real firebrand, trade unionist who was fearless, absolutely fearless. Nothing held him despite the fact that there was jackboot repression; Monty Naicker; Doctor Goonam, great people.

MC: And Sir, can you tell us about the time when you packed your bags and took your family with you to Cape Town,

and when you got a job at the Baxter Theatre as the marketing manager? Can you tell us about that time? What happened?

RG: Ja, I was promoted to sales manager of South African Breweries, and then I said life is becoming a bit of a dead end now. Although there weres promotions in the offing, and as a writer you know, there was this kind of restlessness within myself. And also you know, I felt I wasn't participating enough in life around me. And I quit and I bought a little run-down restaurant called 'Aquarius Restaurant', formed a little theatre there, which I let out to township groups particularly, and I used to go and work in Kwa Mashu. At that time, the Black on Black violence was at its height. And I used to work with kids in churches and things like that doing resistance theatre. And that was a time in my life when this violence really upset me. I would work with about ten kids and suddenly one kid wouldn't pitch up and I would ask where is the kid and nobody knew. And because she wore a Mandela shirt or a T-shirt or something - and that was it in a place like Kwa Mashu.

And of course, my theatre then was used by the University of Durban-Westville also, as a community outreach thing. And once more the restaurant was doing well financially, and I felt that it was a kind of encumbrance and I needed to get away from that, just not making money, and when my play went to Cape Town I was offered a position as

marketing manager. And I found it attractive because I would be associated with the theatre, you know. I took on the job and worked there until I was offered this job here at Playhouse Theatre, as director.

MC: And can you describe, maybe, the atmosphere here at the Playhouse at that time and the atmosphere at Baxter when you were the marketing manager at Baxter and the director here? What atmosphere I mean…?

RG: Ja, you see the Baxter was quite anxious to do work that would include all South Africans because I mean hitherto large sectors of South African communities were excluded, they were anxious to do that. But I mean people were so disadvantaged, at this time that I couldn't just step into the breach, so you had to be part of a development process, you know. And that has been the problem because I mean you haven't really had capacity for that kind of thing and you know theatre and culture particularly you couldn't have a kind of crash course in this sort of thing, you have to nurture it. And they played a part in that and we set certain initiatives in motion at Baxter Theatre, and I felt that, that was important. But it was at the end of the day, theatre must also survive and you had to do that with carefully measured kind of work that you were doing. You know, commercial work to subsidise that kind of effort, and we brought that. We introduced those sort of things. And when we got here to Playhouse Theatre, Playhouse has

already set that in motion. And the irony was when I came to the Playhouse Theatre I remember having engaged those very people in those years, when we boycotted the Playhouse, we formed the Natal Culture Council and we boycotted the Playhouse. And I had engaged with some of those people, some of whom remained on the board and that sort of thing, and that is a great thing about South Africa, you know, during the change we were inclusive. And although people came from different kinds of mindsets, they weren't excluded; they were included. They were included and allowed the room to change. And I was very happy that I was part of this whole process now to bring about this kind of thing. Especially the developmental aspects of things and to change the demographics you know, and that grew apace. And also, one of the challenges in the Playhouse was that you know, funding now there were other priorities and that is of course understandable. Because you had immense prior, you know immense disadvantage in the country and housing and that sort of thing and creation of jobs and all that, education; the changing of education system and all that needed tremendous resources. So it was inevitable that culture wouldn't be one of the top priorities, you know performing arts council. So the grants were lessened and we had now to find our own way. And that is ironic in a sense because the previous people there had all that

tremendous amount of money to spend and they brought out all these second grade artists from overseas to defeat the boycott.

And we started the developmental process here and one of the things that we did was in getting our own revenues. And I recall that we succeeded by increasing the earnings of the Playhouse by forty percent. You know generating funds, its own fund, by forty percent. It is a sad thing now that, that seems to have stopped.

MC: And during this time I mean with your work, plays, harassment, your positions Kamala, your wife and your children how did they feel about this? I mean were they supportive?

RG: I had a very, very supportive family. I mean thank god, I mean they put up with my excesses in life, and I think to a great extent my recklessness also. I mean when I quit jobs in midstream and things like that you know, I mean it impacts on a family, whether you like it or not, and this constant moving about also. But they have been very, very supportive, particularly my wife and ja.

MC: And as a playwrite/director, I mean. was there a time when you were acting or did you act in some of your plays?

RG: No, no I have never acted because I believe you must do anything that you choose you must do it properly. I didn't have the time for that kind of thing. So I mean playwriting and directing, which I just got drawn into at a certain

stage, I have always sort of valued the challenge of playwriting and I wanted to give it my best shot, you see.

MC: So you are a creator not a performer?

RG: Well I think a performer creates also, ja.

MC: So, can you tell us about your work at the Theatre Alliance of Natal?

RG: Ja, no during that time as I said, when we fought Apartheid within the theatre we got together, all the different groupings in Natal that were opposed to racism in theatre. So that we could have a common sort of objective and pool our strengths and we formed the Theatre Alliance of Natal.

MC: And your work as the vice president of the Natal branch of the South African Writers?

RG: Ja the Congress of South African Writers. Ja during the early eighties we realised a need for an organization,. because you had organisations within the country that were racial, you had writers organisations and things like that. And we felt it was about time that we had mass based organisation and of course, which was non-racial and it advanced the cause of oppressed people, particularly writers. And we formed the Congress of South African Writers. We formed that in Gauteng and then the Natal branch, we launched here.

MC: And Sir, tell me before 1990 again when you were involved in these positions and organisations did you have a chance to meet other writers from around Africa and maybe India

people like Salman Rushdie, Chinua Achebe, Ngugi Wa Thiong'o?

RG: No, we were prevented from bringing over some of the people. One of the people that we were prevented from bringing over was Salman Rushdie. Of course, we were prevented from doing that by so-called fundamentalists, because of his book 'Satanic Verses.' It is a great pity, because I mean you know Salman Rushdie remains a giant of literature, and he would have, I think, done a lot. His presence in the country would have done a lot, not only just to inspire disadvantaged writers themselves, but to bring new perspectives, you know, to writing, etc. And also to, I think, we need that kind of excitement because if you compare writing or culture to sport and you see the amount of support that sport gets and very little support for the arts and culture. And so we need that kind of personality to come over and refocus.

Ja but we met other people like [Kole] Omatoso, you know the Yebo man - telephone, ja he is based in the Transvaal now. There were several other such people that came over.

MC: And can you tell us about your job here at the University of Durban-Westville, as the resident director at the University of Durban-Westville Asoka Theatre?

RG: Ja this is a bit of a sore point. I believe that the Asoka Theatre could have been a very, very integral part of the move to foster a South African non-racial theatre, in being

a truly community based theatre. Sadly, this didn't happen. You know, I am angry at that. I am angry at that, because there was this opportunity for the Asoka Theatre, with all its facilities, to be truly community based. And you know, you have this kind of situation in other countries, where the university is not separated from the people. It is not seen as a kind of elitist pursuit out there. Unfortunately, there was this ethos that was reigning here at University of Durban-Westville. When people felt that this was some kind of elitist kind of institution. It would have served a far greater purpose, and it would have achieved far more if it had placed itself squarely within the community. It is a sorry chapter, and I think something that needs to be researched for reasons so that we don't make the same mistakes again. We don't give in to careerism, and you know all those kind of negative approaches to things. Those are public facilities, belonging to the people they don't belong to a few people who have some fancy notions of themselves, you know. I am sorry if that sounds harsh but that is the way it is.

MC: So you are not happy with the way things…?

RG: No I am not happy with the way it was run.

MC: And when was this? Was this during the eighties or…?

RG: The laws of libel prevent me from going any further.

MC: Okay, and how did the unbanning of all political organisations in 1990 affect you and your family?

RG: Oh truly inspiring moment in our lives. We never thought that in our lifetime the change would be so dramatic. And without any, without dropping any names I remember having gone up to Zimbabwe, I think for some conference – Harare - and having met with some of our leaders at that time. Of course, my friend Wally Serote and Kosisela, the poet and together with Joe Slovo – not Joe Slovo – ja we met Joe Slovo, but not so close. Thabo Mbeki, and when Thabo said good bye to us, he came on to the apron of the airport and we got into the plane it was a stirring moment because he hugged every one of us and there was deep emotion. At that moment, none of us knew that we would see change within our lifetime and here were our comrades who were cut off from the country of their birth, out there, and never thought that they would one day come into the country and when this happened. Of course it was like a miracle.

MC: And so from the time when you were young, which political organisations did you sort of support?

RG: Oh, the ANC always. I mean there is no doubt about it. I am not a card-carrying member of the ANC. As a writer, I believe that one, you know, shouldn't be, but I have supported not the ANC, but the things that the ANC has stood for. And the African National Congress has brought forth leadership, I think, unparalleled in the history of oppressed people. I mean there have been tremendous

figures all over the world. In India you have had these tremendous leaders, but consistently in South Africa, you have had these people of tremendous foresight and deep compassion. And that is why I think, we need a kind of optimism for the country despite all the problems that there are.

MC: And Sir, why do you think the National Party agreed to negotiate before 1994?

RG: Ja I think it was largely because resistance now had assumed immense proportions. We had succeeded in gaining the support of the world and it was a slow process in itself. And of course, military struggle was being heightened and you had the sanctions; economic sanctions, which were biting; and it was inevitable that the monolith had to crack. Because, even within the monolith, people saw the writing on the wall. And it is a good thing that they saw it too because we mustn't totally discount that you know. Because they could have been foolhardy and stupid and gone the whole hog and stood their ground and it could have lead to the kind of blood letting again unparalleled in the world because we had all the elements of racial, of a cataclysmic racial war. So it is fortunate too, that some of them saw the writing on the wall. And they only saw the writing on the wall of course after the pressure that was put on them but the fact is that they saw

it and we had this coming together of these different opposites.

MC: Okay so we pause now just to turn the cassettes.

END OF TAPE 2 SIDE A

RESUMPTION ON TAPE 2 SIDE B:

MC: Okay we are back. Mr Govender, can you tell us about your brother who was one of the pioneers in drama?

RG: Ja I think this was the fifties, late fifties, early sixties, I am not sure when he was taken over, he was invited to come to Johannesburg. He was headhunted by a big game hunter called Bob Chrisp who had a newspaper called 'Egoli.' It was the first sort of newspaper aimed at the Black leadership in Johannesburg and he wanted some top Black journalist along, so he offered this job to Gonnie. He was then barely twenty, I think. Took him overseas, took him and he was showing signs of a journalist, capable journalist on the Leader. So they took him to Jo'burg and then Bob Chrisp sold Egoli to Jim Bailey and Jim Bailey then introduced the Drum Magazine and Gonnie was one of the pioneers on Drum Magazine. He wrote two early stories, which I remember. The one was the Crimson League Gang, the first sort of analytical piece on crime in Black sector. And then he followed this up with a story on the exploitation of sugar workers on the sugar plantations and he went along to workers who worked both on Indian owned and White owned sugar plantations. This incurred

the wrath of some of those people. But Gonnie was a fearless journalist.

And then he wrote the story on Sharif Khan, which almost cost him his life. And one of his colleagues, of course, was Nthi Khumalo, who was a fearless journalist himself, and Nthi was killed by gangsters - still in Jo'burg. But Gonnie was always outspoken and he spoke out against the unequal salaries. Then Jurgen Shaderberg was a young rookie journalist who had just come out of East Germany. He ran away from communist East Germany, Eastern Europe and he came here and embraced the capitalist world in Johannesburg and he rose in the ranks and Gonnie, of course, fought against the unequal pay for Black journalists, all Black journalists, whether you were Kant Tembal or Henry Khumalo or Bob Ghasani, you were paid a lesser wage than the White journalists and Gonnie fought against this. This of course, brought him up against the proprietors and once more Gonnie quit. Because I mean, it was getting him nowhere. And it didn't endear him to those people.

And so you see, when you read the history of the Drum magazine now, you don't see the name of Gonnie Govender, although he was one of those people who had set the Drum on its feet.

MC: And when you were working here in Durban as a journalist, did you get a chance to work with people like Nat Nakasa, before he moved to Johannesburg?

RG: No, I didn't particularly work with Nat Nakasa, but I knew of all these great figures and I mean the great Black journalists at the time and Ken Temba was one of those people you know, I have always respected immensely, because I believe that Ken Temba was not just a journalist, he was also a writer of great ability, you know.

MC: And according to certain newspaper articles, in your plays there has always been sort of a theme behind or something about Cato Manor. I mean you have this passion about Cato Manor. And people like Ken Temba like some of his articles he had this passion about Sophia Town?

RG: Ja.

MC: Was this a trend of the seventies and eighties, to write?

RG: Well inevitably, I mean I think all sort of sensitive people, particularly writers I think, felt very strongly about the way communities were destroyed by Apartheid, you know. Although I mean, those communities were very much a product of Apartheid itself in the sense that they were poor communities and segregated communities. Because if it hadn't been for that segregation South Africans would have found themselves, all race groups would have found themselves. And I think there would have been a meeting of those cultures a long time ago. We wouldn't have had all

these kind of racial strife that we have today. But despite that I mean - you know we have all had this sense of belonging to those places. That is inevitable because I mean you know that is human nature to be close to your hearth. And when your hearth gets destroyed, especially by foul means like this you know, the pain is one that endures. It doesn't just go away.

MC: Are there any plays that you wrote, but maybe some people advised you not to continue with the directing or producing those plays? Are there any plays that you, wrote but they were never published or you were asked to forget about it? Or it was such that it would be too dangerous for you?

RG: No. I wouldn't listen to people anyway if they did try to do that. I mean I would just go ahead and write what I wanted to write. But I think you also have a responsibility. I mean the written word is not worth anything if it is not read and no matter how severe the censorship I think there is a challenge for the writer not to abandon I think the truths of life. There is always a way in which one could I think write about those things. You know it has got to be a pretty all-encompassing kind of censorship for you not to be able to get through what you want to write about.

MC: And what do you think here in South Africa we can do to do something? Like in Cape Town they tried to do something about District Six? So what do you think…?

RG: Yes it is about time we had that here in Cato Manor. Unfortunately, Cato Manor was the first and largest district to be destroyed by the Group Areas Act. The Group Areas Act was, I think, preceded by - it was a natural kind of sequel to the Pegging Act, which I said, was aimed largely at the Indian community here. You had one hundred and eighty thousand people, many of whom, most of whom owned their own houses, which they had slaved for, like my grandfather and my father. They slaved for, and they owned their own properties, which unfortunately, the very poor people in Sophia Town and District Six, were mostly tenants. But having said that, I mean you know, the destruction of any sort of community, is not warranted. So but the Cato Manor people owned their piece of ground and that was just taken away from them. You know, they were paid peanuts. The Department of Community Development was described then as the biggest land and estate agency in the world and a pretty ruthless one also, because they paid those people peanuts. You know the years in which they put into that, and all that.

But now what has happened is that one kind of wrong seems to have been followed by another. You had this gloriously named Cato Manor Development Association that has been set up so far funded by the European Union and having a lot of White beaurocrats coming in who have absolutely no idea of the history of Cato Manor. I have

tried every now and then to bring it to their notice but I fail miserably and now recently they have been making some few tentative gestures. But the whole history of Cato Manor has been destroyed to the extent that you know all that has been alluded to is you know exploitative Indian landlords. They say that this was the cause, main cause of the 1949 riots. That is the only illusion to the glorious history of Cato Manor. I mean that is a total outrage, you know. There is no reflection on the way that working class people struggled, worked hard, slaved, built their little houses there, and then formed a viable community and contributed immensely to I think the economy of Natal. Apart from having been sugar workers, etc, etc I mean later on by their own bootstraps I said provided their own education. You had teachers, lawyers, doctors and businessmen emerging. People from all walks of life, political cadres of the best - you know.

There were lost of people who were involved in the Passive Resistance Campaign. You have, had George Sewpersadh who was president of Natal Indian Congress, like I said RB Naidoo, Billy Peters, Subbiah, you know a number, people who made a valuable contribution. And they were true South Africans and then you have the CMDA in all its arrogance referring to just that one little incident, saying that there were exploitative Indian landlords, and that is why you had the 1949 riots. Yes, there were exploitative

Indian landlords; there were exploitative landlords of all race groups. I mean you know a businessman is not exploitative because he is Indian, you know. There are good businessmen and bad businessmen. So but the CMDA also has neglected in redeveloping Cato Manor to go back into the history and for its architecture and things like that to be informed by that glorious history that has just been wiped out. And to me that is very sad. In District Six you have the museum, which is a wonderful thing but not in Cato Manor. And European Union funding I mean, you know, is available, they must have said that they don't want the money. I think they must just have totally different perspectives.

MC: So in your future projects maybe plays, are you planning to do some more about Cato Manor?

RG: I don't know. I mean you know, I am not a young man anymore [laughter]. I will write.

MC: And can you tell us about this play that you wrote, "Facing the North West" about Richard Rive?

RG: Ja Richard Rive. Richard Rive was a great writer and met a very, very tragic end. And he was one of those Black South Africans, at that time, who did us proud with his writing. And I felt it was a fascinating story, and I was in Cape Town at that time you know, when his trial, it was a trial taking place. And I felt we should try and at least capture the life of this man on stage, and I wrote this play. Why I

laugh is, I went back many years later and I saw a similar play, very similar to the one but my play was of course copyrighted. And they have asked me to think of re-doing it.

MC: When did you see this similar play?

RG: Many years later after I did my play and it was [laughter] - we had rather not go into that. We will talk about it some other time.

MC: And so you also wrote another play Nxo History?

RG: Yes I wrote that a long time ago when this 'Release Mandela Campaign' was at its height. You know of course, people like Paul David and all were doing some wonderful work despite the jackboot repression, the face of jackboot repression to launch this campaign and Paul approached me to write a little play and I said I'd gladly write something and I wrote 'Nkozi's Dream', which was based on this story of this Xhosa, I think Xhosa lady. I think she was a princess, I am not sure about that. And that was a part of history that reflects just how manipulative the system was. Because the eastern frontier, so-called eastern frontier, presented a challenge to the White penetration and they couldn't penetrate the eastern. Because the people really; they resisted White penetration. And the only way they could do that is to, I think, exploit superstition and in this dream this person tells this person that the ancestors had advised her that if they burn the crops and bury the cattle

the spirits would drive the White people into the sea. And that is when these people became initiated as a fighting force. And that actually happened in history. So I wrote this play around that.

MC: So the other play - but you said it was not finished; the other play about the people who were hiding political figures were hiding at the British embassy. So you were planning to write a play about that?

RG: Ja.

MC: And what happened?

RG: You know, I think it was a question of time, more than anything else. And that play I felt had to be put on within a certain amount of time because it was very topical, you know. And I just couldn't do it. I mean I was involved in so many things myself at the time, and I couldn't fit it in.

MC: Can you tell me who is, like your favourite writer in this world?

RG: I don't have a particular favourite, but I mean you know there are tremendous writers all over the world whom I really enjoy. Dumutsho Marachera, a young writer but would have been one of Africa's greatest writers. He had this tremendous way with words. He died, I think at the age of twenty-three, and he had produced some great stuff. Then of course, there is Arundhati Roy in India, a tremendous writer. But all along, throughout the years, Arthur Miller has been one of my, you know - one of those

people that I have always admired. Tennessee Williams, great writers and of course, you know writing, Shakespearean writing, Salman Rushdie, the poems of Salman Rushdie, Philip Roth, as a novelist. Philip Roth is one of the greatest novelists that I have read. And for some very light reading on the odd occasion, I read [David] Grisham, this guy wrote this action thing called 'The Client' it was very nice. But I don't have any particular favourite.

MC: From these writers that you have just mentioned, do you have a favourite line; or a favourite quote; or a favourite paragraph; or poem that you can recite to us from their work? Something that sort of inspires you?

RG: Not off-hand, not off-hand, sorry.

MC: Okay. So amongst all your plays, and I know this is a very difficult question, some people are saying it is like asking someone to chose his favourite child, so amongst all your plays, which one is your favourite?

RG: No I don't have any favourites. I mean ja you are right, in that sense, because you know it is almost like giving birth.

MC: So you don't have a play - sometimes from the pays that you published you find yourself sometimes reading it again and again?

RG: No not particularly no, no.

MC: And do you have like a favourite line or quotation or title from your plays that you can recite for us?

RG: No I am afraid not.

MC: And what were your hopes for the country when the negotiations started in 1990?

RG: Nineteen?

MC: In 1990, what were your hopes for this country?

RG: Well obviously, like every other South African, we were hoping that Nelson Mandela would be released; and that the ANC would be unbanned; and exiles to return to the country. I mean that was our main hopes. And of course, every one of us living under the yoke of Apartheid, well we couldn't imagine what it would be like - wanted desperately for all those terrible laws to be repealed.

MC: And I mean have these hopes been realised?

RG: Many of them have been, many of them have been, but one of the things, of course, is that there is such tremendous poverty in the country. And therefore the struggle is not really over. If you think in terms of the huge kind of struggle in the country, you know, the poverty that there is. But you know, there has been some kind of movement where clean water for the first time is provided in areas where it was never been provided before; electricity also to people who have never had electricity; sanitation to some extent. And also when I was asked this question on the BBC when I went to collect my prize; the Commonwealth Writer's Prize for the Best first book in Africa; the BBC interviewed me and they asked me about the high crime

rate in the country. And I said, "While the crime rate is unacceptable, I think that we must understand that the government of national unity has only been in existence for a few years and within that time a lot of things have been done. There has been a courageous attempt to get to the fundamental causes of crime, etc to try and tackle that. We have had children, for the first time, who in schools, are being fed, you know. We have had clean water taken to places, that sort of thing." Although like the building of homes and all that needs to be hastened, the pace of that needs to be hastened, job creation which is a tremendous thing, that is a big debate at the moment, this macro economic process of our government, I am very critical of and this spending of billions of rands on arms I think is totally unnecessary. And this whole Nevirapine debacle; you know hundreds of children's lives could have been saved, but for a kind of, I think, a very closeted approach to this whole problem. Notwithstanding those immense problems you know I think we should take a great deal of hope from the way we have gone about change in the country.

MC: And what do you think about this song that was written by, I am not sure if I should say one of your colleagues?

RG: Yes, one of my colleagues, Mbongeni Ngema. Ja we are still colleagues. I was terribly disappointed that it had to come from him because I know Mbongeni is one of those

people who stood up when it counted and he wrote great work like 'Woza Albert' and 'Asinamali' and that sort of writing, 'Sarafina'. And then suddenly, to write this kind of racially inciting poetry, it is pure racial incitement. I mean it is a diatribe, it comes directly from Mbongeni Ngema. He says that he is reflecting the views of others, but he says himself "Rise up you brave people" and he challenges the Indian or whatever, words to that effect. There is the excuse that if you don't understand this in Zulu, you do not get the full connotation of what he is saying and it looses something in translation. But we have an eminent authority like Patika Nthuli saying quite clearly that it is racial incitement.

I think the responsibility of the artist is not to incite the people and not to use the excuse of artistic licence. I mean if it is just pure racial incitement, it can't be art. Of course I mean, you know this is not to deny that people are talking about these things; these things are being spoken about because racism exists in the Indian community. There is no doubt about that. I mean many of us are ashamed of that kind racism as I am pretty sure that many Africans are ashamed of racism within their own community or exploitation by rich capitalists within their own community and every community. And this thing about communities too, also is this I think because I am an individual; I am a South African. I am not an Indian. I am a South African.

This doesn't mean that I deny my Indian heritage, which I think, is a wonderful thing. I am proud of that in many ways. But that doesn't define me as a South African.

I am a South African because I am born here and I embrace this country, I love this country and nobody must deny me that. I mean I am an accident of birth like Mbongeni Ngema is. I mean he didn't ask to be born Zulu. I didn't ask to be born Tamil or Indian. And neither of us is ashamed of what we are.

But being born a certain kind of race group or ethnic group in this country doesn't entitle you now to deny other people their South Africaness. And I think that is what it is all about; I think that is what the debate is all about. And the debate goes even further; what are the causes of racism? I mean as intellectual beings, we must get the root causes of this. We must understand that the Indians themselves are not a homogenous group, they have their own cultural baggage. You have had the caste system where certain people within Indian community have terribly oppressed people in the Indian community. And that has all filtered down and has lead to this kind of thing. And this is not in any way to excuse personal accountability. I think we have laws in the country in terms of personal accountability, we have organs of civil society that protect us from this kind of abuse. I think we should go to those organisations, strengthen those organizations, and

participate more in civil society and build a South African nation, rather than accentuate the differences, rather than accentuate, you know, perceived injustices. I mean Mbongeni Ngema will have to go a long, long way to prove that Indians have exploited Africans.

MC: Okay and if maybe we can just go back a bit to the nineties? What did you think of the TRC?

RG: Ja the TRC was unique. It was an amazing exercise. It had its limitations, but the fact that it happened at all speaks well of the country. I think this tremendous desire to get to grips with the problems of the country and face them at their root; to understand where they come from and not to be superficial about it. Because superficiality or superficial approaches to things as in the case of Mbongeni Ngema's poem will just lead to further conflict and it would be cyclical, cycle of violence and it will be retributive. And we, as spiritual human beings, can't live forever like that. We must just begin to say what are the causes of all this kind of antagonism or conflict within us? And then opt for revenge without trying to understand where do these things come from. I think therefore this was an amazing exercise as I said with all its limitations that has lead the country forward and taken it out of what could have been a cataclysmic war. I mean there is hope for this country, because if we look at the killing of Hani, of Chris Hani

there could have been another bloodbath. But instead reason prevailed.

And so, there is hope for the country. So while I am upset with Mbongeni Ngema's poem, I have tremendous faith that people are not going to be hoodwinked into going back to a superficial approach to very definite problems in the world.

MC: And what do you think of the unsung heroes in South Africa, those unsung heroes and the forgotten people, what do you think of that?

RG: Well, I think that what you are doing right now you are engaged in talking to you know people who, the forty-five people that you people are going to interview, unknown people. People like, unknown now people like Lutchman and RK Naidoo, and then of course, it is sad that you couldn't have spoken to people like Sister Poomani, but there are a number of other people, quiet people. There is this man who was beaten up in Chatsworth. I think he is about in his eighties now, who resisted the introduction of the Tricameral system. He was very, very, you know, he was an elderly man, and he was beaten up by one of the protagonist of the Tricameral system. People like that, who were brave people who have done things and all that have gone unsung. I think it is time now that we go out there and record the achievements of those people.

MC: Have you finished writing your biography?

RG: No. [laugh]

MC: Okay so when can we expect to get it?

RG: I don't know. I don't know whether, you know, I think it is a bit presumptuous of me I have only had one novel. One book published, I mean two books published. I think somehow, if I manage to write a few more then maybe at the end of that. I have written something but you know just giving it a second thought.

MC: Also besides the other book that you won the prize for, you have another book that was published?

RG: Ja my plays, "The Larney's Pleasure" was published; "Swami" was published. I have just finished writing the first draft of a novel; hopefully it will be published soon.

MC: And do you have a title for that novel?

RG: Ja the working title of that novel was 'Milk and Duff Cake', but I have since changed it to 'A Child in Tow.'

MC: And tell us you get your titles from people because I have been looking at your titles they are very interesting. I mean 'The Larney's Pleasure', 'Swami', 'Blossom from the Bough', 'Offside', 'Inside'?

RG: And the sequel to 'Offside', 'Inside' was 'Backside', hey? [Laughter] It was a trilogy.

MC: No, can you tell us a bit about the 'Backside'?

RG: Ja this was just after transformation, just after unbanning and all that and the inclusion of these clowns into the system. And I took another shot at them. And I said that in, despite the fact that they were given some kind of positions

and all that they are still backside, and lies with the people.

MC: So I mean, the titles of your plays or the names of your plays, I mean you get that from listening to people and…?

RG: Ja I think ordinary life is so rich, you know, it is so rich with things and we take things for granted, you see. I mean we have had this kind of syndrome of always looking outside for – I mean we regard things from outside the country as great always. I mean why? I mean great things are happening right now amongst us.

MC: And from all your plays which one do you think received more attention? Which one do you think people will remember you for?

RG: Well when you say attention you see I was part of the cultural boycott, so much of my work is not known outside Natal and for that matter outside South Africa. Only now it is getting to be known a little bit. I got an invitation the other day from a theatre in Suffolk to take my plays to London. I turned down this invitation in the seventies. But 'At the Edge' went to the Edinburgh Festival, where it was called, 'Resounding into humanity' by London Stage and Television Today Magazine there, and then it got invited to a festival in Toronto, Glasgow and then it got invited to India, to tour the cities of India. All the major cities and they got standing ovations in every city and that play of course was, you know.

MC: And what do you think about the politics of the Nobel Prize and other prizes, what do you think about that?

RG: Politics of?

MC: Of the Nobel Prize?

RG: I think that it is important to have something like the Nobel Prize to focus or for that matter it is an incentive for advancement of human kind in all aspects. But there are questions about whether there are pressure groups that have a say in the selection of certain, you know, people. But despite that, I think some great writers have emerged. Rabindranath Tagore; Gracia, Gabriel Gracia,, Marques, who have received this Nobel Prize. And those people have been recognised.

MC: And Sir your motto in life, can you tell us your motto?

RG: Ja I think about this little thing, where I caught this fish once and I don't go fishing anymore. I used to love deep-sea fishing and I caught this magnificent fish and it was a deep see fish and it was quite a big fish and I brought it up. And because it was a deep-sea fish, and there was a change in the air pressure, I write about this in my book, change in the air pressure. And I just put this fish alongside me, a magnificent creature; beautiful creature and then it was in its death throws. And because of the change of pressure its eyes began to pop out, its tongue dropped and it quivered in its death throws and I just looked at that creature and I put my rod down, and I have

never caught another creature. And then it struck me that the Upanishads and great works like this, have talked about the unity of life, and that the divine rests in every living creature. And for me that was a very, very important and I write about the fact that this is something that my mother taught me. And she said: "There is god in every human being, in every bit of life god is there. You must find the god within other people." And that to me is important, that is my guiding principle in life.

MC: And tell me Sir, do you regret that maybe you participated in the cultural boycott, as a result you didn't get a chance to take your plays all over the world? Do you regret that?

RG: No, not at all. I don't regret it at all. I think it is a small price to pay. There was a great artist called Thami Mnyela. He was just about twenty-three or twenty-four and he participated in the struggle, directly he participated in the struggle and Thami was shot dead. He could have been one of South Africa's greatest painters. Now here was a life that was given in the struggle. So my little sacrifice is nothing.

MC: And if maybe you can be asked about something that you can change in your life is there anything that you think you can ask for a chance to re-do it or?

RG: Ja for one I wouldn't make a bomb without knowing how to make a bomb. [Laugh] I wouldn't have put that dry-ice into that plastic into that bottle. I am talking about many years

ago. Ja, I guess little things like that, but I wouldn't change my life. I think I have been privileged, like all of you here, to be living in very exciting, challenging times, given the fact that there is so much suffering and poverty out there and that we must try to do something about that. At the very least, to be conscious of it, to know that our brethren out there are suffering. I think despite all that it is still very challenging, exciting times and in terms of my own life I wouldn't change anything.

MC: And on behalf of the people of South Africa, and the people of the world I would like to take this opportunity to thank you for all your contribution in the struggle against Apartheid. I would like to say what you did is unforgettable. Thank you very much, thank you for continuing to inspire us with your plays and can you please continue to write and write more plays after this one that we will be seeing on the 20th please, produce more plays. And again I would like to say thank you. And to the future generations of South Africa and future generations of the world I would like to say that this is one of our best playwrights in South Africa, Mr Govender. I just want to say something about the – Mr Govender produced some of the best plays in South Africa like the 'Larney's Pleasure', 'Swami', 'Blossoms from the Bough', 'Offside', 'Inside', 'Backside', 'At the Edge' and '1949'. Thank you very much Sir.

RG: Thank you.

END OF INTERVIEW