https://dspace.org/

Through My Lenz: The historical and cultural dynamics of Lenasia South, pre and present democracy

Bhana, Aarti

2025
University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg
https://hdl.handle.net/10539/50065
Bhana, Aarti . (2025). Through My Lenz: The historical and cultural dynamics of Lenasia South, pre and present democracy [Master's dissertation, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg]. WIReDSpace. https://hdl.handle.net/10539/50065

Downloaded from a DSpace repository. https://dspace.org/

Through My Lenz: The historical and cultural dynamics of Lenasia South, pre and present democracy

By Aarti Bhana
Student Number: 732976
Supervisor: Professor Lesley Cowling

A research report submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of the Master of Arts in Journalism and Media Studies, University of the Witwatersrand.

Johannesburg, June 2025

Abstract: Lenasia South was established as a designated “group area” for Indians under the apartheid government. The first residents moved into this newly established area, 35km away from Johannesburg, in the 1980s, after they were forcibly removed from their homes in other parts of Johannesburg. They developed Lenasia South through businesses, religious institutions and traditions. It became a place of belonging. This long-form journalism project is a journey of my life as I navigate the familiarity of living in Lenasia South and the realities outside of it. It blends memoir and research, and uses theoretical frameworks of identity, race and community to reflect how Lenasia South evolved as South Africa transitioned. It further examines how post-apartheid social and economic shifts, such as land grabs and rising crime, fragmented Lenasia South’s community. As I remembered it, my home was beginning to disappear. “Through My Lenz” is a tribute and a critical reflection of Indian identity and belonging in a changing South Africa.

Plagiarism Declaration

I declare that this research report is my unaided work. It is submitted for the degree of Master of Arts by Coursework and Research Report in the Department of Journalism at the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg.

It has not been submitted before for any other degree or examination at any other university.

Aarti Bhana

27 of June 2025

Ethics Clearance Number: JOMS2023/9

Through My Lenz: The historical and cultural dynamics of Lenasia South, pre and present democracy **1**
1. Method Document **6**
Introduction **6**
Rationale and aim **8**
Research question **9**
Background and context **9**
Literature Review **12**
1. The Arrival of Indians in South Africa 13
2. The Group Areas Act 16
3. Identity and belonging of South African Indians 20
4. Personal Motivation 27
Methodology **30**
1. Desktop research 30
2. Archives and public records 31
3. Interviews 32
4. Ethnographic immersion 34
Literary journalism approach **38**
Conclusion **42**
Long-form ethics **43**
2. Long-Form Journalism Project **44**
Part one **44**
Chapter 1 44
Chapter 2 49
Chapter 3 54
Chapter 4 57
Chapter 5 61
Chapter 6 63
Chapter 7 67
Chapter 8 69
Part two **74**

Chapter 9 74
Chapter 10 76
Chapter 11 78
Chapter 12 80
Chapter 13 82
Chapter 14 85
Bibliography **87**
Appendix: List of Interviewees **95**

1. Method Document

Introduction

This long-form narrative journalism project explores how the 1950s Group Areas Act shaped Lenasia South, a South African Indian community in Johannesburg, and how the controversial law impacted the residents' lives during and after apartheid.

Segregation laws in South Africa date back to the twentieth century, and, after several amendments, the South African apartheid government fully implemented them in 1950, according to Mabin (1992). Group areas were racial zones for non-White people only, Yengde (2021) states. Cachalia (n.d.), in an article titled *"The Ghetto Act"* published in *Africa South,* writes that non-White people were removed from their primary locations, such as Vrededorp (Fietas), Pageview Sophiatown, Newclare, Newlands, Albertsville, Albertskroon in Johannesburg, to make way for White people. A large group of Indians had to relocate to Lenasia, a township located around 35km away from the city, Yengde (2021) writes. The locals call it "Lenz". The *South African History Online* (2011) website states that Indian people started settling in Lenasia in the 1950s, and over time, it expanded into 11 extensions. In 1984, Lenasia South was established as an extension of Lenasia. It was relatively smaller than Lenasia and much further south. The story of Lenasia South has not been documented in formal literature, therefore, this research project is a story of the people who lived through the transitions of Lenasia South since the 1980s.

This long-form journalism project employs "New Journalism", also known as literary journalism, as defined by Wolfe (1973). It does not follow the conventional rules of journalism or basic reportage, but provides nuanced descriptions of characters and places. Wolfe (1973:22) observed that authors who experimented with the literary journalism genre closely studied their subjects, paying attention to "the dialogue, the gestures, the facial expressions, [and] the details of the environment." It borrows devices from fictional novels, such as scene-by-scene construction, dialogue, point of view and status-life detail, Wolfe (1973) writes.

I was raised in Lenasia South, and it played a major role in my sense of identity as a born-free South African Indian, but the core identity of Lenasia South has changed, and documenting the changes within this culturally rich, non-White but racially diverse and dynamic community brings value to the South African literary canon. This research narrates my experiences, together with other community members, against the backdrop of the political changes. It documents Lenasia South's development, dynamism and its deterioration observed over time.

Although Indians were first brought to Cape Town as slaves in the 1600s, this research assignment focuses on the arrival of Indians in South Africa as indentured labourers, as documented by historical texts. *The Indian Africans,* by David et al. in 2023, informs how Indians gradually settled across various regions of South Africa.

In the twentieth century when South Africa was still under colonial rule, the first segregation laws against Indians and Malays were established, according to Mabin (1992). These laws were later revised to The Slums Act, the Ghetto Act and later the Group Areas Act which all had one objective: to segregate people by race so that the White government could maintain its power, Cachalia (n.d.) notes. The Group Areas Act was introduced to the National Assembly in 1950 and changed the course of South African history Mabin (1992) writes, but Cachalia (n.d.) argues "group areas" were established long before the act had been implemented. Yengde (2021) examines the response to the Group Areas Act and the subsequent impact it had on the people who accepted it, and who lived in Lenasia, while Vahed and Desai (2010) provide an understanding of the Indian identity in the South African context, saying that while there are contestations about whether this new generation should be classified as Indians or South Africans, there is one truth: that "India was the homeland and South Africa is home." Afzal (2008) discusses how identities are often formed through communities, which are shaped by external socio-economic and political factors, a concept that this project interrogates. The community itself is characterised by culture, values, traditions, customs and mannerisms that create a sense of belonging and identity.

I applied the frameworks of history, identity, community and politics to examine Lenasia South's traditions, customs and trajectory. This research documents the gradual development of Lenasia South and its eventual deterioration, where the traditions and community structures broke down, and a new community emerged. Change is inevitable, but this research gave me a nuanced understanding of the cultural history and identity of South African Indians.

Rationale and aim

Desai and Vahed (2019)'s *A History of the Present: A Biography of Indian South Africans,1990-2019* explores the topic of "Place, Memory and Nostalgia" in chapter eight of their book. It highlights the significance of remembering one's roots and where they came from. In this chapter, the authors recount their personal experiences and attempt to make connections and learn their history. While substantial archival knowledge exists at the Gandhi-Luthuli Documentation Centre in Durban, Desai and Vahed (2019) highlight the value of keeping record of memories and moments for ourselves and future generations.

This excerpt speaks directly to my motivation for this project:

> Close to 160 years since the first indentured migrants arrived in Natal, the search for roots has captured the imagination of a whole swathe of Indian South Africans. This takes many forms. Alongside the search for ancestral roots has been the publication of local histories, websites, circulation of newsletters, and use of social media to circulate 'history'. Displaying a 'refusal of amnesia', Rob Nixon has observed that 'post apartheid literature plays an invaluable role by preventing, through restless exploration, the closure of history's channels'. South Africans are engaging 'history in more candid, textured, and impassioned terms. The result has been not just a return to the past but a return in a more personal way (Nixon 1996, 77; cited in Govinden 2007, 3). As Govinden (2009,

> 286) points out, a feature of the post-apartheid literary scene has been 'the way history of earlier times and of groups which were previously silent is being recalled and recounted. (2019:197)

In this context, I documented Lenasia South to ensure that its place in South Africa's vast and complicated history is preserved.

Research question

How did the 1950s Group Areas Act shape the formation of the Indian community living in Lenasia South, and how has this influenced their identity and lived experiences in post-apartheid South Africa?

Background and context

Indians were first brought to South Africa as slaves in the 1650s by Dutch colonial settlers, who initially settled in the Cape colonies to work as domestic workers or on farms, according to Reddy (1991). Aside from India, slaves were also brought from Indonesia, Thailand, Sri Lanka, Madagascar and Mauritius, according to both McDonald (2015) and Reddy (1991), who also writes that by the 18th Century, there were more slaves than there were White settlers, adding that slaves had contributed significantly to the development of land. Reddy (1991) notes that as Indians were brought to the Cape as labourers, it was not uncommon for the women to form relationships with White settlers, and studies show that more than half of the children born to enslaved women had White fathers. Oliver and Oliver (2017) say this gave rise to a new "mixed-race" which is now referred to as the "Cape Malays" or "Cape Coloureds". According to Reddy (1991), over time, these populations played a significant role in spreading Islam in South Africa. Slavery under the Dutch colonists ended in the 1830s, but the arrival of Indians in South Africa continued, this time as indentured labourers.

Indentured Indians initially settled in KwaZulu-Natal (formerly Natal) in 1860; a small number of "free Indians" arrived shortly after, David et al. (2023) write. The group of Indians grew, eventually outnumbering the Whites in Natal, but they did not enjoy

freedom and rights under White minority rule. From the late 19th century until the late 1950s, the government had a policy to repatriate Indians or limit their social, political, and economic rights, Desai and Goolam Vahed (2019) write; it was around then that the Group Areas Act was introduced. According to Cachalia (n.d.), the Group Areas Act was a policy introduced by the apartheid government to racially segregate citizens to maintain its control over resources. In Johannesburg, for example, non-Whites living in Turffontein, Fordsburg, Doornfontein, Vrededorp, Sophiatown and Newclare were forcibly removed from their homes and were forced to shut their businesses to live in racial zones or group areas.

Lenasia was a group area, located 35km away from the Johannesburg business district, that was set aside for Indians, mostly, according to Yengde (2021), to isolate Indians and remove their access to job opportunities. As Cachalia (n.d.:39) states: “The Indian people, considered to be ‘a foreign and an outlandish element’, must be uprooted and expatriated. They must be isolated in ghettos, their wealth destroyed, properties confiscated, and means of livelihood taken away.”

A similar reality played out for Coloured people living in Albertsville, Newclare, among others, according to Cachalia (n.d.). Meanwhile, Indian communities resisted the instruction to relocate to designated group areas. According to Yengde (2021), the Natal Indian Congress (NIC) and Transvaal Indian Congress (TIC) attempted to mobilise a movement to prevent Indians from being forcibly moved under the Group Areas Act. Yengde (2021:76) states that many perceived the Act as “threatening the very existence of the Indian community in South Africa,” but some factions, such as the Transvaal Indian Organisation, tried to persuade Indians to move to Lenasia, according to South African History Online (2011).

Lenasia had 11 extensions, and its largest extension was established in 1984: Lenasia South. It is further away from the city and is 13.98² km in size with a population of 37 110, relatively small compared to Lenasia, which is 20.28 km² in size, with a population of 89 714, according to the 2011 census published on City Population.de. The impact of living in group areas, like Lenasia and Lenasia South, influenced the culture, identity and sense of belonging of Indian South Africans, Vahed and Desai (2010) state, and while the Group Areas Act is a thing of the past, its legacy is still prevalent in these ‘gated communities’.

The landmark legislation impacted the second generation of Indians living in South Africa and furthermore shaped the racial and cultural dynamics in South Africa in the post-apartheid period, Yengde (2021) argues. Fast forward to democracy, the effects of the Group Areas Act is evident in urban and spatial resource allocation, Maharaj (2020) writes in a news article.

> Since 1994, urban policies have reinforced the race, class and socio-spatial divisions of apartheid group areas, promoting the likes of Umhlanga and Sandton, and condemning the African majority to be trapped in a vicious cycle of poverty in ghettos and shack settlements, with limited or no basic services.

Within this context, Indian communities in Johannesburg adapted to their new surroundings despite the challenging circumstances, but this research illustrated that the distance was greater for residents of Lenasia South. The area's isolation limited opportunities for residents without reliable transport, but it also fostered a sense of self-reliance or dependency on neighbours and community members to develop the area for work and living. Citing Carrim (1990), Yengde (2021) state:

> Breadwinners had to travel to Johannesburg's city centre via a road that was next to the railway line and get on to the R29 motorway. This road linked Johannesburg to Potchefstroom by the municipal bus service which had two trips in the morning and two in the evening. Even today the public transport situation has not changed. There is a private bus company which operates during the morning and evening hours, transporting employees from Lenasia to central Johannesburg. The physical inconvenience of a 35-km distance from workplace to home was unacceptable to Indians, because they managed their trade by cutting the costs of distance between work and home by living in the same area as their place of business. (2021:79 - 80)

Literature Review

Historical and contextual literature about Lenasia South is extremely thin, which motivated my reason for this long-form research project. There is, however, an extensive amount of literature about the arrival of Indians in South Africa, how they settled and eventually developed an identity which was influenced by their surroundings. These realities have also been documented in fictional texts by South African Indian authors, which expanded the access to literature about the cultural identity of South African Indians.

Frenkel (2011) examines the themes of identity, place and history extensively in a paper called “Reconsidering South African Indian Fiction Postapartheid”, where they determine that fictional texts do not only provide an opportunity to tell stories about the experiences of South African Indians — often entrenched in the legacies of racial categorisation and historical roots — but also provides new ways of thinking about South African culture and cultural history.

> In reading literature as a type of cultural history, I argue that a consideration of the seemingly marginal construction of South African identity becomes central to understanding the ideological underpinnings of South African culture broadly, as it destabilises unintegrated conceptions of cultural forms. (2011:2)

Frenkel (2011) therefore demonstrates that the fictional texts written by Imraan Coovadia, Achmat Dangor, Farida Karodia, Beverley Naidoo, among others, positioned the experiences of South African Indians into the broader cultural basis of South Africa, and draws linkages between the past and the present which impact identity formation. Furthermore, Frenkel (2011) argues that these texts can debunk previous positionalities in cultural history, reimagine the placement of South African Indians

in a complex society as well and penetrate the barriers to include more writings by South African Indians in the collective canon. “The inclusion of minority literatures within African literary studies is beginning to occur, and the intellectual production of writers of Indian descent needs to be included in both their national literatures and within African studies as a whole.” (Frenkel 2011:2)

These dynamics lay the groundwork for researching Lenasia South as part of South African literature. It also presents an opportunity to challenge and redefine some narratives that have been imposed on the existence of marginalised persons and communities. The literature review, therefore, analyses the existing literature that informs the central topic of this long-form narrative journalism project: the cultural and political dynamics of Indian communities in Johannesburg after the Group Areas Act, with a specific focus on Lenasia South.

1. The Arrival of Indians in South Africa

The history of the arrival of the first Indians to South Africa is limited; however, Reddy (1991) determined that Indians were brought to South Africa as slaves in the 1600s when South Africa was still under Dutch colonial rule. The majority of slaves were from India, but many were also brought from Indonesia, Thailand, Sri Lanka, Madagascar and Mauritius, according to McDonald (2015). Citing Bradlow and Margaret Cairns (n.d), Reddy (1991) highlights that between 1658 and the 19th Century, a total of 3283 slaves were brought to South Africa, and 1195 were from India alone, while 1033 came from Indonesia, 102 from Sri Lanka, 160 from Malaya and 60 from Mauritius. Approximately 875 slaves originated from African regions, while the origins of the remaining individuals are unknown, but Reddy (1991) states that if these figures are representative, more than 70% of the foreign-born slaves in the Cape came from Asia, and more than a third from India.

The Dutch had settled in the Cape of Good Hope in 1652, and this became the “home” for the first Indians to arrive in South Africa. By the 18th Century, the number of Indians had exceeded the number of Whites living in the region. Reddy (1991)

discusses how Indians had contributed significantly to the development of the land in the Cape colonies, but while some were subjected to torture and difficult working conditions, some women had entered into relationships with the Dutch, especially during the 17th and 18th centuries. This forged the way for the development of a new “mixed-race” in the region. These are the Malays or Coloureds that still live in the Cape Town region today, according to Oliver and Oliver (2017). In contemporary South Africa the Cape Malay community resides in the Western Cape and Namibia. The Griqua mixed-race population inhabits the area near Kimberley in Griqualand in the Northern Cape and the Rehoboth community thrives in Namibia. Based on these records, Reddy (1993:2) believed that Afrikaners’ roots can be traced back to India.

Authors David Paul, Ranjith Choonilall, Kiru Naidoo and Selvan Naidoo in 2023 published *The Indian Africans*, which documents the journey of the thousands of Indians who descended on South African shores nearly 160 years ago as indentured labourers, primarily. The authors point out that there are gaps in the historical account of Indians arriving in South Africa, due to the lack of personal and public record of the events: however, the authors attempted to source official documents and pictures to ground the history. David et al. (2023) notes at least 384 ships transported indentured workers to South Africa where 62% were men, 25% were women and 13% were children. Between 1860 and 1911, around 152 000 people arrived in South Africa. According to David et al. (2023) the majority of indentured labourers who arrived in KwaZulu Natal were from Madras — in the South of India. They constituted both Tamil and Christian Indians, as well as some Muslim and Hindu Indians.

Information for the book was sourced from the Stewart and Sara Fairbairn Collection, SS Singh Collection, Gandhi Luthuli Special Collections, the 1860 Heritage Centre, RD Naidu Archives among others. Chapter two shows emigration certificates, passes for Indians, conditions of services, contracts of agreement, ship lists and more, further contextualising the journey. The information is primarily based on the Indians who settled in KwaZulu-Natal during the 19th Century, but it demonstrates the struggles they faced when finding a home or starting a family. In chapter seven, “The Struggle to Make a Family”, David et al. (2023) discuss the loss of family structure among Indian indentured labourers after leaving their families behind and coming to a

new country. Rebuilding that structure was a challenge, adding that colonialism's destruction of African and Indian families led to the social issues that South Africa faces today.

Chapter 11, "A Place Called Home", discusses identity struggles. Labourers were granted accommodation by their employers, but these regions became overcrowded. In the early 1900s, the government set aside locations for Indians. In KwaZulu-Natal, these were located beyond the Umgeni River and further inland at Duikerfontein and Sea Cow Lake; more Indians began to settle in Mayville, Cato Manor, Clairwood, Magazine Barracks and the Bluff, according to David et al. (2023). These segregation rules were informal, but over time formal laws around the establishment of racially segregated areas were passed and implemented.

Other themes explored in *The Indian Africans* include the role of Indian activist organisations in resisting the anti-Indian laws, the role of teachers and leaders in uplifting Indian communities, and their subsequent amalgamation through religion, food, culture and traditions. Indians held onto their traditions and began practising them in South Africa, thus 're-establishing' their identity, as Vahed (n.d) points out in David et al. (2023), adding that sharing traditions supported the formation of a community. *The Indian Africans* memorialise the history of the arrival of Indian Africans into South Africa through KwaZulu-Natal in the 19th Century. Chapter 31 on "Memorialisation" speaks to the value of documenting such histories:

> Memorialisation of sites of struggle can serve to foster unity and collective pride. Much of the history of our fractured past goes without commemoration or even documentation. The recovery, documentation and affirmation of marginalised history is crucial to the forging of collective regional and national identities in post-apartheid South Africa. (2023:299)

2. The Group Areas Act

In his article “Comprehensive Segregation: The Origins of the Group Areas Act and Its Planning Apparatuses”, Mabin (1992) examines segregation laws and how they influenced the development of the Group Areas Act in South Africa. The article also highlights the key roleplayers and organisations that enforced the controversial law that was officially passed in 1950.

Segregation laws in South Africa can be traced back to the twentieth century, when the Union of South Africa sought to demarcate areas for minority groups, mainly Malays and Indians. These areas came to be known as ‘Asiatic Bazaars’ and were meant for Indians only. The 1920 Housing Act institutionalised racial segregation by restricting housing schemes to specific racial groups, while the 1923 Natives (Urban Areas) Act formally relegated African populations to designated townships and compounds, Mabin (1992) states.

The United Party was formed in 1934 with General James Barry Munnik Hertzog KC at the helm. In government, the party was committed to enforcing social segregation, which also entailed the separation of townships and established areas, according to Mabin (1992). In 1939, Jan Smuts took over as Prime Minister for the United Party and played a significant role in enforcing segregation laws, targeting Coloured and Indian people. The following year, planners reconstructed the city and demarcated areas for Coloureds in the Cape and Indians in Johannesburg, with plans to move Indians to Diepkloof. In 1944, a report on Regional and Town Planning solidified Smuts’s town planning ambitions, which included establishing “racially distinct, well-separated zones”, Mabin (1992:415) explains. Smuts created two new agencies to continue with the segregation project.

One approach was to coordinate regional planning and allocate land based on race, and the second was to administer a new, stricter legislation to segregate Indians, according to Mabin (1992). The 1946 Asiatic Land Tenure Act, also known as The Ghetto Act, was established and implemented in both Transvaal and Natal, and aimed to demarcate Indian areas. Under this law, Indians were not allowed to acquire or occupy property beyond the areas they lived in. The Land Tenure Advisory Board

played a watchdog role and enforced the laws, Mabin (1992) states. The Asiatic Land Tenure Act had the greatest impact on the Indian population and was the basis for the development of the Group Areas Act. Though the laws were established, they were not implemented in full force until the National Party came into power in 1948 with an even greater commitment to enforcing 'compulsory urban segregation', Mabin (1992:419) writes. For the National Party, this meant that non-Whites did not have the right to land and were not allowed to move beyond their allocated racial zones.

D.S. van der Merwe played a big role in drafting the Group Areas Bill and later implementing it, and he did not favour Indians particularly when doing so. Mabin (1992:421) cited an extract of a dialogue in which Van der Merwe was quoted saying "No" to the suggestion that Indians should enjoy the same rights as other South African nationals, further stating that there is "no equality possible at present." Subsequently, municipalities determined which regions should be allocated for Whites and non-Whites. For Van der Merwe, in order to achieve compulsory segregation, they would have to eliminate Asiatic ownership in European or White areas and then allocate restricted areas for everyone. Under these circumstances the "Group Areas Act" was formally established and added to the political dictionary, Mabin (1992) states.

The Group Areas Act was officially introduced to the National Assembly in 1950 by Dr T.E.Donges and repealed in 1992 when apartheid laws were beginning to dissolve. As shown above, it was not a standalone act devised by the apartheid government but was built on the segregation rules laid out by early colonists, and subsequently, the United Party. However, Mabin (1992) points out that it was indeed the apartheid government that made it a reality.

Cachalia (n.d) in his *Africa South* article "The Ghetto Act," writes that the Group Areas Act had established separate areas for different races in South Africa, adding that one of the main aims of the Act was to bring Indians to ruin, where their business and economic interests were removed, while the opportunity for them to acquire properties or land, and sustain their livelihoods was ceased. Cachalia (n.d.) noted that the Group Areas Act in Johannesburg had affected 78 000 Africans, Indians, Coloureds, Malays and Chinese people — who lived in Pageview (Fietas), Sophiatown, Newclare, Newlands, Newlands Extension,

Albertsville, Albertskroon and Greymont. Indians dominated the majority of these areas, but Chinese traders and Malays also lived there, however, Newclare and Albertsville were a majority Coloured Community, Cachalia (n.d) observes. They were forced to vacate their homes within a certain period, and their properties were given to Whites. Those designated Non-Whites had to move into the “ghettos”, Cachalia (n.d) states. The forced removals would impact the generations to come: Cachalia (n.d) explains that many of the families who lived in these areas for nearly 40 decades were challenged by leaving their homes, businesses and communities. Future generations were therefore burdened with starting a business and earning their money from scratch. They didn’t just lose their homes; they lost their livelihoods.

The “Non-Whites” relocated to group areas or townships, often on the outskirts of the city. Cachalia (n.d) mentions Lenasia and Farm Rietfontein No. 48 as the main group areas established for Indian people. Lenasia was established before it was declared a group area for Indians, and Cachalia (n.d.) speculates that this may be because the authorities had already decided on the racial zones before they were made official. As early as 1953, a school was established in Lenasia and was used as a means to encourage families to relocate to Lenasia for their children’s education. Cachalia (n.d: 43) explains that the government used the Indian children as “hostages in the creation of the ghetto”, indicating the extent to which the state went to accomplish the ruin of the Indian people.

Yengde (2021) provides an overview of the movements that emerged to resist the Group Areas Act and the injustices that Indian people were subjected to under White minority rule. During this period, the Natal Indian Congress and the Transvaal Indian Congress raised awareness about the Act and mobilised people to protest against it. Leaders of resistance movements perceived the Group Areas Act as a threat to Indian communities in South Africa, and they aimed to reclaim a lost ‘Indian’ identity, given the constant removal and subjugation they were subjected to, Yengde (2021:76) states.

The Group Areas Act impacted people’s lives significantly. Those removed from areas such as Sophiatown, Turffontein, Pageview, Albertsville, Fordsburg, and Newclare had to let go of the sentimental value of their homes and adjust to a new

housing situation, while finding the means to travel far out. Yengde (2021) notes that Lenasia is located 35km from central Johannesburg, and the isolation in this far and barren land made it difficult for people to find work or keep their jobs. Some built shops in front of their houses, so those families who were removed also lost their businesses. Travelling to and from Lenasia is an ‘inconvenience’, Yengde (2021) states, adding that while public transport exists, they are infrequent: there is just one bus trip in the morning and another in the evening.

My personal experiences of taking public transport to university from 2013 to 2017 speak to this reality. If I missed the morning or afternoon bus, I had no other means of reaching my destination. In the instances I did miss the bus, I had to rely on people who were travelling in the same direction, which in itself was a great inconvenience. The distance had also stopped me from socialising in areas outside of Lenasia South.

There were different experiences among those who settled in Lenasia. Yengde (2021) points out that some yearned to return to their first homes and the community they belonged to, while being concerned about their children’s futures. Other people, however, welcomed the relocation to Lenasia because they were offered a better home and they could re-establish a community centred on common cultural and religious practices, thus cementing their sense of self in a mixed country. The Indian population itself was mixed between Hindus, Tamils and Muslims, but living in Lenasia provided an opportunity to practise their religious and cultural activities without being “othered”.

The White administration attempted to exclude and isolate Indians from the economy, but for some moving to Lenasia meant that they had an opportunity to start over and find work or start an informal business despite the laws. The economic independence of Indians was perceived as a threat and challenge to the system, Yengde (2021) argues, but this did not deter the Indian population. In 1961, the government officially recognised Indians as South African citizens.

When writing about the experiences of South African Indians and the Group Areas Act, Frenkel (2011) discusses that some literature does not recognise the effects of the Act on its first victims, South African Indians, therefore non-normative accounts of literature, both fiction and non-fiction, about the experience of belonging in post-apartheid South Africa offers a critique on the perspectives of the cultural history and also “widens the lens of understandings through which we may begin to reconcile a diverse, but fractured, cultural history.” (Frenkel 2011:9)

3. Identity and belonging of South African Indians

Historians Goolam Vahed and Ashwin Desai in *A History of the Present: A Biography of Indian South Africans, 1994-2019*, analyse how Indians negotiated their place in the new South Africa. As previously discussed, the Group Areas Act had devastated Indian communities—destroying homes and businesses while eroding cultural identity (Cachalia n.d.). In 1961, when South Africa left the British Commonwealth, Indians were officially recognised as citizens and began cultivating a distinct "South African Indian identity" (Vahed & Desai 2019).

The Department of Indian Education in 1965 also facilitated the development of schools and universities for Indians during the 1960s and 1970s, which offered the new generation skills and training to further their careers (Vahed & Desai 2019). Yengde (2021) notes that the Transvaal Indian Congress and Natal Indian Congress mobilised communities to use education as a form of resistance against the Group Areas Act. This effectively gave people the power to choose a school, including linguistic and religious schools, such as Hindu schools to teach Gujarati, Hindi and Tamil, or Muslim schools to teach Urdu and Arabic. Discussing the value of these institutions, Yengde (2021) quotes Lamont (1980:84) who said that vernacular schools for children were encouraging mechanisms for Indians to hold onto their own customs.

In the case of Rylands, an Indian group area in Cape Town, Desai and Goolam Vahed (2019) emphasise that the Group Areas Act hindered Indian people's economic interests and cultural and religious freedom, but they reformed the space to make it their own. Dhupelia-Mesthrie (2014:16) cited in Desai and Goolam Vahed (2019) states:

> The story of Rylands shows how some were able to turn relocation to an advantage by appropriating land and building and leasing, and creating spaces of warmth, comfort and capital accumulation. The language used is different from that generally associated with stories of dispossession. (2019:11)

As schools, clinics, post offices, administrative offices and various other establishments were developed in these small communities, the people were afforded an opportunity at employment (Vahed & Desai 2019). The idea of belonging to a community slowly became prevalent.

This paper examines how the allocation of resources to different races changed their livelihoods and opportunities, and how this had especially caused tension between Indians and Africans: both were subjected to injustices during apartheid, but the former was provided with higher capital allocations, privileges and opportunities to improve their lives while the latter suffered, suffering that has continued to the present day.

Vahed and Desai (2010) speculate that the tension between Indians and Africans emerged when Indians were unwilling to accept Africans as equals and resisted change and integration with other races. These divisions created a fracture in how Indians were perceived in South Africa — questioning whether they can still be considered "Indian" even though the later generations were born and raised in South Africa, not India, but Vahed and Desai (2010) argue that the Indians living in South Africa were still searching for their roots in the religious and cultural context — often finding it in the media, Bollywood movies

and cultural experiences. Vahed and Desai (2010:5) contest that while the search for Indian roots is prevalent among South African Indians, there is an understanding that “South Africa was home and India was Homeland”.

Vahed and Desai (2010) state the search for roots is not premised on moving to India, but is rather concerned with discovering and learning about ancient religion and knowledge, and experiencing the culture of cricket, music, movies, food and dance associated with India. The authors explore this further in *A History of the Present: A Biography of Indian South African, 1994 - 2019*, where they recount personal experiences of trying to discover their ancestral roots, whether it was in public records and archives in South Africa or the stories and streets of India. Speaking of his trip to India, Desai said that while he saw people who looked like him, he was still considered an outsider - but he had no particular interest in tracing his roots. Though he and his family don’t live in India, the connection remains. In contrast, Vahed illustrated that he felt a connection to the people at his ancestral home. He sought to trace his familial roots but did not find records of his paternal grandfather. Commenting on his journey, Vahed wrote that the democratic era had sparked interest among many South African Indians to dig up their roots through records and albums in an attempt to “make a connection with home”. Desai and Goolam Vahed (2019) state that the value of knowing one’s roots is in grounding one’s identity in a space. Vahed and Desai (2019:194), citing Govender (2018), state that cultural roots are the ‘foundation of uniqueness’, and play an important role in shaping principles, morals and behaviour. At the same time, culture can unify a community and make it distinct.

Afzal (2008) argues that communities form the foundation of identity construction, particularly when rooted in rich traditions, cultural practices, values, norms, and shared knowledge. While external socio-economic structures, political forces, and resource availability influence the development of communities, Afzal (2008) emphasises that it is ultimately the people who shape them. This process gives rise to what Komito (1998) refers to as a “collective identity,” which then influences the behaviour of community members and their interactions with others.

The Group Areas Act was repealed in 1992 (Mabin 1992) and this meant that communities had the freedom to move out of the group areas and into suburbs closer to the city where opportunities were more prevalent and travel time was less, but some of these communities remained in the established group areas, either by choice or financial circumstances. It could be argued that those who chose to stay had done so for the sake of community and the identity they had formed from belonging to a community. Vahed and Desai (2010) write about "belonging" in the context of South Africa as being a group member. Previously this was determined by race, but when democracy ended, people had freedom of choice.

The Indian people who chose to relocate to formerly White areas such as Robertsham, Houghton and Greenside, according to Vahed and Desai (2010), were creating their own identities, but this also resulted in a class divide among Indians, as some could afford to move to affluent areas, whereas others were 'stuck' in the group areas. The experience varies among different people, but Vahed and Desai (2010:9) point out that the identities of Indians living in South Africa will constantly be interrogated given the number of times it was 'reconstructed, deconstructed and remade' over the twentieth century, as Hall (1994:395) cited by Vahed and Desai (2010:9) aptly states: identity and belonging are 'not a fixed essence at all.'

This can be true for the people who lived in tight-knit communities in post-apartheid South Africa, and are still grappling with the idea of being a South African Indian or Indian. Vahed and Desai (2010:9) conclude that "Indian South Africans cannot escape being 'Indian' in the local context and we expect distinctive religious and cultural identities to persist while identification with a global diaspora will most likely strengthen."

Nedine Moonsamy's *The Unfamous Five* (2019) is a novel about five teenagers living in Lenasia. It was written in 1993, against the backdrop of a country in transition. The five teenagers who grew up in Lenasia came from different religious backgrounds but were culturally alike. The narrative employs a literary journalism approach, incorporating devices identified by Wolfe and Edward Warren Johnson (1972), such as status-life detail, scene setting, dialogue, and first-person perspective. The context of

the story is factual and based on the politics of the time; the stories of the teenagers are however fictionalised, but it provides a powerful examination of how large-scale politics can affect everyone.

South African author Farida Karodia's short story, *Crossmatch*, published in 1997 in the collection *Against an African Sky and Other Stories*, is, as Ruehle (n.d.) highlights, an example of how writing can be used to explore identity and 'diasporic consciousness'. In "Writing Home: How Literature of the South Asian Diaspora Rescripts Belonging", Ruehle (n.d.) states that diasporic consciousness means having an understanding of different cultural and historical dynamics and being able to place these contexts in the larger scheme of things — or in 'complex worldviews'. Additionally, Ruehle (n.d.) states that diasporic consciousness is concerned with the self, in knowing who you are and the circumstances that shaped you, and how that determines how you interact and understand the world.

In Ruehle (n.d.:30)'s words, Karodia's work exemplifies diasporic consciousness, because it contains "richly, dynamic investigations of personal and communal identities", adding that diasporic writers like Karodia, "articulate and broadcast inclusive narratives that contribute to the formation of their own embodied and perceived identities, as well as those of their diasporic peers."

Crossmatch by Karodia (1997) centres around the protagonist, Sushila Makanji, who is at her parents' home in Lenasia, away from her own home in London. Ruehle (n.d.) explains that Sushila's character is dynamic, as she is able to retain her culture and simultaneously redefine her character within the spaces she occupies. She becomes a sought-after actress from London, but at the same time, she is a small-town girl from South Africa. The essence of diasporic consciousness, according to Ruehle (n.d.), is about knowing how personal experiences define the way we interact and understand the world. As Ruehle (n.d.) states that in stories which interrogate culture and identity:

> Central figures are displaced from their cultural homes and are met with social and institutional pressures to assimilate in their host environments. In order to navigate and embrace disparate cultures, each character must develop a complex version of self identity through use of the same abstract language their authors employ in articulating the plasticity of identity in a largely essentialist public discourse. (n.d.:31)

The theme of changing identities is also referred to in Juby Mayet's autobiography, *Freedom Writer*, which was published in 2022. Juby Mayet was a writer for *Drum* magazine during apartheid, and in her book she talks about her own experiences and challenges with identity. She was born Malay, but married a Muslim and was given the right to live in Lenasia, but after her husband's death, Mayet's identity was reconfigured and she was forced to leave her children in Lenasia and find a new place to call home. Mayet (2022) also relays her diasporic consciousness in the book, where she acknowledges how the circumstances during apartheid were limiting for her as a person who hailed from Fietas and how her humble upbringing shaped the way she saw the world.

Mayet's career as a journalist and writer was also shaped by her experiences and observations of apartheid. In chapter six of the book, Mayet rehashes an article she wrote for *Drum* in 1966 where she spoke with four people who lived in Vrededorp or Fietas about how they felt about the Group Areas Act. The community in Fietas was occupied by Indians, Malays and Coloureds, and was vibrant, cultured and close-knit, Karani (2018) wrote "From Memories to Cloth [and in-between]" where she attempted to memorialise the culturally rich area before the Group Areas Act removed the people and left it to White people. But now, Karani (2018) states that the area is riddled with crime and dilapidated buildings, and points out that as a child of Fietas, she sought to tell a more personal and unique account of Fietas before it faded and disappeared with all the stories and quirks that once made it.

Mayet (2022) endeavoured to profile people living in Fietas, when the Group Areas Act was being implemented, and also aimed to share the impact of politics on people. The four individuals interviewed by Mayet (2022) in chapter six had lived in Fietas for most of their lives and described how the forced removals were devastating their communities and way of life. It was particularly difficult for the elderly, Mayet (2022) relays as many had built homes and businesses with their families, and their relocation to Group Areas like Lenasia, without resources, meant that they could not really start over. Mayet (2022) shares the experience of Mr Suliman Ebrahim Asvat, who was 85 years old at the time, and who lived in Fietas for more than 60 years. He expressed his pain rawly:

> I just want to earn my living and build something for my children and grandchildren. What will happen when we have to move? My whole life is being ruined. I am too old to start from the beginning again. 'If you break up the nest of a bird, how does that bird feel? It cries all night… how much worse isn't it for a human being to see his home, his whole life's work, being smashed up in front of him? (2022:56)

Such stories had become the reality for many non-Whites living in areas that were later allocated to White people. The uprooting of people was a painful experience, while being placed in a new location was confusing and fracturing for many who had to reconstruct their identity in the community. Some welcomed the change and saw it as a means to advancing their economic interests, and in rediscovering their customs and culture, while others felt the loss of belonging to a community they had already established.

These texts are also founded against the backdrop of other fictional work by Imraan Coovadia, Achmat Dangor, Farida Karodia, Beverley Naidoo, Shamin Sarif, and Ishtiyaq Shukri, which Frenkel (2011) examines in the post-apartheid context. They consider themes of racial and historical fractures faced by South African Indians, Indian migration to South Africa, cultural and

gender norms and the dialogue between colonial and apartheid history with present democratic South Africa — all of which are prevalent themes in South Africa today.

To summarise, telling stories about South African Indians is valuable as it recognises issues of race through "varying notions of 'Indianness,' [which] both inform and destabilise contemporary understandings of South African culture," as Frenkel (2011) examines. To further contextualise cultural history of South African Indians, Frenkel (2011) aptly motivates:

> South African Indian identities consist of a multitude of positions, forming an elastic construct that is complex and often ambiguous. As such, this category of writings (South African Indian fiction) offers an interesting opportunity to examine race in South African culture more broadly as it is an inherently ambivalent construct, while simultaneously being an inherently racialised one, due to the particular history of racial exclusion that continues into the present. The Indian community, while usually marginalised in relation to the dominant dichotomy in South Africa, becomes crucial here in a type of postcolonial revisioning of the central debates that mark contemporary culture. The ambiguous nature of South African society is foregrounded in the longer version of this study (see Frenkel 2011), which shows that South Africans were never one thing or another, but have been forced to choose among or deny the ambiguities of identity. (2011:13)

4. Personal Motivation

Lenasia South is one of those communities that has undergone several changes since it was established as an extension of Lenasia in 1984, according to *South African History Online*. The history and dynamics of Lenasia South have not been documented, recorded or examined as much as those of Lenasia and Fietas, but the historical texts provided a comprehensive

framework that informed my research on how the 1950s Group Areas Act shaped the Indian community in Lenasia South, and influenced their experiences in democratic South Africa.

This research also draws on Reshma Singh's long-form narrative project in 2017 called *Through a Saffron-Tinted Looking Glass Reminiscing, remembering and melancholia. The story of a small Indian South African town 22 years after apartheid.* The small town Singh (2017) refers to is Tongaat in KwaZulu-Natal, where she was raised, and which had also become predominantly Indian due to the Group Areas Act. Singh sought to examine the class, culture, caste and economic determinants of the community, while examining how the community was formed during apartheid and how it adapted to the new freedoms in South Africa.

Singh used to live in Tongaat, but her return to her hometown compelled her to interrogate the changes the community was undergoing. Her parents still live[d] in the small community, commonly known for its sugar production. Over time, Singh (2017) noted how people had left the community, and it was beginning to lose its shape. Although schools, hospitals, businesses, religious institutions and other establishments were erected, Singh (2017) wrote that the community suffered economically. Another key factor that tarnished the community was the housing issue, which Singh (2017) attributed to the legacy of apartheid.

> Seeing it through my adult eyes, I realise that these problems emanated from the apartheid system of governance. Poor infrastructure, lack of recreational facilities, unemployment and poor service delivery lead to a dehumanised community. (2017:20)

Through interviews, observations, archival material and public records, Singh (2017) documents the story of the community in Tongaat and the people who developed it.

My project explored similar themes to Singh's (2017) long-form journalism project, especially where community development and its linkage with identity are concerned and located in the transition from apartheid to democracy. The story of Lenasia South, past and present, can be paralleled to how Singh (2017:32) described Tongaat's community in the present day:

> Today, Tongaat with its freedoms has lulled itself into complacency. Perhaps it's tired of having had to push for so many years, perhaps it's decided that now it's time to take a rest and leave its future in the government's hands, because for far too long the residents had to wield the defence swords. Whatever it may be, the town is failing itself. Unless redemption is found, more and more will run away like I did. The fear for the town is that when the current crop of community leaders, dedicated teachers and committed business owners take a bow, there won't be anyone applauding or taking the stage. (2017:32)

Lenasia South is smaller and less developed than Lenasia, but it has become a region with its own identity through community, which was indeed influenced by socio-economic and political factors. During its early days, there were very few establishments and developments, but houses were available. Within this context, people learned to rely on each other and support each other to make a cohesive and healthy neighbourhood. Bad politics and poverty slowly brought the suburb into ruin. Criminal activity increased because informal settlements mushroomed on private land, as the government failed to provide proper housing. Neighbourhood watch and patrollers have taken safety into their own hands.

There is familiarity and trust among the residents. The homeliness in small communities, bound by religion, culture, tradition and history, is also a product of a political system. The politics may have failed the people in the past, but the people rose above the politics of segregation and came together, building a life, not just for themselves but with everyone. Politics in the present failed them again, when land invasions, land grabs, lack of housing and poor infrastructure became their new story as Polity.org

(2021) describes. The streets once filled with kids playing cricket and riding their bicycles have become bare. Walls became higher, fences became sharper and the sense of community is lost as more people relocate. But this could be the coming of a new identity for Lenasia South, still remnant of what it was before it became what it is.

This is the community where I was raised, schooled and shaped - from the people I met and formed relationships with - to the belonging I had with the community when attending religious and cultural functions. The life I had in Lenasia South for 28 years grounded my values and shaped my cultural dissonance and the way I understand politics, religion and South Africa. Like Tongaat, a lot has changed and lost in Lenasia South, and it is disheartening to watch it deteriorate and fade away. While some memories are fresh in my mind, and some of the elders in the community are living, I took the responsibility to tell the important story of Lenasia South - seeing it as just another township in South Africa that needs to be archived and stored in history.

Methodology

There are three main methods I used to conduct this research: the first was desktop research, the second was accessing public records and newspapers and the third was interviews.

1. Desktop research

Lenasia South's origins and formation have hardly been mentioned in academic texts, so information from apartheid and into democracy have not been captured adequately. It merely lives in the people who were part of the development and who have lived in the estranged suburb for the last 40 years. It was a challenge to acquire information directly related to Lenasia South, but desktop research about Lenasia and other group areas provided a substantial amount of background information to build into my research of Lenasia South. The literature review provided a historical framework of the arrival of Indians in South Africa nearly 160 years ago and provided a detailed timeline of the origins of the Group Areas Act, as Mabin (1992) explains. This

history underpinned the lived experience of residing in a group area established by the apartheid government in the 1950s. Cachalia (n.d) then provided an overview of the different towns and suburbs in Johannesburg which were directly impacted by the Act. This information also tied into Yengde's (2021) research on how Indians in Johannesburg responded to the Group Areas Act and how they subsequently adapted to the rules when they moved to Lenasia. The research also looked into the themes of identity and belonging of Indians in South Africa, which Goolam Vahed and Ashwin Desai wrote about extensively in different publications.

The historical background of Lenasia, the Group Areas Act and the key role players were also documented on the South African History Online website, which – although a public-facing project - provided good direction I could not find anywhere else for what I interrogated. This included the demographics and statistics of Lenasia and Lenasia South.

2. Archives and public records

Over the years, a number of religious institutions, cultural organisations, schools, clinics and shopping centres sprouted in Lenasia South, but the information about their beginnings and growth was not captured formally in literature or online. Communities, however, are special in that they tend to have their newsletters, newspapers, magazines and albums that provide information about the news and history in the area. In *Babel Unbound*, Hamilton (2020) explains that within communities, anything can be considered an archive, from a grave to graffiti, because they are produced within the politics of the area, and are a symbol thereof. Furthermore, Hamilton (2020:128) posits that archives essentially confirm that a particular area has a history that is worth ‘preserving, investigating and reinvestigating, in perpetuity’. This concept proved true in both accessing archives through different means for this research and then positioning this research in the archives, as a place that does indeed exist.

Globe Post (previously *Southern Globe*) is an Indian-owned community newspaper that was established in 1992, according to Rau et al. (2008). It catered for the Black, Coloured, Indian and other Asian people living and working in Lenasia South and

surrounding areas, such as Soweto, Rau et al. (2008:99) states, adding that the community newspaper was founded to inform an ever-changing, culturally rich community, which values family and 'appreciate the familiar', but also divided on the grounds of 'history, culture or creed'.

The role of community media in these contexts according to Rau et al. (2008) is to uplift, inform, educate and empower the community, by providing information that is relevant to their circumstances from municipal, government and non-governmental organisations, community-driven projects and achievements which bring change in the community; they also encourage participation and contributions from the public, to foster a sense of identity and belonging the community, which Afzal (2008) discusses. This is the case for the *Globe Post* and its audience. The information from the newspaper gave me an indication of what was happening in Lenasia South during the late 2010s and early 2020s for this research.

3. Interviews

Hamilton (2020:126) writes that 'old people are the custodians of memory', and this statement is true for the community of Lenasia South. Living in Lenasia South for over 40 years and watching it change is a unique experience, and it must be shared in the way it was perceived, understood and remembered.

I conducted 35 interviews with various people who were living in Lenasia South in 2023, as well as with people who moved out of the area. These included old neighbours, friends, shop-owners, teachers and leaders in religious institutions. I conducted most of the interviews face-to-face, and where I couldn't meet the individuals, I tracked down their number and called them, informing them of my research topic and asking for their insights and memories of the place. By 2023, the majority of my old neighbours had moved out and some people had also passed away. During my research process, I singled out community members and residents who I believed played a pivotal role during Lenasia South's inception. One of these people was Abubaker Cajee, who moved into Lenasia South in the early 1980s and established a few businesses all while being a Muslim

leader and activist in the community, but who moved out in 2023. I also interviewed the owner of one of the first and longest-standing supermarkets in Lenasia South, Jaydee's, whose story had become one of the subplots in my literary piece. I reached out to former teachers, and people who had established religious and cultural institutions, including Ramesh Iccharam for the Gujarati community and Pastor Shaun for the Christian community. The Swamiji I mention in my long-form passed away in 2020, but his character was recollected from memory. I spoke with our neighbours, Rajesh Patel and Rani Ramlal. I also visited the Lenasia South Civic Centre, and spoke with the librarian, an individual at the clinic, the manager at the City Power offices and the security guard to gather their insights and feelings about Lenasia South as they observe its changes. I also tracked the people who moved out of Lenasia South to understand what they remembered about the place and why they decided to move out; the distance and safety were flagged as the biggest concerns. I did not use all the information gathered from these interviews in my literary journalism assignment. The narrative I established, which was to use my brother's wedding as a framework, required me to interview people I knew more intimately and bring their story into mine.

The two pivotal people were my parents: my dad, Mohan Bhana being one of the members who helped establish both the Ashram (religious institution) which we attended and the Daxina Seva Samaj (a local Gujarati community). My mum, Madhoobala Bhana was a teacher and also part of the Samaj. Their arrival into Lenasia South from Lenasia was the beginning of the story I tell in my research. My brother, Rajiv Bhana and his wife, Raksha Bhana also shared their accounts of their memories, including the dance practices at their wedding, travelling to school and their involvement in the different religious and sport activities, plus their relationships with their friends. I also attempted to capture the change of them moving out of Lenasia South after they got married and the anxiety they felt when they came to visit because they had become unfamiliar with the place. I interviewed my childhood friend and her parents, because they were part of my upbringing and experiences in Lenasia South, and their story exemplified my story. Other interviews included business owners, that of the fish shop in the first shopping centre, Jivan Centre, as well as the owners of the bakery (Abdul Raju), supermarket (Shahid) and the Akhalwaya's (Feroz), we frequented. Their characters in the story show the various relationships that were formed over the many years of living in Lenasia South. I spoke to the new residents to understand why they decided to move to Lenasia South, including the people

who bought my family home, and their experiences were essential to explaining and showing that Lenasia South was once again changing shape.

4. Ethnographic immersion

I was not born when my parents moved to Lenasia South with my two elder brothers in 1990. They were initially living at the Seva Sedan flats on Gemsbok Avenue in Lenasia, which had also been put up for Hindus. My family were told that Lenasia South had some houses, too, which they should consider seeing. There was already a budding community in Lenasia South, and my parents knew some of them. They found their house on Parrot Crescent, and we lived there for 32 years. We moved out in November 2022 due to escalating crime and the long travel time to and from Johannesburg, but also because the people we were familiar with were beginning to move out. I was born in 1994 into this “Indian suburb”, unaware of what the country had just gone through. Apartheid was over, but I didn’t know any other race besides Indian, Black and Coloured.

My neighbours were Indian, my friends were Indian, and my school teachers were also mostly Indian. I started Nursery school when I was four years old. My parents sent me to Shree Bharat Sharda Mandir (SBSM) (a Gujarati vernacular school) in Lenasia, where I had only been exposed to Gujarati people, both from South Africa and India. It shaped my very early understanding of my religion, language and culture. I changed schools a year later: I attended Lenasia South Montessori Preschool when I was five. It was closer to home and easier in terms of transport. This was a mixed-race school, and I was exposed to Indian, Black and Coloured people, and it was an ordinary experience for me. My teachers were Indian and Black, so were my friends. I had the same experience at Parkside Primary School in Lenasia South, where I was for seven years, but I continued going to SBSM after “English school” to learn Gujarati. I never enjoyed it because I struggled to identify with the other students in my class, who were all from Lenasia and went to SBSM even for “English school”. I felt like an outsider, ironically, but I appreciate that I can speak, read and understand Gujarati, and that I have a connection with my roots and Indian culture. I started attending dance classes in Lenasia in 2002. It’s known as the Jhankaar School of Dance and it specialises in North Indian Kathak-based Indian Contemporary dance. It profoundly shaped by understanding of Indian culture, language and dance

styles, dressing, language and religion. Simultaneously, I attended *Satsangs (*prayers) and Sunday school at the Sri Ramakrishna Dham in Lenasia South, which was established by Sri Swami Premananda Puri in 2001, a religious teacher who taught us about Hinduism, the sacred scriptures and how to practise it within our households. These sessions laid the foundation of my religious knowledge and manners. The late Swami garnered devotees, Hindu and Tamil, from across Lenasia South, Lenasia, Roshnee, Mayfair and other Indian communities in South Africa for the weekly Satsangs and auspicious occasions, such as Shivratri, Krishna Jayanti and Navaratri. Alongside these religious activities, I also went to Daxina Seva Samaj, a community centre for other religious occasions, such as Holi, Diwali and Navratri. I perceive the people that I know from Daxina Seva Samaj to be “my” community. The Daxina Seva Samaj hall was purchased by some early Gujarati residents in Lenasia South and was intended to hold gatherings for the community. The hall was sold in 2024 as more people moved out of Lenasia South, and it is being repurposed into a school. I attended a high school out of Lenasia South in Rosettenville in the south of Johannesburg, with a bus load (or more) of other Indian children living in Lenasia South. This was the first time I was properly exposed to White people — this time I was very aware of my difference, but appreciative of understanding and interacting with other races. It opened my eyes to the world outside of Lenasia South. I attended Wits University for four years, and then started my first job in Sandton. These chapters in my life emboldened the difficulties I had when living in Lenasia South. I became more aware of my “difference” and the distance was more apparent and gruelling.

I illustrated my experiences within the context of my brother’s wedding in 2017, which showed how the community came together to help with the preparations; and this also demonstrated the traditions and relationships between people, including neighbours, friends and people who attended school and religious festivals together. On the other side of this story was the gradual mushrooming of informal settlements and illegal land grabs around Lenasia South. This sparked concern for residents and marked the transition away from community and towards dispersion. The slow provision of resources also resulted in crumbling infrastructure, including broken street lights and electricity and water cuts. The distance of travelling for work and school added to the grief. I relayed the transformation of the community from 2017, when my brother got married, to 2023, when my childhood friend got married. Over this period, I discovered my different identities and how I pieced them together through

the different changes in my life: the comfort and familiarity of living in Lenasia South, the struggle of trying to adapt to the world outside it and the realisation that I needed to escape it, while simultaneously searching for and accepting a new place I call “home”.

—----------

All these experiences and exposures lend into my foundational understanding of being a Hindu South African in post-apartheid South Africa. I was not aware of the segregation that existed before I was born, but I knew I was different from White people, and accepted that they were superior, I didn’t even know by what standards.

As I learned more about South Africa’s history and why I was surrounded by Indians mostly, I began to understand how complicated South Africa actually is, and how difficult it is to know myself. I knew Bollywood movies, music and actors more than South African movies and music. I knew curry, rice and roti before I knew burgers and pizzas. I was fascinated by Indian outfits, bangles and make-up before I accepted jeans, shirts and dresses as “normal attire”. I knew my Indianness more than my South Africanness, and I wasn’t sure if I was proud of it. I don’t think I was, because taking roti and curry for lunch or wearing a punjabi to the mall was weird and embarrassing, and the difference still stands out today. When it comes to sports, however, we always support South Africa, even when they’re playing against India or Sri Lanka in cricket.

The conflict in my understanding of my identity was always there, but I never really questioned it. I knew I wanted to belong to something - maybe put on a “White accent” so I could have more White friends in high school, or speak the few words of Sotho that I learnt from my helper to relate to Black people, or go to dance classes so I can retain my love for Bollywood, Indian attire and culture. It’s even more complicated when the topic of relationships comes up.

The fracture still exists and my experiences in different settings coupled with historical contexts enriched this project. Furthermore, my access to these different communities, people and institutions provided a personal and intimate account of the experiences of South African Indians and how they navigate(d) the cultural changes and political transitions in South Africa.

Ethnography is a study of cultural systems and socio-cultural contexts, processes and meanings within cultural systems, according to Whitehead (2005). The main attribute of ethnographic research is fieldwork. Citing Wolcott (1995), Whitehead (2005) points out,

> Fieldwork as a form of inquiry that requires a researcher to be immersed personally in the ongoing social activities of some individual or group carrying out the research. For classical ethnographers, who primarily studied local communities, it meant the total immersion of the researcher in the field setting 24 hours per day, 7 days per week, and in different seasons of the year, for an extended period of time (e.g., one year). In this way, the ethnographer not only becomes familiar with the spatial dimensions of the research setting and its socio-cultural dynamics, but also how those dynamics may change at certain times of the day, week or year. (2005:3)

I used ethnographic and qualitative research methods while conducting my research, which was through immersion, observation and qualitative interviews with the people. This included the people who lived there in the 1980s, who lived there in 2023, who moved out and who moved in before 2023. This included religious leaders, community leaders, business owners, my family and friends, politicians, activists and teachers.

I had the advantage of using my personal experiences and memories in the research, however, I have limited knowledge of what Lenasia South was before my parents moved in, and accessing people who remembered this period was a challenge

because they either lived elsewhere or have passed away. The information I gathered through oral accounts had to be pieced together several times to chronicle Lenasia South, but embedding myself into this context supported the narrative for this project.

Literary journalism approach

This long-form research project used a form and writing style that Wolfe (1973) refers to as “New Journalism”, a form of journalism that many American authors experimented with in the 1960s. It did not adhere to the conventional form of journalism, which follows the cardinal 5Ws and H rule, but instead borrowed its devices from fictional novels. According to Wolfe (1973), this meant that non-fictional pieces, like journalism, can be read “like a novel”, and could essentially replace the novel as a literary piece. However, new journalism is grounded in fact and real events, but is developed through the use of four key writing devices.

The first device is a scene-by-scene construction. According to Wolfe (1973), scenes can carry the story forward and sometimes make reference to historical events. Scenes provide very specific details around the time, place and setting to essentially paint a picture of what the writer is trying to convey.

To illustrate the different devices, I referred to the winner of the 2002 Caine Prize, Binyavanga Wainaina (2003)’s “Discovering Home” as an example. Wainaina wrote about his experience of going back home in Kenya from South Africa, while inserting himself in the story: the themes of home, familiarity, culture, and traditions are prevalent in this piece, and provided a framework for my project.

In this passage, Wainaina builds up the story using scenes which provide specific details about the changes he observes on this journey, for instance, this excerpt is named “A Fluid Disposition: Masailand, August 1995”, and describes his surroundings.

> A few minutes ago, I was sleeping comfortably in the front of a Landrover Discovery. Now I have been unceremoniously dumped by the side of the road as the extension officer makes a mad dash for the night comforts of Narok town. Driving at night in this area is not a bright idea.
>
> The first few minutes out of the car are disturbing - it is an interesting aspect of travelling to a new place that your eyes cannot concentrate on the particular
>
> I am swamped by the glare of dust, by the shiver of wind on undulating acres of wheat and barley, by the vision of mile upon mile of space free from our wirings. So much is my focus derailed that when I return to myself I find, to my surprise, that my feet are not off the ground – that the landscape had grabbed me with such force it sucked up the awareness of myself for a moment. (2003:83)

Wainaina also employed dialogue (the second device) in his writing. Dialogue is the direct speech captured in a piece of writing and according to Wolfe (1973:33), 'it involves the reader more completely than any other single device' as well as defining and establishing a person's character quicker and more effectively. For example:

> 'Arhh! It's so boring here! Nobody to talk to! I hope Eddah comes home early.' I am still stunned. How bold and animated she is, speaking Sheng, a very hip street language that mixes Swahili and English. 'Why didn't you go with the women today?' She laughs, 'I am not married. Ho! I'm sure they had fun! They are drinking Muratina somewhere here I am sure. I can't wait to get married.'

> ‘Kwani? You don’t want to go to university and all that?’
>
> ‘Maybe, but if I’m married to the right guy, life is good. Look at Eddah – she is free – she does anything she wants. Old men are good. If you feed them, and give them a son, they leave you alone.’ (Wainaina 2003:88)

With dialogue, Wainaina inserts himself into the story, noting his own observations, understanding and perception of the situation;, this proves that the piece is written from his point of view. However, according to Wolfe (1973) the third-person point of view is considered the third device in literary journalism. This is essentially telling the story through the eyes of a particular character - and it requires the writer to know the intimate thoughts, ideas and perspective of the character, which Wolfe said can be achieved through interviews. Wainaina uses first-person language. The passage above indicates that the story is written from his own point of view.

The fourth device, status-life details, are the basic characteristics that can be used to describe and decipher a person and their position in the world. As Wolfe states:

> This is the recording of everyday gestures, habits, manners, customs, styles of furniture, clothing, decorations, styles of travelling, eating, keeping house, modes of behaving toward children, servants, superiors, inferiors, peers, plus the various looks, glances, poses, styles of walking and other symbolic details that might exist within a scene. (1973:47)

An example of this can be seen in Wainaina:

> Baganda women traditionally wear a long, loose Victorian-style dress. It fulfils every literal aspect the Victorians desired, but manages, despite itself, to suggest sex. The dresses are usually in bold colours. To emphasise their size, many women tie a band just below their buttocks (which are often padded). (2003:92)

The essence of new journalism, as Wolfe (1973) describes it, is to give full, objective descriptions combined with the storytelling devices that people seek in short stories and novels, where the subjective or emotional life of a character is told. These writing mechanisms elevated my story, where people, places and culture intersect.

I framed my long-form narrative research around my brother's wedding in 2017. The occasion demonstrated the elements of community — where people helped in the preparation for the occasion — and culture which were displayed through the Hindu wedding customs. The proximity to businesses in the area that were familiar with the needs of the community — including of prayer goods and certain Indian vegetables — also gave depth to how the community dynamics play out. In 2017, Lenasia South was still a richly diverse space, and it was relatively safe. The neighbours, friends and religious and cultural activities were still robust. I used this timeline to create a contrast with my childhood friend and neighbour's wedding that took place in 2023 — after we moved out of the area. By this point, the community had dissipated significantly, and since it was post Covid-19, a lot of the religious and cultural activity halted. The different characters in my piece as well as the description of their surroundings, and the progression of the story from a rich and tight community to one that had become dispersed and lost, fulfilled the requirements of a long-form narrative piece.

My first attempt was positioned as more of an historical account of Lenasia South, which outlined its early days and what the very first residents observed. It also followed the developments of the area, but failed to include the thread that transformed the details into a story. My second attempt, while included more factors of the devices of long-form narrative, including characters,

more description and dialouge, was also missing the story-telling element. It instead provided snapshots of different periods in my life but were not connected to each other.

Conclusion

When Indian families arrived in South Africa as indentured labourers in the 1800s, their futures were already mapped out by the colonial regime. It determined where and how they should live, as well as the rights and opportunities they were allowed (or not allowed) to enjoy. This history is told remarkably in David et al. (2023). The Group Areas Act, a law that racially segregated people in different areas, was a product of a series of segregation laws that were instituted by the colonial regime at first and later the United Party, before the National Party took over and implemented it fully in 1950. This changed the lives of scores of non-White people living across South Africa. Those in Johannesburg were forced to move from their first homes in Vrededorp, Pageview, Sophiatown, Newclare, among others, to live in Lenasia - a group area established for Indians only. The transition was painful for families who lost their community, businesses and livelihoods. It was only in 1961 that the South African government officially accepted Indians as citizens. This change opened discussions about the identity of Indians living in South Africa. Vahed and Desai (2010) interrogated this conundrum and tried to determine if this population should be classified as Indian or as South African Indian. There is no definite conclusion to this, as identity is indeed an ever-changing thing, but it is true that identities were influenced by communities, which were in turn shaped by socio-economic and political factors. Afzal (2008) examined. These historical frameworks informed my understanding of the community of Lenasia, but this research expanded and told a story of Lenasia South — my hometown — to learn, understand and place my community's story in history. Lenasia South's story is not particularly unique to South Africa, nor is its changing demographic, but it is a place that shaped me, and many other current and former residents, in terms of cultural and religious grounding and mannerisms. The project used the four key writing devices that define literary journalism, which include scene-by-scene construction, dialogue, third-person point of view and status-life details. In this manner, this long-form literary journalism project examined the

transformation of Lenasia South amid post-apartheid social and economic shifts and serves as both a tribute and a reckoning of my own sense of belonging.

Long-form ethics

Participants in my research were informed of the purposes of this project and that it will be submitted to the University of the Witwatersrand for examination under the Master's in Journalism and Media Studies course. Interviewees were selected through personal connections and by their involvement in the development in the community. This included business owners, religious leaders and residents - past and present. Each participant completed a consent form which confirmed that I could record the interviews and use their names and information in my long-form research project. Aside from interviews, my research entailed immersion and observation of my surroundings and people in their natural settings. I took pictures and videos to capture scenes that I could portray in my project. It was important to include details of people's interactions with each other and events to build the narrative. It also required recalling memories to provide historical information. These included my personal accounts and experiences, as well as that of my family.

2. Long-Form Journalism Project

Part one

Chapter 1

My single bed was next to the wall, and my purple curtain hung over my duvet. I loved that I had a thick curtain because it blocked out the light - I couldn't tell if it was night or day. When it was time to wake up, I tugged at it and pulled it towards me while I lay in bed. I sat up against my wooden headboard and peered into my front yard and into the streets to observe the activity. I had the perfect view of Starling Street: the busiest street and "the business lane" of Lenasia South, in the south of Johannesburg.

It was the 22nd of April 2017. I was 23 years old, and 22 days into my first real job in Sandton. I only had the luxury of slow mornings on the weekends.

Thor, my white Swiss Shepherd, was running around in the front yard minding everyone's business. Cars were speeding across the main road - one after the next - some with booming bass and others that left the sounds of the "pah pah pah" exhaust in their trails. The trotting and annoying clanging of a donkey cart also contributed to the noise. I don't know where the donkeys came from but it's a funny sight for the 21st Century. I embraced it.

Half-contemplating and half-observing, it was a moment of connecting with the scenes around me. I could hear Kenny Maistry playing golden oldies on the radio 702 in my mother's room. My brother, Rajiv woke up early. His wedding was in a few weeks, so his excitement was building up. He came into my room to do his hair and annoyed me.

“Kid, are you still sleeping?”

Kid was his nickname for me, being the youngest in the family.

“What do you want?”

Typical sibling bickering.

“Where’s the plug for the hair straightener?”

“I don’t know, check in mummy’s room.”

He was singing his version of a Bollywood song. Stuck in his head from dance practice the night before.

“Where are you going?” I asked.

“Raksha’s house.”

His fiancée. She lived down the road from us.

At 11 o’clock, Ouma walked past our house on Parrot Crescent. She whistled and wailed to announce her arrival. My mum was her regular customer. Ouma carried brooms and dusters beneath her armpit on one side and a bag wrapped around her other shoulder, filled with pot scourers, steel wool and socks. She had colourful shoelaces in her hands. She knocked the lock against the palisade gate because we never had a bell. Thor alerted us.

My mum met her at the front gate.

“Ma, what do you have today?”

Ouma spoke in broken English and was soft-spoken. She wore torn black tommies, high socks, a wraparound skirt with a plain t-shirt and a doek wrapped around her head.

“Air freshener, mummy. Steel wool, pot scourer and dish cloth.”

“How much is the dishcloth?”

“R15, mummy. Please support.”

My mum bought chequered dish cloths, a block of air freshener and some steel wool.

The activity was my cue to get out of bed and start *my* day.

A pile of wedding invitations were on the dining room table. My parents still needed to hand them out. A stack of the little gold gift cardboard boxes was lying haphazardly about. I had to label them and put them in the little lamps we bought to give out as wedding favours at the pithi on the day before the wedding. I still had to fill tiny ziplock bags with individually wrapped Mentos sweets, paan (betel leaf) sweets and ready-made varyari (sweet fennel seeds mixed with almonds and pink Romantics sweets). These were also wedding favours we had to give out.

I planned to get my legs waxed and thread my eyebrows. My beautician came from India after an arranged marriage with a South African man. If I got there late I'd have to wait. She didn't work by appointment.

I walked to her little corner salon, just two streets away from my house. It was opposite Jivan Centre — Lenasia South's first shopping centre, beside Bismillah Tandoori takeaway. Cars were speeding down Starling Street. Saturdays were the only days people ran errands. I trod carefully on the pavement rather than the road because my dad had warned me, "Drivers in Lenasia South were reckless".

Musa at the old Rhea's Cafe raised his hand in a friendly wave and smiled. I smiled back. My mum knew him and he delivered bread to our house on our lazy days. The samosa aunty was in her caravan at the corner; selling samosas or vade for R8 a packet. A few people stalled around her caravan as the smell of the batter and the fragrant coriander engulfed the air. It lingered on my senses as I walked past. It was her Saturday special.

The door at my beautician's salon was closed with a chair pitted against it from the inside. A lady smiled and opened the door for me. The 5 by 5 square metre salon had a sunken couch and kitchen chairs scattered for the waiting customers. No relaxing spa music was playing, nor were there any aromas; just the pungent smell of the rose-scented agarbati, and a room full of ladies waiting for their turn.

Her price list was a simple A4 page on the wall: upper lip wax - R10, eyebrows - R20 and full-leg wax - R100.

She was one of many beauticians who came from India and found their way into Lenasia South. They ran their businesses informally in a small corner of a hair salon, a garage or a room in their home. It was difficult for them to earn a living through their salons, but they cultivated relationships, and their businesses were somehow guaranteed by their regular customers. We

needed them as much as they needed us, and so ensued a relationship in the pursuit of clean eyebrows and smooth legs at a very cheap price.

Chapter 2

My mum waited eagerly for me at home. It was almost 1 pm and we needed to buy vegetables, flour and cooking oil. The afternoon show on Lotus FM was playing on the radio as we detoured to Classic Bakery. A regular stop.

The shop was dark but deliciously fogged with the smell of fresh bread and koeksisters. A glass shielded the trays of eclairs with thick cream drizzled with chocolate, puff pastries with a drop of jam, koeksisters with and without coconut, doughnuts, cheesecake and burfee, jalebi and channa magaj — popular sweetmeats. Abdul sold homemade roti and custard biscuits, and tubs of chevro.

On the counter by the till was a steel frame, and all my favourite dry, sour sweets were hanging on it in tiny ziplock packets. There were packets of china fruit, bor, choria, sour, dry papaya and mango strips. I took one packet of sour, dry mango for R2 and a handful of chappies for R8. He also sold cigarettes, coal and flavours for hookah pipes.

My mum took brown rolls and koeksisters, but she didn't carry enough cash on her.

"I will pay the rest when I come again," she told Abdul unashamedly.

"No problem, aunty," he said.

Ouma was sitting outside Classic Bakery at the scene of an old, bombed Standard Bank ATM.

"Peanuts. Peanuts"

Jane came swaying with the bag of monkey nuts balanced on her head.

“Please support. One packet, only R10.”

“Next time, Jane,” we declined.

The purple Hollywood Bets building, next to the Da Dop Shop, the liquor store, was beginning to fill up. It was at the corner of Wimbledon and Starling Street. Since it was on the main street, it was accessible to most people, and an advantage for business owners.

Starling Street was adjacent to Wimbledon, which led to the K43 highway and extended towards Finetown and Ennerdale on the left, and Lenasia on the right. Parallel to the highway, and over a small hill, were wetlands and a dam. It was picturesque and lush. A few shacks were erected on the marsh, but there were more in the distance.

It was a contrast to the residential side, where comfortable four and five-bedroom houses were put up. A single road separated us.

I don’t know when the shacks started to mushroom or who lived in them, but I could justify that they needed a place to stay. The government had probably failed them and they had to resort to living in small dwellings and often without water and electricity. So much for economic freedom and all the good things they promised us. We lived in a comfortable four-bedroom house with a double garage and a big front yard. We had good neighbours. Indian neighbours and friends we could trust. But before this, there was nothing much. Lenasia was established under the Group Areas Act during apartheid. The White government forcibly removed people who lived in Fordsburg, Fietas, Sophiatown and other surrounding areas in Johannesburg and sent them to live in an isolated place where nothing existed and opportunities were few. Lenasia South was an extension of Lenasia. It was

further away from town and closer to the informal settlements for poor black people. It also became known as an “Indian township.”

When my parents moved to Lenasia South from a little two-bedroom flat in Lenasia or “Lenz”, there were very few developments, but it was more than what it was in the early 1980s. There were empty plots and land to build houses and shops and whatever the community wanted. Banks gave out loans so people could build homes.

I was born in 1994, four years after they moved to Lenasia South. My brothers’ friends became my friends, and our neighbours became friends, too. I liked it because everyone was nearby, and even my school was within walking distance from home. We had our small neighbourhood, so I always had *someone* around me. Now on Starling Street, I reflected on how the diaspora was slowly changing. Previously, it was predominantly Indian, but it was becoming more racially diverse, albeit without White people. Only three colours were known to Lenasia South: Black, Brown (that’s me!) and Coloured.

The shops sold products, like spices, lentils, Halal meat and vegetables, mainly catering for the needs of those who lived in Lenasia South. Informal vegetable stands were erected sporadically but in proximity to each other. They sold stock-standard Indian vegetables for a Brown household. A black chalkboard that leaned against crates had the prices of the fresh vegetables for the day.

“Jam tomatoes: R15 a kg”

“Up-to-date potatoes: R20 a bag”

“Fresh chillies: R25 a box”

“Dhanyia, methi bajji - R5 a bunch”

Then squashed at the bottom of the board:

“Bhinda, brinjal, double beans, carrots and pumpkin”

The Daxina Supermarket in the ever-so-busy NTN Centre was newer than Jivan Centre, and the shops were constantly being repurposed — from a salon to a cell shop and a pet shop to a DVD shop that eventually closed down. My mum stopped to buy groceries from Daxina Supermarket. The owner Shahid was counting money behind the till.

“Aunty, are you still living?”

He joked around with my mum.

“What do you mean? I’m still living.” Do you have dabla beans? I’m collecting for my son’s wedding. How much is 10kg of white flour and a 5-litre bottle of oil?”

“12.5kg white flour is R80, and the sunflower oil is R79.99.”

My mum took two bags of flour and one bottle of oil. She needed it to make puri for the wedding. I helped her pick out two packets of dabla beans. As we existed the supermarket, a whiff of smoke blew into our faces. A sausage braai on the passage between Shahid’s shop and Khan’s Butchery was clousing the space. It was a Saturday standard like the samosa aunty.

We deliberated on buying food from Akhalwaya's — the famous fish and chip franchise from Fordsburg. There was just one main counter separating the people waiting in queues and the kitchen at the back. There was a small fish tank with tiny fish in it…in a fish and chip shop. It added no aesthetic value. Very random. We ordered a medium packet of chips for R35 from Feroz, the owner. My mum reminded him to fry it in vegetarian oil, not in the same oil used to fry mutton, beef and polony. He was familiar with the need for vegetarian oil because Hindus don't eat beef, and when we're fasting, we don't eat meat. It was nice that he understood that even though he was Muslim.

At 4 pm, the boys driving their Golfs and GTIs, with a boombox that shook my brain, were creeping into the streets. Ladies dressed in gowns and slippers came to Akhalwayas and Roman's Pizza. That shop used to be a Chicken Licken'. It was one of the first of the few fast food places in Lenasia South. The smell of chips mixed with the smoke from the braai alongside the smell of fresh bread from Royal Bakery awakened my senses in a deeply confusing way. The chips were spiced with salt, red chilli powder and vinegar. It was wrapped in trestle paper and slid into a blue plastic packet. It was hot in my hands, and the plastic smelled like it was melting.

I opened the packet and stole two hot, spicy, slightly flaccid chips. Perfect for a lazy Saturday.

Chapter 3

My dad wanted to go to the Ashram for the Satsang at 4 pm at the Ashram just 4 minutes from home, and he needed the car.

“What took you guys so long? You know I want to go to the Ashram?”

We swiftly unpacked the car, and he zoomed off. My mum told him to come once they’re done and not wait around. He had a habit of doing that.

My dad didn’t have a huge interest in religion and spirituality, but this changed after he joined the Ashram in Lenasia South. It was first opened in 1991 in a repurposed house on Starling Street, a year after my family moved to Lenasia South. It was just across the street from our house. A Swamiji from Durban established it after he recognised the gap in the community. He used to visit Lenasia South while he was doing charity work, so my parents already knew him. When the Ashram first opened its doors, my parents furnished it with our old lounge suite, sheets, dishes and pots. My mum prepared a vegetarian breakfast and tea for him every morning, and he used our house phone before cell phones were a thing.

People from Lenasia, Roshnee and the south of Joburg started coming to the Ashram on Saturdays for Satsang and on special occasions. They sent their children to Sunday school as well. My parents said we were privileged to know and to have Swamiji at our doorstep, so we should make it a point to go to the Ashram. My dad was a teacher at Sunday school and he made sure the three of us attended every week. Children outside of Lenasia South also attended. We were a big group and had to sit in different areas of the Ashram — like school groups — to learn about Hinduism. The Ashram on Starling Street closed down towards the end of 2000 and a new one was opened on Cosmos Street in 2001. It was smaller but Swamiji retained the same crowd and newer devotees came, too.

Sixteen years later, in 2017, the crowd withered away because people had slowly started moving out of Lenasia South. Most of them moved out to be closer to work. Fair enough, no one enjoys an hour-long drive to a place that was 30 minutes away. They came back on occasion, and each time, they were shocked at how much I'd grown. Most of the time, I didn't know who they were. The crowd became smaller and Swamiji felt those people were straying from spirituality and forgetting the importance of Hinduism.

My dad got home after 7:30. Later than usual.

"Why did you come so late?"

"I had to stay for the meeting." He was a committee member as well. "Swamji was upset because only 15 people came for Satsang today. He expects a bigger crowd like before, but people won't just drive to Lenasia South. We finish at 6pm and it's late for some people to drive back. It's not easy," my dad complained.

We still lived in Lenasia South even though some people were moving out. We had built a life and were part of a community and it would have been difficult to break away and find a new place to stay. Things weren't that bad, anyway.

But we had to keep an eye on the informal settlements mushrooming on the uncomfortable side of the highway. More shacks on Hospital Hills were also beginning to emerge - a settlement that was put up around the same time Lenasia South was established. The difference in our circumstances, despite living in the same area, surpassed my comprehension. Apartheid messed things up.

The wheels of the front palisade gate vibrated against the rails and banged closed. Rajiv was back.

"Kid, open the door."

Without saying much, he walked into the kitchen to get the chips we left in the microwave. My dad settled to watch Indian Idols after dinner, and my mum was in the dining room peeling the dabla beans we bought earlier that day.

Tyres screeched on Starling Street as the drag racers took over the mildly quiet streets. The shallow music beats from the informal settlements also filtered into my house. Thor snuck into his kennel and fell asleep.

Chapter 4

On an ordinary work day, I had to be up before 5 am because my first real job was slap-bang in the middle of Sandton. It was so big and different from this little world I was living in.

The glossy, fancy office with free food was about 55km away from home, and I was travelling with someone because I didn't have a car or any viable or safe form of public transport. The bus I took to Wits wasn't an option because it didn't go as far as Sandton, and frankly, I didn't know how to use a taxi. Buying a car wasn't in my sights. I had been travelling with other people for most of my life - most of us did - whether it was school, university or work. It was an obvious solution. I had no control over my time when I travelled with someone else. If they said we were leaving at 5:55 am, I had to be ready. I didn't want to be the reason someone else got late for work.

I sat in the passenger seat, weary. Fighting the urge to fall asleep. The Azaan sounded while we were making our way out of Lenasia South, leaving its soft echoes behind us. There was hardly any activity at that ungodly hour, except for the few people waiting at the street corner for a taxi or their transport. There was a man I saw every morning for a while. He carried a plastic packet and wore overalls with paint stains on it. Our paths crossed in the early morning, and we would go about our day and cross paths again the next day. I wondered about his life. Petrol attendants at the BP garage were huddled in the corner of the station while people streamed in to fill their tanks for the long journey ahead. It was just a regular morning in a place we called home.

The dry, flat landscape with houses, shops, garages and schools was a major contrast to skyscrapers and shiny buildings in Sandton. Spatial planning was so strange.

The messy overalls and torn takkies of the man walking wearily on the side of the road were so different from the tailored suits and leather shoes of the men who walked tall with briefcases in the business capital of our country.

The daily journey from Lenasia South to Sandton made me more aware of how different my reality was from other people's. I had experienced life outside of Lenasia South before, in high school and university, and I held those realities in me, but as an adult, something was shifting. Maybe I was beginning to lose touch with the community I was raised in because I was heading out into a very unfamiliar and daunting territory. As much as I didn't want to be sheltered and comfortable at home, I was scared because I was unlearning myself and learning something new. I wasn't even sure if I liked it and if I wanted to embrace it.

I had to sit with this feeling.

As we snaked through the cars after passing through the Grasmere Toll road to head onto the N1 North highway, I observed my surroundings. The tiny lights on shacks on the left-hand side of the highway were still glimmering because it was still dark at 6 am. Winter was approaching, too, so there were plumes of smoke from a fire, possibly from the night before. It looked placid from the outside, but I had no doubt that on the inside there were hundreds of other men in paint-stained overalls with a plastic packet heading out to go to work or to find work. The camps extended far and towards the N12 Highway where we converged with the people who came from Lenz. I assumed most of them were from there. Traffic was already backed up.

The long-distance travelling was getting to me. I don't know how some people, like the uncle I was travelling with had been doing it for 15 to 20 years. At around 6:15, he switched the radio to 702. Xolani Gwala was the morning show host. The car was silent, except for a few giggles, snickers and disagreements with what was being said on the radio. We had just left that period of the #ZumaMustFall protests that sent even old White people into the streets to protest against his presidency.

Lenasia South is located around 35km away from the Johannesburg city centre, but with traffic, it took between 60 minutes and forever to get to work. Whenever we sat in this horror of a congested highway. One question came to mind: "Why is there traffic? Like, just drive".

My dad told me the traffic on the M1 to and from Joburg was due to apartheid. I thought he was being witty. But he was serious.

“How so?”

“Because of the Group Areas Act, most people were moved to live in areas far away from the city. Now they are all working this side but they can’t move out, so there’s more traffic coming from the south or going in that direction,” he said.

It made sense. Especially as I witnessed the contrasts between the two sides of the same country made me question my reality. Was being Brown a hindrance to my chances of living in an affluent city, where there were more opportunities and where Uber Eats or at least Uber, existed. Lenasia South wasn’t even on the Uber Eats map. Outrageous. I had so many questions about why things were the way they were.

As we were driving, I thought about my colleagues at work. They lived very close to the office. They were probably hitting snooze as I was leaving home.

The worst thing about living in Lenasia South was that no one knew where it was, and because of this, I was slightly embarrassed to say it. I didn’t want to explain it, and I didn’t want to be “othered”. I felt like I never knew enough because of where I came from. I felt that my skills didn’t matter because I had not seen “the real world.”

I was sheltered in the community I was raised in, and my job was one of the ways ou,t but the danger of the “real world” always intimidated me. It didn’t help that my brown dad was a magistrate who had indeed seen the real world. I wondered if he sheltered me in his world because he had a cautious approach to life in general. I wanted to defy it, but I was too young and cautious to even try.

I was usually the first one to get to the office and the last one to leave. People jokingly asked if I slept in the office, I smirked at the comment, but it hurt a little on the inside because I had to explain my “difference” and my distance.

I told them I lived in Lenasia.

“Lanseria?” they asked.

“No, Lenasia”.

I said Lenasia because I thought it was a bit more popular than Lenasia South.

“Oh, Lenasia. Where is that?”

“Uhm, in the deep south of Joburg. Close to Soweto?”

That’s the best I could come up with.

Story of my life.

Chapter 5

It took my mum six minutes to get to work; no snaking traffic, endless roads and a long day far away from home. She was a nursery school teacher and administrator at Kiddies Corner Playschool. It was on the same premises as the DSSj hall. That's where we were having my brother's pre-wedding functions.

The hall was a meeting place for people of Lenasia South, whether they attended karate classes, workshops, lectures, gala dinners or school awards. But it was "founded" by early residents in Lenasia South. Mostly the Gujarati folk. DSS stood for Daxina Seva Samaj; in English, that was South Service Society. They wanted a place to host religious festivals for the budding community. They opened a school on the same premises. Three classrooms, a playground, a teacher's kitchen and kiddies' bathrooms. There was a small temple hidden in the corner between the classrooms. My mum landed a job as a teacher's aide at the school in 2000. It helped that my dad was also on the committee.

The teachers were Indian, and the caretakers, helpers and teacher assistants were black, but they seemed to all get along.

Yanti Kaka worked at the school and was doing the decor for my brother's functions. He was always the one who decorated the hall so I had an idea of what props he used: artificial flower garlands with mango leaves, pleated drapes and one of his fabric-painted Ganesh portraits. It wasn't exuberant, but he made it look pretty.

The festivities at the hall, like the Ashram, were a block that built my identity.

Navaratri was my fondest memory in the hall. It was the nine nights of Garba, a Gujarati folk dance, in honour of the Goddess Durga. Yanti Kaka spent his days setting up the hall for the Garba at night. The hall was dim except for the lights that shone onto the idol of the Goddess at the centre.

Yanti Kaka pulled out his usual Navratri banner — a motif of a man and woman in dance. It was pinned against drapes on the stage. Chairs were lined up on either side of the hall, and unintentionally, women sat on the left and men sat on the right. They watched intently and waved at people — old and new — as they streamed into the hall.

Women wore colourful lenghas, Punjabis and sarees with matching bangles, earrings and necklaces.

Garba is performed in a circle around the idol. A cross-step while clapping hands. When the beat quickened, the elderly hopped out, and the young kept the energy going with a style of Garba they invented. The doors to the school's playground were ope,n and a cool breeze cooled the hall. We used the brief breaks in between Garbas to catch up with old friends from school and our neighbourhoods.

The circles at Garba were getting smaller as well. I suppose long and late hours at work got in the way of celebrating. The hall filled up on weekends, though. Sometimes the old committee members also came to visit. It was nice to feel the "good old days" in our hall again. But the quiet weekdays were a reminder — a symptom — of how rapidly our community was dissipating and changing. New people came to enjoy the Garba, many from India. The communities were constantly transforming, but we had something…a place where we belonged.

Chapter 6

It was one week before the wedding, and we gathered for the last time to rehearse the “show-stopper” we were going to present to the crowd on the night of music and dance. Rajiv was in the garage and had already whipped out the Bombay Sapphire gin and Sky Vodka bottle to kickstart the night. He waited patiently for his friends to come through. We said practice starts at 7 pm, but we made an allowance for latecomers.

Raksha and I were in the lounge, doing last-minute choreography. We were both trained dancers in Indian classical dance, so technically, I knew her before she met my brother. But he never accepted that.

They met when they were teenagers in high school. This was despite living two streets away from each other, going to the same primary school and going to the Ashram and DSS. It was timing, I guess. We went to a high school in Rosettenville. Not the best of areas in the south of Joburg, but somehow, over the years, close to 20 children from Lenasia South went there. It was 30 minutes away from home.

It was a Model C school in a White area, so it automatically became a “White school” for us. It was the first time we were exposed to White people. I felt inferior and I didn’t even know why. I felt like I was on the back foot because I came from a school in a small suburb and didn’t know as much as the kids from White schools. I didn’t have the opportunities they had, like sports and after-school activities, but now that I was going to a White school, I had access to these extra sports and subject choices. It was an advantage over going to a high school in Lenasia South. In a way, I already felt I was better than the children who went to the schools back home.

Rajiv played cricket for the school — one of the best the school had — but had to quit because he never had transport home. He lost out on opportunities to play league cricket from a young age.

Again, we were on the back foot, but we tried to mix with different races at school. It felt as though we spoke a different language altogether because our understandings were different. For comfort, the brown kids stuck together. We had one common meeting spot during break: “The Big Tree”.

We were subjected to racism from both Whites and coloureds, but we didn’t know any better.

“It smells like curry!”

“Look at all the curry munchers!”

It was normalised and we made light of it. However, the difficulty of trying to mix with people from school made us appreciate the ease of connecting with the people at home. We could remove that metaphoric mask, relax our demeanour and speak without having to explain ourselves as much.

We heard the deep exhaust of a Polo rev into the yard. It was my brother’s friend, Hishal. He came to greet us.

“Howsit Raksha, howsit Aarti”

Soon after, the “oonts oonts” of house music was coming from the front yard, and someone else had arrived.

“What kind, bra? “ It was Akiel. He and Rajiv became friends in pre-school and played cricket in the Lenasia South Cricket Club together. They’d been friends since then. Avinash arrived and announced he was ready to dance, and Vivek made a quieter entry. They were all friends from primary school. We could relate to them better because we shared experiences in Lenasia South. We knew which uncle didn’t know how to do garba, which Ma made the best burfee, which teacher in our primary school

used to talk to himself; also that it's better to take the Golden Highway and Eikenhof road to get onto the highway, rather than going through the toll road.

A few shots of gin and vodka had already gone down; there was a buzz among us. We turned up the music to match our loud voices and laughter. We kept the garage doors open to let the cool air in while we danced. The palisade gate was closed so it was safe.

"You making so much noise. The neighbours are going to complain," my mum checked on us.

"Haai, masi. They mos know we dancing. We're not so loud," Hishal responded jokingly.

My dad came and snuck a video while we were dancing.

It was something past twelve and it was only Raksha, me and my brother's four friends. My brother in his drunken stupor got sentimental.

"Guys, we went through a lot in this garage."

Our house had been a meeting place for all my brother's parties.

"Remember when we used to play poker and smoke pipe? Akiel bra, you made that thing from a valpre bottle and tape."

"We used to come to buy flavour from Raksha's father's shop and we didn't even know her that time," Akiel said.

“Remember all those New Year's Eve parties when we got so drunk here, bra, and you were mopping my lounge at 7 in the morning.”

He was throwing out memories incoherently, and we listened intently. The boys took sips of their drinks from polystyrene cups… lost in their thoughts. It felt like time stood still as we reminisced on all those memories.

On a slightly sober note, everyone left. We closed the gate.

“Message when you get home.”

“Aweh!”

Chapter 7

The first Ashram on Starling Street was repurposed into a hair and nail salon. It was the first time in nearly 16 years that I stepped back into the building, to do my nails, days before the wedding. There was a side door, which I didn't remember using and I went upstairs to the salon

The space was unrecognisable, but I tried to evoke the old feelings and memories of being in the Ashram. I had flashbacks of the shrine filled to capacity on Krishna Jayanti when we prayed until midnight and Shivratri when we prayed from 6pm to 6am. I remembered falling asleep on my mother's lap. I vaguely remembered my first dance lessons and the tiny details from the "Hinduism for Children" books we read at Sunday school.

Soft rain fell on the roof — a slight inconvenience if it continued — because the wedding was happening outdoors.

"They said the rain will stop by the evening, so by the wedding it will be clear. Don't worry Ma. Even if it rains, you know it's God's blessings," the hairdresser told me.

Seconds later, the place was in complete darkness.

My eyes widened as I looked to them for answers and our Lenasia South WhatsApp groups were silent, too. If it wasn't a power trip there was no guarantee it would come back soon. Anxiety filled my stomach.

It was chilly and dusky and still drizzling when I walked back home.

The tent in our front yard was blocking the light from entering the garage where seven ladies were busy rolling and frying puri – an Indian flatbread, about the size of a very small saucer, to eat with curries.

My grandmother perfected the consistency of dough and supervised the women as they rolled and fried the deliciously, buttery puris. I had to taste-test one.

This task could have easily been delegated to a wedding cook, but there was willing help from our neighbours and friends. It would not have only been rude to dismiss them, but we would have lost out on a special moment of bonding and sharing stories during the wedding celebrations. It took about four hours and the ladies were collectively lamenting the rain and electricity issue. We made a pot of masala tea and enjoyed it with the fresh puris. There was no indication of when the electricity would come back, and they departed before dusk set.

“Kaam pare, toh phone karje.” [If there’s any work to do, phone us.]

Clusters of our family members came to our shallow-lit house. Somewhat panicked - it felt like they made things worse. They were talking on top of each other and telling me and my mum what to do. One was making garlands, another filling up sweetmeats. One aunt was arranging flowers and another organising the prayer goods. The dining room table was cluttered and the organised chaos sent me into a tailspin.

At least we ended the night with lights. Relief.

Chapter 8

The first big day arrived. It was 5am and my mum woke me up in a panic.

“Aarti, wake up. The lights are gone.”

Half-dazed, she told me I had to go opposite to Darshana Masi’s house to shower and get dressed. I didn’t question her and left the house with my little bag.

The sky was grey, and the sun was barely peeping through the clouds. It was cold and wet.

I met her at her front gate.

“What is your mummy doing?”

“They are busy making the dhal.”

By 5:45, I was dressed and carried the three ice-cream tubs filled with frozen patha back home. My mum had left her food in the neighbours’ fridges because there was no space in our own.

There was no way around my mum rushing between the kitchen and garage to fetch the food in the fridge. Wearing a gown and walking barefoot on the wet bricks, the worry in her eyes were evident but she kept going while my aunts and my grandmother took up space around the single gas stove in the kitchen to cook big pots of dhal and sweet vermicelli.

At something past eight, Rajiv was dressed; while my mum scurried around the house in a half-draped saree to bring out the fresh flower garlands for the Ganesh prayers we had to do at home. The crates with the gold gift boxes, variyari packets, a bottle of turmeric and oil; mango leaves and steel bowls were in the passage. My dad needed to drop these at the hall before the guests arrived at 9am.

We arrived at the hall at 9:30 – late – to visibly cold, restless guests. I saw Yanti Kaka's modest little set-up at the front; a picture of Ganesh was hung onto a steel frame and just a few garlands hanging on the side.

Heads turned to look at us. My mum looked down in shame and began to cry. I saw the judgemental eyes as my mum's friends consoled her at the back of the hall.

Power outages had become a norm in Lenasia South, but for people who came from their affluent suburbs in Glenvista, Fourways and Sandton – where things actually worked – my little suburb was seen as backward, broken and unsafe. It was like they looked down on us and questioned why we were still staying in Lenasia South. Their long drive on the day with unfavourable weather and no electricity only amplified their negative view. They expected us to consider moving out as well. But it was not something we were ready for.

The soft chatter among the women was echoing in the hall. Ordinarily, some music would be playing or someone would be singing, but the cold and discomfort was a turn-off. One by one they smeared the cold turmeric paste on Rajiv — a symbol of purification. It hardened on his body. He was shaking like a leaf.

"What happened bra?" Hishal asked him afterwards.

We told him Rajiv needed to bath before the Satak, but there was no hot water at home.

“You can come shower by me, bra. Our electricity came back.”

We were hesitant because the turmeric is very messy and leaves stains.

“It’s fine, bra. How? We all bras here. Just come shower by me,” Hishal reassured.

Rajiv had never showered at Hishal’s house before.

In the late afternoon, people who were part of the DSS committee brought generators to keep the lights on for the satak. Through the hour-long ceremony to align the planets and summon ancestors, the exchanging of parcels and dinner, the hall remained lit. At least.

The streets were eerily dark, cold and quiet as we drove to Daxina Primary School where Raksha was having her satak and we were having the joint geet. I envied the people wrapped up in warm clothes in their homes, while I trotted around in a saree, high heels and an uncomfortably tight blouse.

The hall was dusky and dark except for the stage lights and the fairy lights that scalloped from the ceiling to the corners of the hall.

Her parents welcomed guests at the door.

Raksha’s dad had a small supermarket on Starling Street. He stocked everything from hair dye, batteries, cigarettes, hair gels, and incense sticks to pink dhal, oil dhal, magh dhal, yellow dhal, chickpeas and white beans; and some household products,

non-perishable foods, brooms, plugs, bags, odd clothes and cigarettes, hookah coal and flavour. It had an old-fashioned feel to it and rightfully so. His shop was among the first to come up in Lenasia South and it stood the test of time. He sold sweets that reminded me of my childhood: sippy sherbet, stock sweets, the original fireballs and chappies; plus the odd spinning tops and yo-yo's.

He was Uncle Jaydee to everyone and everyone else was "bhaba", "my friend" or "aunty" to him. The children who grew up in front of him brought their kids to the shop eventually.

He had to invite *some* of his regular customers, who became his friends, to the functions; or at least the geet. It was informal and fun and they didn't need to provide big meals. Just Kulfi ice cream.

We took to our positions for our 12 minutes of fame to dance for the last time. It was an emotional but exciting moment because it was long-awaited and something we got to bond over together. We laughed and screamed out while dancing. We celebrated the 12 minutes; with the friends of 20 years for a love story that brought us all together.

The clouds did not part on their wedding day, but shy rays of sunshine tried to fight through it. It was a much calmer day because electricity had been restored and we just had to make our way to the wedding venue in Alberton, 25 minutes away. It was a garden wedding and eyes were constantly surveilling the clouds. The bridal couple was under a canopy. Raindrops caused ripples in a pond; and signalled the start of a rainy day. As the guests huddled together under a shelter, they observed the two-hour-long ceremony. The close friends and cousins stood under umbrellas and watched gleefully and tearfully as the couple married. They were not bothered by the rain or the guests' discomfort. My parents stopped worrying, too and we let things take its course on God's rainiest day in May.

As the day wound down and the house became quieter, I swapped my wedding outfit for warm, comfortable pajamas. Everything was over. My brother was married, and he was leaving the house, forever. Our days of annoying each other in the mornings and waiting up at night were also over. I pondered my future in this house: “will I get to walk out our yard on my wedding day like my brothers did?” “Will the same people be here?” “Would we even be living here at all?”

It left me restless, but my heavy eyes led me into a slumber.

Part two

Chapter 9

My life was at a crossroads. Both my brothers were married and moved out and an unspoken responsibility fell on me to take care of my parents.

They were still capable, both were still working and independent, but they were ageing, and it weighed on me. I wanted to move forward with my life, maybe get a little place in Rosebank but I felt guilty about staying far from home and leaving my parents alone in our four-bedroom house, which felt much bigger now.

“What if there was a medical emergency, and there was no one here to help?”

“What if someone breaks in at night and hurts them?”

“What if they get robbed while pulling in the car at the front gate?”

That cautiousness and anxiety surfaced and I subconsciously blocked myself from doing life so I could just be around “just in case.”

My parents were still comfortable in Daxina because other couples stayed in Lenasia South. My mum was adamant that the house in Lenasia South would be our “forever” home, and I guess staying was more tantalising than starting over in a new house in a new neighbourhood where nobody knows their name. She was staying for the community.

“You’re staying for the community, but the community is going and you’re going to be left alone,” I told them.

I was frustrated with my life in Lenasia South. But the topic of “moving out” was always met with resistance. It was a conversation we never had. My friends were moving out and living bigger lives.

Maybe it was time for me to do the same.

“Moving out wouldn’t change the fact that this is home, right?”

My first car at 24 was my way out of depending on people for transport. It gave me the taste of something I so desperately craved my whole life: freedom.

Freedom to stay out as late as I wanted and go wherever I wanted.

But driving home at night became a paranoia-stricken nightmare. With no street lights, low visibility and huge potholes, the roads became a danger. I had to learn different routes coming in and out of Lenasia South in case a road was blocked because of a protest or the dark roads were a hazard.

“Don’t come too late, and message when you leave.”

“Don’t take Grasmere Toll at night. Rather come through Lenz. It’s better than driving past the squatter camps”

These were my parents parting words in the morning whenever I drove off to work.

Lenasia South was robbing me of my freedom again.

Chapter 10

The words “Lenasia South residents protest against land grabs” flashed on the news.

It was a Saturday evening in 2019 and Rajiv and Raksha came to visit. His friends also came home that evening. It was like old times. We sat in the dining room and watched with great intent as protestors in neon jackets and beanies stood on K43 Highway with placards and banners, that read: “No to land grabs”. “Ons is gatvol of the land invasions”. “Don’t turn your back to land invasions.”

Tensions between Indians and Blacks living in Lenasia South were becoming intense as more shacks mushroomed. On one hand, people were concerned about the safety and value of their homes. On the other hand, people just needed a place to stay. The government failed to fulfil promises, and never provided enough houses for all South Africans, especially the poor. I didn’t blame the shack dwellers but criminality was a concern. It held people hostage as they put up high walls and fences and stayed home at night. Houses were getting robbed and cars were getting hijacked. We became paranoid at every “thump” or “bump” we heard in the house. When Thor barked incessantly, we wondered if someone was trying to get into our house. We did everything we could to protect ourselves. It wasn’t an ideal way of living. The highway that separated our comfort and the discomfort of the shack dwellers was getting narrow.

The paranoia was heightened when there were protests. They scared us into believing that any piece of vacant land would be occupied. Desperation can push people over the edge. It was unpredictable.

I flirted with time and safety sometimes and drove at night through Lenasia and into Lenasia South. The K43 highway leading me to Lenasia South was dark but I was familiar with the potholes and when to skip robots at night. This familiarity was my

safety net for travelling back home at night. As I was navigating my way through the dark, I jolted at the sound of something hitting my car.

“What was that?”

A shadow in the midst threw a small rock at my car, just missing the window. I kept driving as my heart pounded. That experience taught me to race home before dusk and never to play with time like that again.

It was becoming difficult to hold onto the things I loved about the place.

Chapter 11

Diwali was the one thing I did love about Lenasia South because we could enjoy our traditions boldly, without shame or worry about the rest of the residents. Everyone kind of revelled in it. The smell of gunpowder from the fireworks from the nights leading up to Diwali lingered in the air. We attended prayers at the DSS in the morning and met old and new residents of Lenasia South; stealing short conversations and pleasantries. We went to Jaydee's shop in the evening to celebrate together. People were queuing up at the counter at the side of the shop that only sold fireworks. Raksha's sister was selling blockbusters and kegs to last-minute customers.

"How much for the 100 shooter?"

"R150.00"

"And starlights and pop-pops?"

"Which starlights do you want? We have the normal one and the colour one. Pop-pops is R2 a box."

"Give me two boxes of the normal starlights, and..." The customer asked his son how many pop-pops he wanted.

"Three."

Jaydee's was the only shop that sold fireworks in Lenasia South. My brother — who got roped into the "family business" — pulled out a 20-shot blockbuster for a display. We were there to witness it.

He buttressed a one-litre glass Coke bottle with bricks. Placed the rocket inside the bottle and lit the stray string with agarbati. We used to set up rockets like that in our front yard.

An explosion of colours lit up the sky. There were a few shoots and we were thrilled by the pounding of the blasts in our hearts and the way the sparks fell and disappeared in our midst. Every corner of the sky in Lenasia South shimmered with fireworks. When the skies lit up on Diwali and New Year, we paid homage to Jaydee's. Thanks to his fireworks, Lenasia South had a magical vibe.

"This would never be allowed in a White neighbourhood," my dad always reminded us. It made us appreciate Lenasia South more.

Although Jaydee's was popular for his fireworks — it was beginning to become a stagnant business in a changing environment. He lamented that all his old customers were moving out, and the new ones didn't know him. He was quietly deliberating the future of his business and his house. It was a typical case of living in a big house after all the children moved out.

"They say birds of a feather flock together so I'm going where all the birds went and I want to be with them. There's nothing left for me. My kids have moved out, they live on their own because they can't keep coming here. They don't know when there are service delivery protests when they burn tyres and block the roads. So they don't come much."

"That's a way of life here. We live in fear. We have no fun living in Lenasia South anymore. What else can I tell you?"

This made me sad.

Chapter 12

And then there was Covid. The streets became quiet as the world stood still in 2020.

I missed Ouma's loud wailing and the trotting of the horse and donkey carts on Starling Street. Even the drag racing had stopped. The only thing that grew were the shacks. Desperation due to economic strain was evident. There was no certainty that this deadly silence and stillness would end. It caused a massive shake-up in Lenasia South and people we knew moved out swiftly. We never got to say bye to them or even ask where they were moving to. In some cases, we didn't even know who moved out and who stayed.

It was also a turning point for my parents, and we put our house on sale for the first time. Unsure if we would get a buyer or if these quiet, desolate streets would become our "new normal." My heart felt heavy when I looked at pictures of my house on Property 24. It felt like our lives were on sale, not just the house.

Picture frames of my family were on the walls. Ornaments and school trophies we collected over the years were on display in an old cabinet. Thor's face snuck into one of the photos. Our massive lemon tree and the little vegetable patch with the pateria, papri beans, spinach and tomatoes that my mum nurtured in the backyard were also up for sale.

It was a slow moment of acceptance whenever the agent brought someone to view the house. Reimagining our kitchen with people other than my mum just didn't make sense. My dad's "office" and the "prayer room" would also lose their names. I became aware of losing our neighbours and friends; and our quick trips to the bakery, beautician and vegetable shops. I realised I wouldn't hear the Azaan in the morning either.

My heart wasn’t ready to let go of our home. The time just didn’t feel right. Buyers were not interested in our house, yet. We continued to stay in Lenasia South. Our “new normal” was stillness, emptiness and growing criminality.

We tried again in 2022.

An offer was put down. My mum and I sat at the dining room table and we saw the buyer walk towards my parents’ bedroom. On her way there, she uttered the words: “Let me see my house.”

Our hearts sank.

Chapter 13

My lifelong friend and neighbour Bhavika — Darshana Masi's daughter — was getting engaged in November.

We had our last sleepover a few weeks before her engagement and reminisced as she was entering a new chapter of her life, and we were leaving part of our lives behind. At the same time.

"I can't believe your guys' house is sold."

I also couldn't believe it and was in denial.

Our house was becoming emptier while a two-bedroom flat in Alberton became full.

I saw the insides of my cupboards and the stickers my brothers plastered against the boards. I saw the prestik stains and scratches on the wall where Rajiv stuck CDs and vinyl. The marks left behind on the wall where he used to bounce his cricket ball also became more pronounced. I discovered my name etched into the wall and the holes I made on the dining room wall with the tip of the spinning top when I was five years old.

Bhavika got married in April 2023. In the months leading up to her wedding, I regretted leaving Lenasia South. If we had had a few more months, I could be there for my friend, and my mum could be there for Darshana Masi. But we couldn't do anything about it but try as much as we could to help them.

When we told people we moved out, the response was standard: "You got out at the right time. Things are getting very bad in Daxina."

The view from my bedroom window in our complex in Meyersdal is a tree and a quiet car park. The six children in the complex play together; the pavement is their playground. The day is still, except for the sound of aeroplanes and cars. When tyres break the silence of the puddles of water on the pavement, I can hear the splashes. This awakens the birds into a fury of chirping and conversations only they understood. It's the most distinct sound we hear.

My parents enjoy the serenity in our area, and their days are mostly spent indoors except for the odd walk around the neighbourhood. At least it's safer.

The colour and chaos I was raised in faded into pale greys of the complexes around me. It takes me less time to travel and we are comfortable, but it comes with rules. There are rules to maintain noise levels at night. We can't keep pot plants on our balcony "if they don't match the aesthetic and colour of the complex" and we can't leave our clothes to dry on the balcony. If any visitors come after 5 pm, they have to park outside the complex. When we have loud conversations with visitors or have the radio or TV on too loud, we remind ourselves: "This is not Lenasia South. We can't act like we want to."

We have become used to the culture of living in a 'White' neighbourhood and accepted our new normal. We meet ex-Lenasia South friends in Alberton, but the sense of community is missing.

I went back to Lenasia South on the weekends to help Bhavika with her geet. From the window in her lounge, I could see my old house. I'd imagine my mum speaking to someone on the street or Thor running around and barking at anyone who dared come close to the gate. My dad's car was parked in the driveway. I recognised the small changes during the time we were away. There were boom gates at nearly every street entrance. It was a neighbourhood initiative to protect the people and their houses; and keep a lookout for anyone who comes and goes.

It's so similar to the system that townhouse complexes use to surveille who enters their complex. The freedom of movement was limited due to these gates, and most were closed by 7pm. Essentially, they bound residents to a safety curfew. Hardly

anyone went out at night anyway, but it's nice to have a choice. It was an ironic juxtaposition to how the apartheid system had limited our freedom and organised things for us.

It was strange that I had become a stranger to the familiar roads I drove on every day for most of my life. I became cautious because I was no longer a resident, but a visitor.

During the week of her wedding, my mum and I had to *find* a place to stay in Lenasia South, after years of calling it home. Only Raksha's parents' home was available to us. They were family so it felt like home. Kind of.

I missed out on the moment of seeing my childhood friend transform into a bride on the morning of her wedding. Bhavika was lucky enough to walk out of her yard — which I remembered for playing hopscotch and skipping — as a bride. A wish I never got to fulfil.

The stunning paradox of relocating is that you learn the difference between living in a community and living with a community.

Chapter 14

My mum and I decided to visit the residents at our old house in November 2023. My heart was in my throat and my mum had tears in her eyes.

The front yard was paved with memories of cricket, soccer and a silly white dog running around. The garage door was open, and I pictured us practising our dances. The line we marked between the garages for our cricket stumps was still there.

I walked into “our” house and it had changed colour completely. The marks on the tiles from playing top were retiled. The new dog sat in Thor’s kennel. His name is still on the top. I remembered the day he died in that very kennel.

The pain of leaving my childhood home was dense and unforgiving. I had lived there my entire life yet I watched the new residents take occupation and do the activities we had once indulged in.

The mum cooked in the kitchen where my mum, granny, and aunts stood.

The dad sat in the dining area where my dad worked, where we ate, celebrated our birthdays and had lunch. The prayer room became storage. It hurt us.

The children walked in the indoor passage where we played cricket; and where Sandeep’s son got to do the same, at least.

I realised that we had our chance to live, play and grow up on these streets. Now we’re all grown up and perhaps our time in Lenasia South has reached its natural end. Darshana Masi’s house was up for sale, too.

The Mazibukos from Southdale in Joburg South, bought our house. In the one year they had been staying in Lenasia South they adapted to the culture and formed their community through their neighbours and in the church.

“We were lucky to come to Lenasia South because we were trying to change the environment because we were mostly spending time in town. In our mind, we said we wanted a quiet place,” Nelson, the dad told my mum while my eyes were searching around for the signs of our memories.

“We like the place because the schools are near. Our child can walk to school so we don’t use transport. Even going to the shops is not far.”

“We like the place but in every area, there is a lot of crime, but we are installing an alarm system. The crime rate is too high here - but it’s not only Lenasia - it’s everywhere. But at this moment I don't see any difficulties, everything is still fine.”

The front gate slammed and my mum and I impulsively propped our heads up to see who it was. But it wasn’t our house anymore.

The Mazibukos' integration into the community has mostly been through the church they attend on Cosmos Street. Already something new is brewing.

We concluded our visit with the Mazibukos and left them with some tips on where they should go to do their shopping. It was heartfelt and heartbreaking at the same time. I don’t think I’ll ever walk into *that* house again. Whatever we had will forever be etched in my memories and sealed in the photographs we have…

Bibliography

Aanu, Adeoye. 2021. “The Complicated Lives of Nigerian Immigrants in South Africa.” https://wiredspace.wits.ac.za/server/api/core/bitstreams/8a0cf735-a2ac-4f75-a154-8fbc992e18f8/content.

Buccus, Imraan. 2022. “OPINIONISTA: ‘the Indian Africans’ Is a Fresh Take on Contested Terrain of Race, Ethnicity, Identity and Politics.” *Daily Maverick*. December 6, 2022. https://www.dailymaverick.co.za/opinionista/2022-12-06-the-indian-africans-is-a-fresh-take-on-contested-terrain-of-race-ethnicity-identity-and-politics/.

Campbell, Christopher , ed. 2017. “REPRESENTATION Stuart Hall and the “Politics of Signification.” *The Routledge Companion to Media and Race*, 10–18. https://doi.org/ISBN%2013:978-1-138-02072-6%20(hbk).

City population. 2013. “Lenasia South (Main Place, City of Johannesburg, South Africa) - Population Statistics, Charts, Map and Location.” *Citypopulation.de*. October 5, 2013. http://citypopulation.de/en/southafrica/cityofjohannesburg/798032__lenasia_south/.

Cowling, Lesley, and Carolyn Hamilton. 2020. *Babel Unbound*. NYU Press.

David, Paul, Ranjith Choonilall, Kiru Naidoo, and Selvan Naidoo. 2023. *The Indian Africans*. Durban North, South Africa: Micromega Publications.

Desai, Ashwin, and Goolam Vahed. 2019. *A History of the Present*. *Oxford University Press EBooks*. Oxford University Press. https://doi.org/10.1093/oso/9780199498017.001.0001.

Desai, Ashwin, and Goolam Vahed. 2019a. “Between Yesterday and Tomorrow.” In *A History of the Present: A Biography of Indian South Africans, 1990-2019*. Oxford University Press.

Desai, Ashwin, and Goolam Vahed. 2019b. “Place, Memory, and Nostalgia.” In *A History of the Present: A Biography of Indian South Africans, 1990-2019* . Oxford University Press.

“Discovering Home Binyavanga Wainaina -Winner of the 2002 Caine Prize.” 2003. https://jacana.co.za/wp-content/uploads/2021/05/Twenty-Years-of-the-Caine-Prize-Discovering-Home.pdf.

Dlamini, Penwell. 2019. “Squatter Camps Making Life a ‘Living Hell’ for Lenasia South.” SowetanLIVE. December 19, 2019. https://www.sowetanlive.co.za/news/south-africa/2019-12-19-squatter-camps-making-life-a-living-hell-for-lenasia-south/#:~:text=%22People%20are%20selling%20their%20houses.

Facing History & Ourselves. 2018. “Introduction: Before Apartheid | Facing History & Ourselves.” *Www.facinghistory.org*. August 3, 2018. https://www.facinghistory.org/resource-library/introduction-apartheid.

Frenkel, Ronit. 2011. “Reconsidering South African Indian Fiction Postapartheid.” *Research in African Literatures* 42 (3): 1–16.

Globe Post . n.d. *Globe Post*. https://globepost.co.za/.

heartlines.org.za. n.d. “Healing the Legacy of Apartheid in Lenasia – What’s Your Story - Church.” Www.heartlines.org.za. https://www.heartlines.org.za/wys/church/stories/healing-the-legacy-of-apartheid-in-lenasia.

Huttenback, Robert A. 1966. “Indians in South Africa, 1860-1914: The British Imperial Philosophy on Trial.” *The English Historical Review* 81 (319): 273–91. https://www.jstor.org/stable/560260?casa_token=ed0wxw-G51oAAAAA%3AFjsgjkl19juVPFaKn2S74PvJb-k8hJU3dhRVBqRQkPXXJdRE9t_MrWBtOntidsXYXZMMd5bpVuqTK0CHZuG3jB9vQL_3ieqshR5Cx2A3JCJ-GCa2UChshA.

“Indian Community in Lenasia | South African History Online.” 2011. *Www.sahistory.org.za*. 10, 2011. https://www.sahistory.org.za/article/indian-community-lenasia.

Jadwat, Zahid. 2021. “Lenasia South Residents Disgruntled over Illegal Land Occupation.” *Salaamedia*. August 31, 2021. https://salaamedia.com/2021/08/31/lenasia-residents-disgruntled-over-illegal-land-occupation/.

Joseph, Joanne. 2021. *Children of Sugarcane*. Jonathan Ball Publishers.

Karani, Atiyya . 2018. “From Memories to Cloth [and In-Between].” University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. February 9, 2018. https://hdl.handle.net/10539/25214.

Keeble, Richard Lance. 2018. “Literary Journalism as a Discipline: Tom Wolfe and Beyond.” *Brazilian Journalism Research* 14 (3): 862–81. https://doi.org/10.25200/bjr.v14n3.2018.1126.

Mabin, Alan. 1992. “Comprehensive Segregation: The Origins of the Group Areas Act and Its Planning Apparatuses.” *Journal of Southern African Studies* 18 (2): 405–29. https://doi.org/10.1080/03057079208708320.

Maharaj, Brij. 2020. “OPINIONISTA: Seventy Years On, the Group Areas Act Continues to Map the Future of Durban.” Daily Maverick. July 15, 2020.

https://www.dailymaverick.co.za/opinionista/2020-07-16-seventy-years-on-the-group-areas-act-continues-to-map-the-future-of-durban/.

Mayet, Juby. (2022) 2022. *Freedom Writer*. South Africa: Jacana Media .

McDonald, Jared . 2015. “Southern Africans and the Advent of Colonialism | Livingstone Online.” Edited by Adrian S Wisnicki and Megan Ward. Livingstoneonline.org. 2015. https://livingstoneonline.org/life-and-times/southern-africans-and-the-advent-colonialism#sapp3.

Naidoo, Muthal. 2013. “Muthal Naidoo - 1940 - 1946 the Pegging Act.” Muthalnaidoo.co.za. August 18, 2013. https://muthalnaidoo.co.za/article-categories/indian-south-african-history-from-1906/372-1940-1946.

Nedine Moonsamy. 2019. *The Unfamous Five*. African Books Collective.

Newson, Adele. S. 1998. “- BookmarkAuthorizationFailure.” Go.gale.com. 1998. https://go.gale.com/ps/i.do?id=GALE%7CA20990155&sid=googleScholar&v=2.1&it=r&linkaccess=abs&issn=01963570&p=LitRC&sw=w&userGroupName=anon%7E2f5f07e3&aty=open-web-entry.

Ngcuka, Onke. 2022. “SERVICE (NON)DELIVERY: A R45m Reservoir Later, and Still No Water: Lenasia South Residents’ ‘Stressful and Sickening’ Predicament.” Daily Maverick. September 13, 2022. https://www.dailymaverick.co.za/article/2022-09-13-a-r45m-reservoir-later-and-still-no-water-lenasia-south-residents-stressful-and-sickening-predicament/.

Oliver, Erna, and Willem H. Oliver. 2017. “The Colonisation of South Africa: A Unique Case.” *HTS Teologiese Studies / Theological Studies* 73 (3). https://doi.org/10.4102/hts.v73i3.4498.

O'Malley. n.d. “The Indian Community in SA - the O’Malley Archives.” *Omalley.nelsonmandela.org*. https://omalley.nelsonmandela.org/index.php/site/q/03lv02424/04lv03370/05lv03414.htm.

Pillay, Suren. 2018. “Being Coloured and Indian in South Africa after Apartheid.” *Africasacountry.com*. June 18, 2018. https://africasacountry.com/2018/06/being-coloured-and-indian-in-south-africa-after-apartheid.

Polity.org. 2021. “Land Invasions Hamper Lenasia Service Delivery, While Protea South Residents Still Wait for Housing, Basic Services.” *Polity.org.za*. September 9, 2021. https://www.polity.org.za/article/land-invasions-hamper-lenasia-service-delivery-while-protea-south-residents-still-wait-for-housing-basic-services-by-mpho-phalatse---da-mayoral-candidate-for-johannesburg-date-09-september-2021-release-immediate-it-is-extremely-disheartening-that-the-gaut.

Rau, Asta, Claire Milne, Peter du Toit, and Francis Mdlongwa. 2008. “Positioning Independent Community Media: Findings from a Case Study of Six Small South African Newspapers.” *Communicatio* 34 (1): 95–112. https://doi.org/10.1080/02500160802144579.

Reddy, E.S. 1991. “INDIAN SLAVES in SOUTH AFRICA: A Little-Known Aspect of Indian-South African Relations by E. S. Reddy | South African History Online.” *Www.sahistory.org.za*. October 19, 1991. https://www.sahistory.org.za/archive/indian-slaves-south-africa-little-known-aspect-indian-south-african-relations-e-s-reddy

Reddy, E.S. 1993. “India and South Africa: Exploring New Openings.” *JSTOR*, November. https://www.jstor.org/stable/al.sff.document.esrindp1b40003.

Robb, Carla. 2018. “Housing for the Poor: A Case Study of the Johannesburg Inner City.” Open.uct.ac.za. 2018. https://open.uct.ac.za/handle/11427/29689.

Ruehle, Will. n.d. “7. Writing Home: How Literature of the South Asian Diaspora Rescripts Belonging.” *Asian American* 4. https://tnagano-web.s3.us-east-1.amazonaws.com/2020/AAV2020/docs/AsianAmericanVoices2022_04/07_Writing_Home_How_Literature_of_the_South_Asian_Diaspora_Rescripts_BelongingWill_Ruehle.pdf.

Singh, Reshma Ambaram. 2017. “Through a Saffron-Tinted Looking Glass: Reminiscing, Remembering and Melancholia. The Story of a Small Indian South African Town: 22 Years after Apartheid.” *Wiredspace.wits.ac.za*. https://wiredspace.wits.ac.za/items/f92466a8-db12-44ba-b9bc-9cc3327b7880.

South African History Online. 2011. “South Africa in the 1900s (1900-1917) | South African History Online.” *Sahistory.org.za*. 2011. https://www.sahistory.org.za/article/south-africa-1900s-1900-1917.

South African History Online. 2020. “Indian South Africans | South African History Online.” Www.sahistory.org.za. 2020. https://www.sahistory.org.za/article/indian-south-africans#:~:text=The%20first%20Indians%20arrived%20during.

South African History Online . n.d. “”Ghetto Act” or the Asiatic Land Tenure and Indian Representation Act No 28 of 1946 Is Passed | South African History Online.” Www.sahistory.org.za. https://www.sahistory.org.za/dated-event/ghetto-act-or-asiatic-land-tenure-and-indian-representation-act-no-28-1946-passed.

South African History Online. n.d. “Fietas: Pageview Timeline 1880-1988 | South African History Online.” Www.sahistory.org.za. https://www.sahistory.org.za/article/fietas-pageview-timeline-1880-1988.

Surendra Bhana, and Bridglal Pachai. 1984. *A Documentary History of Indian South Africans*. Cape Town: D. Philip ; Stanford.

Vadi, Ismail. 2022. *Young Lions of Lenz*. Our Reading Tree.

Vahed, Goolam, and Ashwin Desai. 2010. “Identity and Belonging in Post-Apartheid South Africa: The Case of Indian South Africans.” *Journal of Social Sciences* 25 (1-3): 1–12. https://doi.org/10.1080/09718923.2010.11892861

Wang, Dan. 2020. “The Sea Wind Is Still Blowing: Stories of a Chinese South African Community in Port Elizabeth.” *Wiredspace.wits.ac.za*. https://wiredspace.wits.ac.za/items/1d41e094-b8a1-48da-837d-cdb3ea060397.

Waseem, Afzal. 2008. “Community, Identity, and Knowledge : A Conceptual Framework for LIS Research.” *Library and Information Science Research E-Journal* 18 (1). https://doi.org/10.32655/libres.2008.1.7.

Wenzel, Marita, Ignatius Dube Siphiwe, Elwyn Jenkins, Elaine Dubourdieu, Sandra Saayman, Richard Samin, Sheila Collingwood-Whittick, et al. 2016. *Healing South African Wounds / Guérir Les Blessures de l’Afrique Du Sud*. Presses universitaires de la Méditerranée (PULM).

Whitehead, Tonyl, and Professorofanthropologyanddirector. 2005. “ETHNOGRAPHICALLY INFORMED COMMUNITY and CULTURAL ASSESSMENT RESEARCH SYSTEMS (EICCARS) WORKING PAPER SERIES Basic Classical Ethnographic Research Methods Secondary Data Analysis, Fieldwork, Observation/Participant Observation, and Informal and Semi-Structured Interviewing.”

https://www.depts.ttu.edu/education/our-people/Faculty/additional_pages/duemer/epsy_5382_class_materials/2019/Basic-Classical-Ethnographic-Research-Methods-Whitehead-2005.pdf.

Wolfe, Tom, and Edward Warren Johnson. 1972. *The New Journalism*. Harper & Row Barnes & Noble Import Division.

Yengde, Suraj. 2020. “Indians in Apartheid South Africa: Class, Compromise and Controversy in the Era of the Group Areas Act, 1952–1962.” *Diaspora Studies* 14 (September): 1–22. https://doi.org/10.1080/09739572.2020.1816801.

Appendix: List of Interviewees

Robert Abrahams – Teacher at Parkside Primary School; Former Resident

Abubaker Cajee – Business Owner and Imam; Former Resident

Rajiv Bhana – Brother; Grew up in Lenasia South

Raksha Bhana – Sister-in-law; Grew up in Lenasia South

Madhubala Bhana – Mother; Teacher at Kiddies Corner Playschool

Mohan Bhana – Father; Committee Member at Daxina Seva Samaj and Ramakrishna Dham (Ashram)

Kishore Badal – Ran for Ward Councillor; Resident

Abdul Rajoo – Owner, Classic Bakery; Resident

Hasmuk Govind – Member of Daxina Seva Samaj, Former Business Owner and Resident

Shirley Govender – Editor, *Southern Globe* Newspaper; Resident

Surendra Kanjee – Owner, Fisherman's Bay at Jivan Centre

Feroz Khan – Owner, Akhalwaya's; Resident

Hoosein Khan – Owner, Khan's Butchery; Resident

Jayvadan Khusal – Owner, Jaydee's; Raksha's Father

Shaun Mannie – Pastor; Former Resident

Nelson Mazibuko – New Resident; Owner of Old House

Susan Mtheini – Librarian at Lenasia South Civic Centre Library

Michael Ndima – New Resident

Jaya Nangepan – Hindu Priest; Resident

Ramesh Iccharam – Founding Member, Daxina Seva Samaj; Former Resident

Sarla Jeva – Fromer shop Owner at Jivan Centre

Martin Joseph Patel – Former Teacher at Parkside Primary School; Resident

Rajesh and Darshana Patel – Former Neighbours

Bhavika Patel – Friend and Former Neighbour

Shahid – Owner, Daxina Supermarket

Shamla Pather – Owner, Bedford Bunny; Former Resident

Gavin Swartz – City Power Official; Resident; Lenasia South Civic Centre