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A Visual Mapping: Uncovering the Silencing and Secrecy of Abuse in the Lives of South African Indian Women's Love Narratives

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VEILS OF LOVE

A Visual Mapping: Uncovering the Silencing and Secrecy of Abuse in the Lives of South African Indian Women's Love Narratives

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Masters of Arts in Fine Art

2024

Declaration

I, Saajidah Madhi (student number: 1257220), am a student registered for Masters of Arts in Fine Arts in the year 2024. I hereby declare the following:

- I am aware that plagiarism (the use of someone else's work without their permission and/or without acknowledging the original source) is wrong.
- I confirm that ALL the work submitted for assessment for the above course is my own unaided work except where I have explicitly indicated otherwise.
- I have followed the required conventions in referencing the thoughts and ideas of others.
- I understand that the University of the Witwatersrand may take disciplinary action against me if there is a belief that this is not my own unaided work or that I have failed to acknowledge the source of the ideas or words in my writing.

Signature:  Date: __12/03/2024_____

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Abstract

Using Autoethnography as a research approach, this dissertation explores how storytelling and poetry can be used to unveil South African Indian women's lived experiences of Indian culture and generational teachings. This is explored in conjunction with how love and secrecy/silencing (which is the aftermath of abuse) co-exist in heterosexual relationships. In this context, *unveiling* refers to the uncovering of women's narratives, the stories that have been silenced, erased, or overlooked, due to women often being judged and shamed for expressing their suffering. Throughout this dissertation, my poetry is utilized to address these issues. Furthermore, this dissertation analyses South African Indian women's narratives using qualitative research (interviews) that questions the notions of how love, patriarchy, Indian cultural beliefs, and identity influence relationships. To achieve this, Chapter One outlines the key concepts of love, patriarchy, Indian identity, and generational beliefs, through literature that is interwoven with South African Indian women's experiences. This is followed by Chapter Two, which engages in gendered roles, silencing, secrecy, and the impact that media has on romance and love in relationships. Lastly, Chapter Three proposes the model of *unlearning* as a practice. In this context, *unlearning* refers to a transformation of learned knowledge to build safer and non-violent relationships. To critically examine the practice of veiling in South African Indian women's lives, my artwork actively explores various methods of veiling. These methods include covering, layering, uncovering, and recovering, and they act as tools to voice a subjective position on women's silencing through weaving, stitching, and beading.

Keywords: South African Indian women, Lenasia, domestic violence, poetry, visual artwork and visual mapping

Table of Contents:

Title 1

Declaration 2

Acknowledgements.....3

Abstract.....5

Table of Contents.....6

List of Illustrations.....8

Introduction.....9

Research Methodologies.....14

Poetry as a form of Storytelling.....19

Creative Practice.....20

Chapter Outlines.....21

Chapter 1: Unravelling the veils of love.....23

Defining Love 23

Types of Love.....26

Love as an Action.....28

Love and Culture.....29

Patriarchy 30

South African Indians.....33

The Importance of Family 35

Divorce 41

Chapter 2: Engaging Entanglements.....43

Gender Roles.....43

Silence and Secrecy.....47

Loyalty.....50

A Belief: Things Will Change.....52

Let's Talk About Abuse.....56

Media's Influence on Love and the Ideal Image.....59

Bollywood Cinema and Songs 62

Chapter 3: Uncovering and Undoing.....65

Art as Questioning and Healing.....65

Unlearning.....83

Conclusion 87

Limitations of this Research 89

Bibliography 90

Appendix A: Interviews.....102

List of Illustrations

Fig.1. Madhi, S. (2021-2023) *Tracing Narratives* [Cotton fabrics and collected scarves on loom]. University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg.....70

Fig.2. Madhi, S. (2021-2023) *Tracing Narratives* [Mixed textile; cotton, wool, string, beads, ribbon, and scarves]. University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg.....70

Fig.3. Madhi, S. (2021-2023) *Tracing Narratives* [Mixed Textile; cotton, string, wool, beads, and ribbon]. University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg.....70

Fig.4. Madhi, S. (2022-2023) *Healing from Healing for* [Sculpture installation, bandage, plaster of Paris, cotton, and string]. University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg.....74

Fig.5. Madhi, S. (2022-2023) *Healing from Healing for* [Sculpture installation, bandage, plaster of Paris, cotton, and string]. University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg.....75

Fig.6. Madhi, S. (2023) *Visions of* [Glow-in-the-dark paint on wall]. University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg.....77

Fig.7. Madhi, S. (2023) *Beyond the Veil* [Installation of a room exclusive for women only] University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg.....78

Fig.8. Madhi, S. (2023) *Beyond the Veil* [Beads on wire]. University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg.....78

Fig.9. Madhi, S. (2023) *Beyond the Veil* [View of installation, table, cushions, wool, poetry, and tea]. University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg.....79

Fig.10. Madhi, S. (2023) *Beyond the Veil* [wooden table, tea, fabric cushions, wool, poetry, knitted cloth, and candles]. University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg.....80

Fig.11. Madhi, S. (2023) *Circles of Strength* [Mixed textile, scarves, cotton fabrics, wool, and beads]. University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg.....81

Fig.12. Madhi, S. (2023) *Circles of Strength* Mixed textile, scarves, cotton fabrics, wool, and beads]. University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg.....82

Introduction

This research is inspired by a personal traumatic experience, an incident of intimate domestic violence between my grandparents, and it has encouraged me to investigate why women from my community live their lives by placing *veils* over their experiences and narratives. I refer to *veil* or *veiling* in the literal and metaphorical context. In a literal context, a *veil* is a piece of cloth used to cover a woman's head, shoulders, or face (Overholser and Jamieson, 2005), and it is practised in several religions. In a metaphorical context, *veiling* can be understood as how South African Indian women conceal their narratives from the outside world, and how embracing the practice of *unveiling* might assist in uncovering the layers of concealment to reveal their true narratives. As a Muslim Indian woman, I will particularly focus on *veiling* as encouraged in the religion of Islam. As my experiences, relationships, Indian generational practices, cultural norms, and daily life responsibilities have shaped my life, the need to investigate the implications of these factors means a great deal to me. Inspired by the auto-ethnographic work of South African visual artist and scholar, Sharlene Khan (2019), and an American feminist scholar whose pen name is *bell hooks* (1989; 2000), this creative research titled *Veils of Love* is a study presented through a personal narrative.

My Nani

She still stands before me

Age has weakened her ability

but that did not weaken her strength

She is the eldest woman that remains of her generation

from a line of which 13 followed

taken out of school

at a young age

education was seen as insignificant

for a girl at that stage

My Nani

When I look into her eyes

I see this blaze that she has set alight

Her resistance burns brighter than her fears

I see this flame of strength

I see it in my mother.

I see it in my sister.

I see it in myself.

My Nani

When I looked into her eyes

I saw her strength

She was not afraid

To let him go

Her wounds are symbols of determination

Her loss a

form of motivation

Her life a representation of resilience

Her story defies the odds created against Muslim women

She is still fighting against patriarchy

Even though to her its value is unknown

It's a silent fight from within the walls of her home

I see it

Even though her age is against her

her fight for me is still a symbol of hope

Saajidah Madhi, 2021

During the traumatic incident mentioned above, I was shocked and heartbroken as I witnessed my grandfather's abusive treatment towards my grandmother (who I refer to as *'Nani'*). Nani sacrificed much of her life for him and her workload during their marriage was rather taxing and exhausting. She cooked, managed all the household chores, worked, contributed all her earnings towards the household, and provided care for their children. Yet, he treated her atrociously. Upon discovering the abusive reality of Nani's life, I began to question everything I was told as a child. Were all their glorious stories of love merely a façade? Why did she hide and lie about who he truly was? What could have possibly motivated her to stay committed to their marriage? Would I have ever discovered his true nature if I had not witnessed his behaviour first-hand?

Research Question

This narrative inquiry explores South African (SA) Indian women's lived experiences of how love and abuse co-exist in heterosexual relationships, and how these relationships are influenced by Indian culture and generational indoctrination. Abuse, in this context, refers not only to physical, verbal, or emotional abuse but also to the after-effects of abuse, which is the silencing and secrecy that women are sworn to from a young age in Indian communities.

It is a challenge to theoretically conceptualise the phrase 'South African Indian', as the term 'Indian' is usually attributed to members of different religions, languages, and caste systems originating from India (Kakar and Kakar, 2009; Singh and Chetty, 2018; Naidoo, 1997; Kunvar, 2014). Betty Govinden, a South African researcher highlights the complexities of defining an Indian woman. Govinden (2008) expresses that she is "constantly faced with the conundrum, indeed, the great anxiety, in the very process of the exercise, of what constitutes 'Indian women's writing' and who an 'Indian woman writer' is" (p. 21). As the phrase 'South African Indian women' is used throughout this paper, I would like to clarify its use and its reference in this study. South African Indians are referred to as South Africans who descend from 'indentured labourers' or 'free' migrants who arrived from British India during the late 1800s and early 1900s ("*Indian South Africans*", 2011)[1]. I do not intend to generalise 'Indian women' or 'South African Indian women' as South Africa has a diverse population of Indian ethnic groups (Govinden, 2008). However, for this study, the phrase 'South African Indian woman' is utilized to distinguish women who may have been born in South Africa but are of Indian descent.

While this research can relate to women on a global level, I am looking in from a South African Indian Muslim woman perspective which is informed by my immersion in this culture. Although several religions and communities influence and maintain certain practices in individuals' lives and relationships, I will focus primarily on the Indian community of Lenasia (an area in Gauteng's Southern Metropolitan Area) to demonstrate how patriarchy can manipulate religious and cultural teachings.

[1] Available at: https://www.sahistory.org.za/article/indian-south-africans. It is important to note that two groups of Muslims migrated to South Africa, namely the Cape Muslims (Cape Malay) who came during the 1700s mainly from the Indonesia Archipelago, Java, Bali, Sunda Islands and Madagascar, and the Indian Muslims who migrated from India during the 1860s (Mandivenga, 2010). The distinction is important as these two groups differ in cultural backgrounds and belief systems. For this research, I will be focusing on the second group – the Indian Muslims.

According to the Group Areas Act of 1950, the area of Lenasia was formed during apartheid (Vally, 2001). Due to the implementation of this Act, Indians, Coloureds and Blacks were forcibly removed from areas that were designated for white residents only. The disadvantaged groups were moved to confined spatial areas, according to their ethnic groups, and Lenasia was assigned to the Indians (Vally, 2001)[2]. Although I primarily focus on Muslim Indian women from Lenasia in this research, I acknowledge that Indian cultural identity is not limited to a particular religion, and it can have implications for several religions. Considering this, I aim to show how cultural norms and beliefs are perpetuated through generations of women through daily life experiences (Meer, 1972; Naidoo, 1997; Kunvar, 2014) (i.e., including women from Hindu and Christian faiths from the Lenasia community).

Some researchers (see for instance Fraser, 2003; Donovan and Hester, 2011; Wilson, 2012) believe that love and abuse co-exist in heterosexual relationships. In her book, *All About Love* (2000), bell hooks warns that "love and abuse cannot co-exist" (p. 6) in relationships. She explains that when one is unclear about the nature of love, it can lead to mistaking abuse for love, and one should not tolerate this as it is intrinsically abuse. However, if love and abuse cannot co-exist, then why do love, and abuse co-exist in South African Indian women's narratives? How can I, in this study, unpack how women remain in abusive relationships and marriages, and believe that the actions they perform in their daily lives are out of love or in love's name? To investigate these issues, the key question that this research poses is: how can storytelling and poetry be used to unveil the complex narratives of love that become survival strategies for women, by unpacking how care, affection, and respect thrive amidst the silencing, secrecy, power, and fear in the lives of South African Indian women? Subsequently, this raises another question, how can love exist amidst the abuse in heterosexual relationships of South African Indian women? Lastly, can 'unlearning' be used as a method and become a practice that South African Indian women could adopt to undo the Indian cultural and generational indoctrination that has led women to remain silent and secretive about their experiences?

[2] I refer to apartheid categories of race which are still used post-apartheid.

Research Methodologies

My work predominantly draws on personal narratives and feminist perspectives on Autoethnography, Biomythography, decolonial ideas of orality, and narration, all of which become important research methods in this dissertation.

- **Autoethnography**

In their article, 'Auto-ethnography: An Overview', Carolyn Ellis, Tony E. Adams, and Arthur P. Bochner (2011) state that autoethnography is an approach that allows one to reflect on 'personal' experiences (autobiography) to understand cultural practices (ethnographies) and histories. While this method enables me to write about my own experiences, it also allows me to reflect on Indian culture from an insider (as a cultural member) and an outsider (as a cultural stranger) perspective. Marilyn E. Asselin (2003) further explains in her article, 'Insider research: Issues to consider when doing qualitative research in your own setting', regarding insider-outsider research, that "it is best for the insider researcher to collect data with their 'eyes open' but assuming they know nothing about the topic being studied therefore viewing the data from an outside researcher perspective" (p. 100).

Autoethnography goes against the norm of 'objective' academic research methods as it "lets you use yourself to get to culture" (Pelias, 2003, p. 372). It is through this method that previously marginalised groups of women[3] began to graph their narratives by reflecting on the personal and theoretical domains to challenge and analyse culture from within. Therefore, in this research, autoethnography becomes a decolonial practice and method of research, as it has afforded me the opportunity and ability to create and narrate from participant observation to the observation of participation. This is in line with what Barbara Tedlock (1991) mentions about "narrative ethnographies" focusing "not on the ethnographer herself, but rather on the character and process of the ethnographic dialogue or encounter" (p. 78).

[3] To name a few, Audre Lorde (1982; 1984), bell hooks (1990; 1999; 2000; 2002; 2004), Kirin Narayan (1989, 1994, 1997), Virginia Woolf (1929) and Ruth Behar (1993; 1996; 2019).

Autoethnography as a research method supports my creative practice and theoretical work, becoming a tool through which I can carry more than one voice. Khan (2019), in *When the Moon Waxes Red,* reflects on the challenges one encounters when telling Indian women's stories, as she engages with the experiences of women in her own family. Khan (2019) grapples with and unfolds the concept of working with insider-outsider research, asking, "How do we speak of ourselves and represent the interwoven, textured, coloured narratives which are our lives? … How to speak as an insider-Outsider, an outsider-Insider? To peel back the layers only to find more" (pp. 12-13). Similarly, it has been a difficult journey collecting and retelling the narratives of the women in my family. It has been a constant worry of how to tell the narrative, what to include or exclude, and how or when to record the narratives without violating any rights of the women or making them re-experience the trauma. I recall messaging my supervisor to ask how to interview my grandmother, who lost her husband only three months ago and found out she has stage four cancer that is untreatable, with possibly only a few weeks of her life remaining. My supervisor advised that even though the situation might be difficult under the circumstances, discussing this matter might be necessary "because maybe she needs to let go of her pain before she leaves this world".

- **Biomythography**

Retelling narratives of lived experiences that involve trauma and pain is difficult as it requires one to recall memories that have either been forgotten or hidden. African American feminist writer, Audre Lorde (1982), has constructed a methodology that grapples with what she terms, 'biomythography' in her novel *Zami: A New Spelling of my Name*, in which she graphs her narrative from childhood to adulthood. Her narrative is centred around the bonds she develops with the women throughout her life. Through her book, Lorde (1982) uncovers a narrative of self-love which becomes necessary for her survival. She uses biomythography as a concept to weave together fact, myth, and history to recreate narratives that would go unrecorded, unarchived, or be erased. Adopting biomythography as a method in my research enables me to narrate South African Indian women's stories that are secreted from their families, communities, and the larger world. The graphing of narratives involves plotting and

filling in the gaps of incomplete histories and untold narratives by writing about real-life experiences – personal facts that may be skewed by memory and retelling, myths of cultural teachings and practices (fiction), and generational norms (history) that women have experienced due to gendered differences, patriarchy, and religious control. Graphing in this context extends the written form, as I have used it as a practice in my artworks to visually weave together narratives that are too painful to share. Those narratives that words cannot fully encapsulate, and through these artworks, the narratives are portrayed (refer to Fig. 3) in the formation of the lines, colours, textures, forms, and shapes in collaboration with some of the women in my family and the community.

Autobiographies and storytelling are important methods used to capture undocumented and untold narratives of black women and women of colour who have been marginalised (Collins, 2019), and these methods are employed in this study. The phrase 'personal is political' has been used in many political movements. However, it was coined by Carol Hanisch in 1969 in an essay which appeared in the anthology *Notes from the Second Year: Women's Liberation* (1970)[4]. Hanisch (1969) mentions that "one of the first things we discover in these groups is that personal problems are political problems…but to figure out what can be done to make it work, some of us started to write" (pp. 4-5). Hanisch's work and the importance of speaking from our subjective positions are relevant as my work derives from personal experiences and interpersonal communication with women. Hence, this paper will use 'I' as a central subjective positioning to emphasize my personal position in this research study.

- **Oral Histories**

According to Dipti Desai (2001) in 'Working with People to Make Art: Oral History, Artistic Practice, and Art Education', oral history is an approach that enables one to discuss the lives of ordinary people by documenting hidden histories and narratives of marginalised cultural and social groups through interviews. This method allows one to transform personal narratives into public narratives, and to further understand histories and social relationships. South African writer, Paul la Hausse (1990), in his article, 'Oral History and South African

[4]While Hanisch is credited with this phrase, she stated in a reprint of the essay in 2006 that the feminist editors of the anthology had come up with the title (Hanisch, 1969/2006).

Historians' elaborates on oral histories as a methodology that allows one to, "recover the 'lost voices' of the African past" (p. 346).

As children, we grow up hearing stories from those around us (e.g., parents and grandparents) (Frankish and Bradbury, 2021), and going to school is how we learn to read stories and narrate our own, to make sense of the world and our social lives. Media studies researcher, Bernhard Forchtner (2021), clarifies this by highlighting that "narratives are everywhere" (p. 304). Similarly, cultural philosopher, Roland Barthes (1975) indicates that narratives are, "present at all times, in all places, in all societies; indeed, narrative starts with the very history of mankind; there is not, there has never been anywhere, any people without narrative" (p. 237). However, Jill Bradbury and Bhekizizwe Peterson (2019) in their article, 'Introduction: Narrative Articulations in Africa' state that, "stories are indeed one of the possible outcomes of narrative, but narrative encompasses and exceeds stories" (p. 1). Hence, narratives are presented in various ways and forms, from communication to documentation, and they are also used as a method of preserving histories and cultures. For example, Tarryn Frankish and Jill Bradbury (2021), in their article, 'Telling Stories for the Next Generation: Trauma and Nostalgia', unpack the complexities involved in passing on lived experiences through storytelling, of those who experienced apartheid in South Africa from one generation to the next. Bradbury and Peterson (2019) further contend that the "personal, cultural, social and collective senses of self, experiences, desires, fears and hopes are developed in and through narrative meaning-making, providing recognition and validation, and deepening our sense of human dignity across lines of existence and difference" (p. 2).

For instance, American artist Peggy Diggs's artwork, *The Milk-Carton Project* (1991-1992), incorporates oral histories as she documents the everyday abuse women experience. She does this by raising awareness about the unspoken violence in domestic settings by printing her artwork on milk cartons (an item present in every shopping store and almost every household) and poses the question: "When you argue at home, does it always get out of hand?". This question, which appears on the cartons, is accompanied by a silhouette of a hand which has the words, "If you or someone you know is a victim of domestic violence call: 1-

800-333-SAFE" (1992)[5]. Through conversations with her participants, she discovered that women cover the abuse they experienced in domestic settings for survival purposes and out of fear of what may come next. Therefore, using oral histories and narrativisation as a method allows me to narrate and document shared experiences of ordinary women's day-to-day lives whose stories are overlooked or 'swept under the carpet' in South African Indian communities and homes, but also to tie these narratives to larger issues in South Africa and the world.

Eeva-Kaisa Prokkola (2014), a scholar in the field of human geography mentions in her article, 'Using Narrativity as Methodological Tool', that narrative as a theory and methodology assists in creating and interpreting interviews. Therefore, using qualitative research, I conducted one-on-one interviews documenting the narratives of South African Indian women from Lenasia, between August and December of 2023[6]. The ten participants (ranging from 25 to 90-years-old) involved family members and friends who were willing to share their narratives and experiences. This demographic was crucial in helping me understand how women's experiences and treatment are similar despite the variances in ages, professions, class and cultural differences. The age difference also highlights how cultural practices were/are carried down to younger generations, and how toxic behavioural patterns have become normalised in South African Indian communities.

The interview questions were based on women's experiences of love, relationships with the men in their lives, and how they dealt with abuse in their relationships. An important observation during the interview process was when participants were asked if they would speak about the abuse endured, they all hesitated and responded negatively, and some participants withdrew when I mentioned 'abuse'. Albeit, interviewees were asked the same questions which were audio recorded, and later transcribed for use in this research. As these narratives carry trauma and lived experiences that have not been shared previously, the women have been kept anonymous and pseudonyms are used. Moments of silence are indicated using ellipses (...). Despite participants having prior access to interview questions

[5] (Creativetime.org, 1992)
[6] My project's ethics clearance protocol number is H23/03/16.

the emotional context of revisiting traumatic experiences is conveyed through interjections such as, 'yeah', 'uhm', 'ah', etc. This further highlights the frustration, confusion, contradiction, and hesitation that the participants experienced during the interview process as they reflected on their experiences of abuse.

- **Social Learning Theory**

It is difficult to trace how cultural practices (i.e., silencing, secrecy, love, abuse, and patriarchal systems) have been instilled in our daily lives. However, I have found that the Social Learning Theory of observation might help to understand how these practices intersect and influence our daily lives, and how they are carried down through generations. Albert Bandura (1977), a Canadian American psychologist, in his book *Social Learning Theory*, looks at the interaction between an individual's environment, behaviour, and cognitive responses to events in his/her environment. His theory focuses on how observational learning and modelling play a primary role in how and why people learn, as it is a process of learning by watching the behaviours of those around us. Bandura's theory is relevant as humans observe and repeat patterns of behaviour and practices that they experience in their environments and daily lives, beginning in childhood. For example, as women, we watch our mothers' and grandmothers' behaviour towards the men in their lives. We witness the roles and responsibilities they carry out within their homes, and we begin to role-model similar behaviours. As a newly married woman (since 2022), I have observed how in/voluntarily I started mimicking the same roles and responsibilities as my mother and grandmother within my own home and my marriage. Bandura (in Daffin, 2021) goes on to mention that if all types of behaviour are learned through observation, then undesirable behaviours can be altered and relearned. While I don't question Bandura's belief that it is possible to unlearn learnt behaviours, I do question how possible or simple it is to do so within cultural patriarchal family structures. I am interested in researching how we can unlearn the practices that have been learned through observation, without carrying the guilt or shame of our mothers and grandmothers.

- **Poetry as a form of Storytelling**

The methodologies explained above - autoethnography, biomythography, oral histories, narrativisation and poetry - enable me to graph (construct through writing and making art) the untold, forgotten, past and present experiences and narratives of South African Indian women. Nigerian novelist Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie (2013) responds to a question asked about storytelling in an interview saying, "I am a person who believes in asking questions, in not conforming for the sake of conforming. I am deeply dissatisfied – about so many things, about injustice, about the way the world works – and in some ways, my dissatisfaction drives my storytelling".

Growing up in Lenasia, a community that relies upon Indian cultural practices and teachings, I do not accept and conform to the norms, and I question gendered roles and responsibilities. This is like the story of the *'willful girl child'* told by Sara Ahmed (2014) in *Willful Subjects*, in which she discusses girls and women who do not follow cultural scripts and are punished for it. Similarly, hooks (1989) mentions in 'Talking Back' that "back talk" or "talking back" (p. 5) meant speaking when one should not (specifically to adults or in the company of adults). She continues that such actions invite punishment upon an individual. These narratives, and the inequality I have experienced, drive my storytelling and poetry. Therefore, I wish to unpack forbidden conversations – the repercussions of speaking out or up to authority figures (men), by paying attention to 'willful'[7] women.

Poetry enables me to write freely, without limitations and boundaries. It allows me to put my thoughts and feelings into words without feeling judgement, shame or guilt, feelings that women are often trapped in. The article, 'What can poetry do?' (2019) by South African poet, Gabeba Baderoon, explores the layered landscape of black women's words and worlds which encapsulates how poetry can reshape and remake the public space for black women's voices. Baderoon (2019) states, "Poetry can reshape debates about belonging and what matters in South Africa" (p. 5). Baderoon (2019) further mentions how Nontsizi Mgqwetho, an early

[7] Ahmed intentionally spells 'willful' in this way to acknowledge women and girls who are full of their own will.

Xhosa poetess, powerfully spoke out against the devastation of colonialism and displacement, as she demanded, “the right of women to speak up against the silencing demands of religion and culture” (p. 6). Therefore, I will use my own poetry throughout this research paper as a way of narrating and reflecting on issues that I find difficult to address about Indian cultural beliefs on topics such as love, silencing, secrecy, and abuse.

- **Creative Practice**

As a visual artist, my creative practice feeds my writing process and vice versa. My artworks were created as part of my Master of Arts in Fine Arts (MAFA) degree examination entitled *Preveil* – an exhibition that aims to unravel the complex narratives of love in the lives of South African Indian women. As storytelling and unveiling are key concepts in my research, the artworks explore these themes, taking one on a journey by (un)layering the untold, forgotten, erased and silent narratives of women. Storytelling is more than just words; it encapsulates human connection and the power of one’s imagination, as Canadian artist and writer Leanne Prain (2014) states, “Narrative is the binding thread of human experience, and stories are the medium we use to know one another and ourselves” (p. 9).

The artworks are created from materials that are symbolic of Indian history (i.e., beads, textiles, and scarves). However, I question the notion of the handwork (i.e., beadwork, sewing, knitting, embroidery, and crocheting) made by women by suggesting how the materials translate into a language, a voice, an unspoken narrative. I look at weaving, threading, beading, and painting as important languages and aesthetics within my community, and question if these forms of ‘making’ are therapeutic, or if women use these ‘skills’ as a voice and a way of communicating through their silence.

My MAFA artworks entitled *Tracing Narratives* (2021-2023), *Visions of* (2023), *Healing from Healing for* (2022-2023), *Circles of Strength* (2023)*, Beyond the Veil* (2023) and the inclusion of other women’s artworks as part of my MAFA exhibition, will be unpacked further in this dissertation. Artists whose work interrogates histories and narratives, and unpacks

womanhood will be explored further, specifically those of Sharlene Khan, Asma Ahmed Shikoh and Amna Yandarbin.

Chapter Outlines

Chapter One outlines the key concepts for this research, namely love, patriarchy and 'Indian culture', by unpacking how these ideologies function in the lives of South African Indian women. Chapter Two will tackle the concept of gendered domestic abuse and how it functions in intimate relationships. Chapter Two also explores the day-to-day lives of South African Indian women by unpacking gendered roles and responsibilities and how this leads to forms of abuse, secrecy, and silencing. Furthermore, Chapter Two also looks at the influence media has on love and romance in relationships. Lastly, Chapter Three focuses on unlearning as a practice against cultural norms of silencing, and secrecy in relationships or marriages, intervening in the generational passing on of such, so women can build healthier and safer living environments. Chapter Three also discusses how art and creative making are forms of therapy, undoing, and recreating.

Chapter 1: Unravelling the Veils of Love

This chapter will explore how scholars and research speak about love, how it influences behaviours, and how it is used differently when carried out as an action. Patriarchy and its influence on the lives of women will be explored, in conjunction with how it affects South African Indian women's love relationships.

Defining Love

The word *love* is complicated, as it is a complex set of emotions and holds different meanings in each of our lives (Fraser, 2008; Levine, 2005; Sternberg, 1988; Jackson, 1996). Heather Fraser (2008), a researcher in social work, mentions in her book *In the Name of Love* that "no amount of talk will settle, once and for all, the many meanings that may be attributed to love" (p. 15). While many theorists in various fields such as psychology, sociology, health sciences, and anthropology have tried to define love (Fraser, 2008; Levine, 2005; Peck, 1978), they seem to conclude that there is no singular and definitive definition (hooks, 1999; Fraser, 2008; Peck, 1978, p. 81). In her book *All About Love*, hooks (1999) explores how authors never truly define love but rather posit an idea, result or their experiences of love: "The vast majority of books on the subject of love work hard to avoid giving clear definitions" (p. 4). *The Road Less Traveled: A New Psychology of Love, Traditional Values and Spiritual Growth* by M. Scott Peck (1978) states that "one result of the mysterious nature of love is that no one has ever, to my knowledge, arrived at a truly satisfactory definition of love" (p. 81). Emerson Eggerichs (2004), in his book *Love & Respect: The Love She Most Desires, The Respect He Desperately Needs,* offers a guide on how women desire love and men respect, but he does not give a clear definition of the word love either. However, some theorists have noted that there is a distinction between using the word *love* as a noun and as a verb (hooks, 1999; Fraser, 2008; Wilson, 2012), and it can refer to both subject and object (Ahmed, 2015; Fraser, 2008). Hence, the emotions one experiences due to love can be seen as a noun, and the actions one performs due to love can be viewed as a verb.

I asked participants in this study to give their definition or understanding of love:

Naila (an Indian Muslim woman from Lenasia in her early 40s who works as a teacher, and is a single mother) claimed: “It’s very broad; we love our children, parents, students, we love our friends, then, of course, the romantic love. I would say love is pure and unfiltered, it’s giving and two-way, so it's reciprocal – I love you, I love my child, my child loves me, my students love me. Obviously, it’s not so simple, a true bond will obviously look beyond all the mistakes, and errors, hurt and challenges.”

Firoza (an Indian Muslim woman from Lenasia in her late 70s who currently volunteers at Khadijatul Kubra Care Centre, a home for the aged in Lenasia and who is a housewife) stated: “Love may be defined as an intense emotional feeling of affection for another person. This affection varies with different people and the type of love we feel for a mother will be different from that shown to brothers, sisters, sons, daughters, or friends and so on. Romantic love is, of course, best described in stories of *Layla and Majnun*, *Romeo and Juliet*, and Mumtaz and Shahjahan.”

Hashmita (an Indian Hindu woman from Lenasia in her late 50s who works as a teacher) stated: “Love for me is your ability to respect and understand another person and let them be who they want to be. For me that’s love; give people a chance to grow and allow a sense of happiness to filter through. That for me is love, not me pushing my beliefs down their throat. That’s not love.”

Muneebah (an Indian Muslim woman from Lenasia in her early 40s who currently works as a financial accountant and housewife): “To me love is selfless, is being selfless, it’s doing what’s best for the person you claim to love. It’s most likely an action that you have to do; it might make you unhappy in certain ways, but it’s something you have to do. To me, it’s being selfless. Doing things for someone to see them happy or to do what’s good for them.”

> Priyanka (an Indian Hindu woman from Lenasia in her early 50s, who works as a teacher and is a single mother) stated: "I think in that way I'm very cynical. I used to be one of those that believed in love and fairy tales and a knight and shining armour. You grow up reading all these books and watching movies, so you create a false impression of what you think love is and what I understand of it now is that true love will exist between a parent and child, but between partners, I don't think so. I think it's more comfort than it is love."

Many participants instantly defined love according to how they give or receive it (affection, care), associated love with romantic love (in heterosexual partnering) or viewed love as an ideal that is shown in films, books and stories (as shown in Firoza and Priyanka's response which will be discussed later). Naila, Hashmita, Muneebah, and Firoza, all defined love as an act of giving and doing. As hooks (2000) mentions, authors do not truly define love but provide us with an idea, result or their experience of love, and this can be seen in the responses above, as participants instinctively described what it means to love, and the qualities needed to show love. However, their perspectives are driven towards the positive aspects while the negative is omitted or hidden, and loving of oneself is not mentioned. To truly love, hooks (2000) contends that one must "learn to mix various ingredients - care, affection, recognition, respect, commitment, and trust, as well as honest and open communication" (p. 6). This is similar to Hashmita's definition of love.

I realised that many of the women struggled to define love, or paused for a moment before offering their definitions. After the participants responded to the first question with hesitation, I asked them to think about what qualities would best describe or be associated with the word *love*.

> Nuha (a South African Indian Muslim woman in her early 30s from Lenasia, who is a teacher, counsellor, and mother) stated: "Sacrifice, pain, tolerance, acceptance are just a few words that I would say come part and parcel of love."
>
> Naila: "Bonding, nurturing, nourishing, giving, sustaining, progressive - that is love."

> Firoza: “Care, hmmm, by doing a lot for someone, helping them with their difficulties – the children and husband, nurturing and sacrifice. “
>
> Zaakirah (an Indian Muslim woman from Lenasia in her early 40s who did advertising, but later became a teacher and had to leave work due to motherly responsibilities, and is currently a TEFL[8] teacher online) stated: “Love has to be, not just the being in love, but everything that comes with it: the compassion, understanding, a give-and-take, lots of communication, helping each other out, just being there for each other, even if you don’t say I love you very often, just you know, the hug, the kiss, the touch.”

It is evident that after asking this question for a second time, most of the women still associated love with positive aspects of caregiving, while Nuha pointed out the sacrifice and tolerance demanded by love. One important aspect that is highlighted is gendered love, where women are taught to love in one way and men in another. As Ahmed (2015, p. 131) mentions, “Love becomes a sign of respectable femininity and of maternal qualities narrated as the capacity to touch and be touched by others”. In the majority of the responses, one can identify how the qualities of nurturing, giving and sustaining are associated with women’s bodies and, therefore, gendered in particular ways that associate ‘labouring’ for others with a particular gender and how they should give and show love – which then defines ‘love’ (noun) as a verb of constant giving and doing by women.

Types of love

According to ancient Greeks, there are eight different types of love namely: eros (sexual passion), philia (deep friendship), ludus (playful love), agape (love for everyone), pragma (long-standing love), philautia (love of the self), storge (family love), and mania (obsessive love) (Gulla, 2020). Theorists who study love, such as Beall and Sternberg (1995); Sternberg and Grajek (1984), Lee (1973/1976) and Fraser (2008), have divided each type of love into different categories, as each type may result in a different set of emotions, behaviours, and experiences (Beall and Sternberg, 1995).

[8] Teaching English as a foreign language (TEFL)

This research focuses on romantic love to understand how love takes the form of actions in the lives of women. John Alan Lee (1973/1976) proposed a typology based on the colour wheel that identified three primary types of love styles which he says are the foundation of love attachments: eros (romantic, passionate love), ludus (game-playing love)[9], and storage (friendship love)[10]. For Lee, romantic love (eros) is a passionate physical or emotional feeling. Psychologists, Ellen Berscheid and Elaine Hatfield's (1974) research in the article, 'A Little Bit about Love' is based on the scientific study of love that focuses largely on romantic and passionate love. Berscheid and Hatfield (1974) conclude that for an individual to identify the type of love he/she feels is dependent on their "culture and reference group" (p. 371). Psychologist Robert J. Sternberg's (1986/1988) Triangular Theory of Love consists of three components: intimacy, passion, and commitment. Sternberg (1986/1988) believes that these components are required for two people who are in love or have a romantic relationship. According to the Triangular Theory, intimacy relates to the feelings of closeness and connectedness; passion includes desires that may create physical attraction and sexual fulfilment; and commitment relates to feelings that lead a person to remain with someone and move towards common goals. While Sternberg's (1986/1988) approach to love has helped refine my thoughts about romantic love, Lee's (1973/1976) and Berscheid and Hatfield's (1974) have not been very useful in helping me to formulate a language in which to best describe romantic love and how it contributes to 'actions' performed out of love or in the name of love, in the lives of South African Indian women.

Anne E. Beall and Robert J. Sternberg's (1995) work has been more helpful in considering four aspects of romantic love that reflect components of historical and modern conceptions of love and articulating how love is influenced by cultural and religious practices, viz., 1) the beloved; 2) feelings that are believed to accompany love; 3) thoughts that are believed to accompany love; and 4) the actions or relations between the lover and beloved. Beall and Sternberg (1995) mention that these four aspects, "change across cultures, but all cultures

[9] This type of love according to Lee (1973/1976), is where the end goal is to win a person over by gaining some benefits (emotional, sexual, diversion)

[10] This type of love according to Lee (1973/1976), is based on care and respect rather than intimacy

define them" (p. 9). While the first three aspects[11] are important, I will focus on the fourth aspect concerning Sternberg's (1986/1988) third point in the Triangular Theory, commitment, which focuses on feelings that lead a person to remain with someone and move towards common goals, which then allows for notions of how love and abuse co-exist in relationships.

Love as an action

Research on romantic love by Beall and Sternberg (1995) and Sternberg (1986/1988) supports how love as an action can be received or given. Thus, how does love take the form of a verb (action) in the lives of South African Indian women in romantic relationships? South African researchers Louise Vincent and Caryn McEwen (2006), in their article 'Labouring to Love', unpack how domesticity has been knitted into romantic love relationships amongst South African Indian women, and "the image of domestic women is intricately tied to the romantic imagery of beauty and of love forever" (p. 37). So, rather than asking 'What is love?', I will ask 'What does love do?' Ahmed (2015) supplements this idea by asking, "What are we doing when we do something in the name of love? Why is it assumed to be better to do the same thing if it is done out of love?". hooks (2000) writes,

> "An overwhelming majority of us come from dysfunctional families in which we were taught we were not okay, where we were shamed, verbally and/or physically abused, and emotionally neglected even as we were also taught to believe that we were loved" (p. 6).

I would like to investigate how love actions circulate in the lives of South African Indian women and even thriving amidst silencing and secrecy associated with abuse in heterosexual relationships.

[11] Refer to the article 'The Social Construction of Love' (Beall and Sternberg, 1995, p. 9-10) for more information on the first three aspects.)

Love and Culture

According to various theorists, the word 'love' carries many connotative meanings which can change over time due to a person's context and social constructs (Beall and Sternberg, 1995; Fraser, 2008; Soloski et al., 2013). Cultural theorist, Stuart Hall (2013), explains that "cultural meanings are not in the 'head', but are produced by the practice of representation whereby the meaning depends not on the sign, but on its symbolic function" (p. 36). Therefore, Hall (2013) proposes a constructionist approach in his book, *Representations*, which states that culture provides us with the language we use to create meanings of 'signs'. Representation, according to Hall (2013), is a system by which language works by using 'signs' and 'symbols' to stand for or to represent ideas, thoughts, feelings, expressions, and emotions. However, the term is not limited to spoken or written language (Hall, 2013). Hall further explains that meanings are, therefore, constructed and influenced by a person's context and social constructs. Context refers to a person's environment, personal experience, and cultural background. Social constructs are concepts that exist due to human interaction. Beall and Sternberg (1995) identify love as "a socially constructed entity that is influenced by a person's environment and personal experience". Hence, if love is acknowledged as a social construct, then it is influenced by context (Fraser, 2008; Beall and Sternberg, 1995).

Though it is difficult to define love as a noun, if we reflect on Hall's (2013) approach to the construction of meanings, 'love' is a sign as meanings and ideologies are attached to it universally. Yet, it is also culturally bound with religion, race, gender, and class. Love as a sign, thus, creates unrealistic expectations and ideal notions of what relationships need to have. For example, there is a day commemorating the 'sign' of love known as Valentine's Day, which falls on the 14th of February and is celebrated in many countries across the world. It is believed that giving gifts as a symbol of this sign expresses the deep feelings of love the giver has for the receiver[12]. Similarly, I question if women perform acts of domesticity and secrecy/silencing of abuse in relationships as a sign to express their love.

Culture is also a social construct as it encompasses learned behaviours, beliefs, values, and customs shared by a group of people (Hall, 2013; Piedalue, 2016). Culture is, therefore,

[12] https://www.history.com/topics/valentines-day/history-of-valentines-day2

influenced by factors such as race, ethnicity, religion, socio-economic status, geographical location, and various other aspects of identity. Amy Piedalue (2016), a researcher in women and international studies explains intimate violence in her article, 'Beyond culture: the politics and possibilities of plural resistance' and mentions that "rather than pre-given or 'pure' social formations, cultures are heterogeneous, contested, and constantly shifting social formations" (p. 567). Culture is also dynamic and constantly changing or evolving, as it is shaped by socialising institutions such as family, school, peers, and the media. This understanding of culture as fluid and encompassing a variety of aspects that include women's accepted and expected roles in society are considered in this work.

Patriarchy

Just as the meaning of love is constructed, so is the meaning of patriarchy. Patriarchy is a constructed system that allows men to behave in a certain manner, according them certain formations of power over women (Rawat, 2014; Facio, 2013) to maintain dominance in communities and households (Walby, 1989; hooks, 2004). According to Preeti S. Rawat (2014), patriarchy is a: "social and ideological construct" (p. 44), which affords men a superior status to women. For hooks (2004), patriarchy is an ideological system whereby men claim superiority over women, which is believed and acted upon by both men and women. In many Indian homes, while many men do take authority and leadership roles, women are enablers and participants of this patriarchy by continuing to practice generational and cultural norms of gendered distinction between children (girls and boys). This is apparent in some participants' responses to: *Do we, as women, due to generational practices, uphold patriarchy in our homes?*

> Nuha: "Yes, we do, because, uhm, if you go back to my definition of love you will see that we are groomed in such a way that we have to be the tolerant individuals that allow certain things to just happen even though you want to take a stand against it. For peace and peace of mind and happiness' sake sometimes."
>
> Priyanka: "Yes, yes a lot of the time, it's because of the relationships we get to see, because the men get to eat before the women, because the men must be served first, in whatever occasion it may be, whether it's a wedding a funeral, it's always about the men first, they sit on chairs and tables you got to go sit in the kitchen."

Naila: “Yes, we do uphold patriarchy in our homes, we always will give a little more respect to males, to older males, they have a higher position. Their decisions will be first, and their solutions will go. Very rarely will it be the other way round.”

Mariam (an Indian Muslim woman from Lenasia in her early 60s who is a homoeopath): “Ya, I think my parents did that a lot, because the boys, the cake was made for them, the baking was done for them, the choice of meat was theirs first, you dishing out for them first, so yes it was very much.”

Muneebah: “It’s a challenge because we living in a society like that, even though women have equal rights… like I don’t believe in feminism, and I don’t believe in patriarchy. I believe that Allah gave specific roles to women and to men and Allah does say either must be kind to each other, Allah doesn’t say a man must be unkind or controlling, but he’s supposed to have the wisdom and the understanding of how to be a man, like strong when he needs to be and gentle when he needs to be and a woman at the same time is more gentle. But it seems like women are stronger these days, stronger wills, stronger everything, where they’ve come to like overtake men. Some women are manly these days like they doing more male things than the men are doing.”

Faheema (an Indian Muslim woman from Lenasia in her early 40s, who currently works as a receptionist and is a housewife): “Yes, we do. In my situation that’s the way I was brought up, and that’s what I thought it would be like when I get married, that I will have someone to support us, and I won’t have to work. Not that I never worked but I thought he would work and I will look after the house but shoooh my marriage was a rude awakening, because he was unstable. In the five years that we were together, he had ten jobs and a lot of the time in between he was at home. And I had two babies one after the other and I was shaken, but after that, I had to be a man, I had to be a mum, I had to be everything for my children. It was a shock.”

Hashmita: “Yes, but here’s the thing - the older women, yes, we do that, but I’m telling you the next generation is not doing that. The next generation, even the children, are growing up knowing that there is a balance between the two. My nephews, I see growing up, see strong women. My brother-in-law is looking after the children at

> home while my sister is working, so the next generation, you know, but my mother is still you know, I listen to the same, but the next generation knows. We know that the women are strong, all the women are educated, all have strong jobs, and most of the family, our family the women have stronger jobs than the males."

While it is evident that Nuha, Priyanka, Naila and Mariam still believe that patriarchal systems are in place and women enable these practices, Firoza, Hashmita, and Muneebah believe that it was practiced in the past and women, due to education and families changing the roles, and having alternate views. They acknowledge that older generational values are placed next to new ones. While I do agree with the latter, that women are far more educated in recent years and do have more will and power than our grandmothers and mothers, I question whether the roles have changed as most of the interviewees identified as being housewives before stating their qualifications and jobs. I, therefore, question if the women are carrying out these responsibilities for 'love' in their relationship or because it is an expected gendered role of women according to generational expectations and cultural beliefs.

Costa Rican writer Alda Facio (2013) defines patriarchy as, "a form of mental, social, spiritual, economic and political organization … maintained and reinforced by different institutions linked closely together to achieve consensus on the lesser value of women and their roles" (p. 2). This definition resonates with the perspectives of the participants above, all being aware of the cultural expectations of women by the men in their lives. This perspective is highlighted by other academics as well, with Sociologist, Sylvia Walby (1989) defining patriarchy as "A system of social structures, and practices in which men dominate, oppress and exploit women" (p. 214). The primary barriers to equality and women's rights, according to Benjamin G. Bishin and Feryal M. Cherif (2017), are said to be religion and patriarchal culture. The latter is made clear by the participants claiming that cultural expectations demand the revering and serving of men first. However, there is also the awareness of the changing dynamic among the modern generation which all the participants appear to admire.

South African Indians

During the Dutch colonial era, in 1684, the first Indians arrived in Cape Town, South Africa, as slaves (Govinden, 2008). During the 1860s and the rest of the 19th century, Indians came to South Africa in two categories: indentured labourers who worked on the sugar plantations of Natal in the 1860s and later as 'free' or 'passenger' Indians who mainly came as traders (Meer, 1972; Singh and Chetty, 2018; Bramdaw, 1994). The Indian nation-state divided the citizens of India according to religion, caste, and tribal identities. However, these divisions were influenced by class, language, gender, and region (Patel and Uys, 2016, p. 2). South Africa was not any different as apartheid enforced racial segregation. Race was also influenced by class, language, gender, and region (Naidoo, 1997; Kakar and Kakar, 2009; Singh and Chetty, 2018; Meer, 1972; Kala and Sharma, 2009). South African Indian playwright, Muthal Naidoo (1997), speaks about the identity and culture of South African Indians saying that "the consolidation of an Indian identity and culture is fraught with problems because of the diversity within the community itself" (p. 30). Kakar and Kakar (2009) mention in their book *The Indian People,* that (Indian) culture is part of a person's identity, and identity is not a role, it's not something that one can choose to do or to discard when one wishes, but it is a part of one's being. Intrinsic to this Indian cultural identity are the various factors of ethnic and religious identities, as well as how gender, race and class intersect with these various identity formations in South Africa.

It is important to mention that when Indians migrated to South Africa, they did not bring many physical belongings with them, but they did come with behavioural practices, beliefs, and cultural norms of living during colonialism (Meer, 1972; Gokool, 1994). While the caste system that was implemented in India did not manifest in Indian communities in South Africa, the South African Indian identities were forged against the British colonial empire, in which "Language and religion survived as important building blocks of a new identity and many Indians continued to define themselves as Hindu, Muslim or Christian, while caste evolved into a hierarchy of class" (Desai and Vahed, 2007, p. 188). While the Indian indigenous language was retained initially by our great-grandparents, later generations were educated mainly in English. The Group Areas Act (1954) under apartheid implemented racial segregation specifying where one could live, go to school, work, and enjoy entertainment,

and some scholars argue that this resulted in Indian cultural insulation (Kunvar, 2014), whereby Indians retained and fixed their cultural norms, values and traditions that came from India without much external influence.

According to research, Indian traditional laws were constructed by various religious texts, which laid down the foundational status of Indian women (Meer, 1972; Sharma, 1962). South African Indian activist and sociologist Fatima Meer (1972) in her article, 'Women and the Family in the Indian Enclave in South Africa' addresses the 'Laws of Manu'[13] (p. 33), stating that his laws were based on religious and customary practices, which continue to influence Hindu life, most severely against women, regardless of the new Indian constitution in India that gave equality to women. According to Meer (1972), women in India were deprived of rights to property, independence, and individuality, and were made to believe that their salvation was in worshipping their husbands as God on earth. According to the Quran, women are given complete control over their possessions and earnings (Bishin and Cherif, 2017), rights over property (Bishin and Cherif, 2017), and equal rights to acquire divorce (Meer, 1972). However, Meer (1972) states that as conventions crystallised in South Africa, many cultural practices and teachings contradicted the Quran, where only men were entitled to give divorce, and while property rights remained, education and training were discouraged as women were seen as incapable of taking on this responsibility and became dependent on men. Meer (1972) further states, "The actual status of the South African Indian woman is derived from a concoction of Islamic and Hindu law, neither of which is to be confused with Islam and Hinduism" (p. 33). Her meaning of 'law' refers to cultural laws that came to dominate the spheres in which men and women operate.

In the beginning, not many women immigrated to South Africa "simply because the law stipulated that each group of male workers should be accompanied by a minimum proportion (25 percent) of women" (Meer, 1972, p. 37), and those women who did were employed in the homes of white employers or the fields alongside men (Pillay, 2014). Women received a

[13] An ancient Hindu text which has formed the source for Hindu law and social customs for many years, dating back to approximately 100 C.E.

lower wage than men and were subjected to violence and sexual abuse at the hands of their husbands and employers (Desai and Vahed, 2007; Meer, 1972). The women population increased in the second decade of the twentieth century (Meer, 1972), and the "moral family became a feature of the Indian community" (Pillay, 2014, p. 20). With this increase of migrant South African Indian women came the passing down of gendered morals presented as 'cultural norms' that permeated the cultural fabric of the entire community. Meer (1972) explores how Indian culture and practices have become embedded in South African Indian lives and how women preserve and maintain that culture within their homes, stating that, "Indian family life in South Africa settled into traditional conservatism, and women assumed full responsibility for maintaining that conservatism… Women thus became reified into that culture - they became that culture..." (pp. 37-38). Sujata Patel and Tina Uys (2016) support Meer's viewpoint that, "women in particular were determined to maintain a sense of family, community, religion and identity" (p. 4).

The Importance of Family

Family plays a vital role among Indian communities in South Africa, and many practices (roles and responsibilities) were maintained according to family structures practiced in India (Kakar and Kakar, 2009; Bhangaokar and Kapadia, 2019; Narayan, 2018; Mullatti, 1995). Kakar and Kakar (2009, p. 10) mention that "it is the family and the role family obligations play in the life of an Indian, which is the glue that holds Indian society together". Examining the changing roles of Indian women in South Africa in family roles, Gerelene Jagganath (2011, p. 4), a South African Indian researcher interested in migration, points out how the "manipulation of scriptural laws and the reinforcement of patriarchal controls" shaped the conservative roles and traditional expectations of Indian women. As Indian families settled in South Africa and adapted to a life guided by religious doctrine and customary cultural norms, they re-established gender roles and patriarchal ideologies. Meer (1972) states, "the sons were expected to enter and cope with the larger, foreign culture; daughter's/daughter in-law's must be pure to preserve pure Indian traditions" (p. 43). Rachana Bhangaokar and Shagufa Kapadia (2019) support this point by stating, "Duties within Indian families operate within a network of roles accorded to individuals … gender plays a very important role in defining the form and content of these duties" (p. 271). In my interview with Priyanka, her response shows

that she understands that although South African Indians have preserved certain elements of cultural practices and beliefs from India, these have changed over time:

> "Yes, definitely. The choices I have made and the choices I make, and again this question of religion and culture, there's a lot of things that we do culturally, that's the generational thing, from one generation to the next, whether it's the way we pray, the way we dress, or dress others, the way you enter a home, what you teach your children, the way your children behave, all of those things. So, all of that is shaped by what we are taught, and I think a lot of the time what we taught is watered down, from what it should have been, from generation to generation and things get a little changed here or changed there, and then you end up with something that's completely different, so yes, it has influenced me in a big way."

To the culture that raised me

You taught me

that my worth was measured by my domesticity, wealth and beauty

You taught me

that education wasn't important for me and my place was in the home

You taught me

that families are male-dominated and if opposed, it will only bring on violence

You taught me

to remain silent about abuse or issues that arise in a marriage or relationship

You taught me

to secret my pain and suffering from the outside world

You taught me

to protect the image of my husband and give him respect and praise his ego

You taught me

that widowhood is a tragedy and divorce a disgrace

You made me believe

that sons deserve love and daughters need discipline

You taught me

to give love and serve men – you taught men to be strong, aggressive and emotionless

You imposed

roles and responsibilities on me at a young age - my brother was granted freedom

You taught me

that acquiring a career is a prestige bestowed upon my husband and my own independence and identity are not own

You made me believe

I was weak – you raised the status of men and gave them power and control

You enslaved me and made me believe it was freedom

Saajidah Madhi, 2023

According to Indian cultural beliefs and practices, roles and responsibilities are well-defined by one's gender (Kakar and Kakar, 2009; Bhangaokar and Kapadia, 2019). According to Bhangaokar and Kapadia (2019, p. 271), "Indian society, like many other (traditional) societies, has a gendered division of labour within and outside the household". A man is considered the leader of the household; therefore, it is his responsibility to provide economically for his wife and family. Among the roles and responsibilities of a woman are to remain in the home and oversee household chores, raise, and nurture children, and take care of her husband (Bhangaokar and Kapadia, 2019).

As discussed previously, religious beliefs serve as a foundation for cultural practices. Islam and Christianity depict a similar role of a leader. Islam confers on a man the responsibility

over his spouse, granting him the role of head of the family (Siraj, 2010, pp. 199-203). "*Ar-rijalu qawwamuna alan nisa*", in the *Qur'an* refers to this responsibility as '*Qawwam'*, which, when translated means, "Men are the protectors and maintainers of women" (Qur'an, 4, p. 34). According to Ibn Kathīr[14], a scholar in *tafsir* (Quranic exegesis) and *fiqh* (jurisprudence), a "leader" is defined as a protector, provider, and maintainer who has to financially provide for his family, protect and empathise with them, understand and manage their affairs, and make decisions that affect them after consulting with them (Omar, 2014, p. 104; Bani and Pate, 2015, p. 104; Siraj, 2010, p. 203). In Christianity, there is a more rigorous role granted to men who are almost required to dominate over women who in turn submit entirely to their husbands: "Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife even as Christ is the head of the church, his body, and is himself its Savior. Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit in everything to their husbands" (Ephesians 5: 22-24; New International Version [NIV]). Christianity and Islam state that the role of a leader is to provide, maintain and protect, but it does not say dominate, dictate, or control. Yet, in Christianity, women are viewed as subordinate to men, and according to the apostle, Paul, women must not ask questions in the church; rather, they should go home and speak to their husbands,

> "In all the churches of the saints, the women should keep silence in the churches. For they are not permitted to speak, but should be subordinate, as even the law says. If there is anything they desire to know, let them ask their husbands at home. For it is shameful for a woman to speak in church. What! Did the word of God originate with you, or are you the only ones it has reached? (1 Corinthians 14: 33b-36; Revised Standard Version [RSV])

This view is also evident in Hinduism according to the Law of Manu, the male is the leader (patriarch) of the family: [15]"senior most male member of the family who acts as the

[14] Refer to https://quran.com/4:34/tafsirs/en-tafisr-ibn-kathir; https://quran.com/4:34/tafsirs/en-tafsir-maarif-ul-quran

[15] Ancient family units were headed by the senior most male member in the family, the 'Patriarch,' who had more or less absolute control over the property and even over the lives of the family members. In the present time. The term Patriarch has been replaced by the term Karta which is also described as the Manager of the Hindu Joint Family. (Sanhi and Singh 2015: 2)

representative of the family and acts on behalf of the family" (Sanhi and Singh, 2015; Mishra, 2020; Bhangaokar and Kapadia, 2019). While the title 'patriarch' was replaced by the term '*karta'*, the values and beliefs are still the same (Sanhi and Singh, 2015, p. 2). This title has been reinforced by culture with Indian men using it as a weapon to enforce obligations on their women, seeking submission by gaining power, and control (Siraj, 2010), and have disregarded, in many cases, their own religious beliefs (i.e., Islamic or Christianity).

Naila mentions that Islam has given women a voice in matters of the household and life but patriarchal culture gives men control, "Religiously we are told that we should make 'shura' and speak together and make decisions". 'Shura' is an Arabic word when translated means consultation. Lamya Hamad (2014)[16] mentions that to make 'shura' or consult and seek advice when making decisions is important as, "Prophet Muhammad, peace be upon him, used to decide matters of importance, be it within the community or in his home, with the consultation of those around him". It is, therefore, apparent that patriarchal culture and religion create barriers to the rights and equality of women in society, as men have used parts of religion and the position accorded to them by patriarchal culture to manipulate and control women in their relationships.

Vincent and McEwen (2006, p. 38) mention that "deeply embedded ideologies and practices within heterosexual relationships serve to keep educated, apparently empowered women 'in their place', ensuring they do not fulfil their potential". The role of a man in demanding control is evident in interviewee Muneebah's interview:

> "My first marriage, the man had the power and controls everything, and I think with Islam also people misunderstand the concept of when they say the man is in charge. Yes, the man is in charge of protecting his woman and looking after her, but it does not mean that he has the right to bully her or boss her around, etc. We grow up in places like Lenasia where there's a lot of culture and tradition, so it's easier to go with it than to go against it."

[16] https://www.whyislam.org/shura-a-social-approach-to-consultation/

Faheema and Priyanka echo this view:

> Faheema: “Yes, definitely cultural and generational practices make every effect in our lives, and it did in my life. There are times when I didn’t know the line between religion (Islam) and culture. Up to now, recently, I came into contact with my transport lady, who is Hindu, and when we compared our lifestyles, I realised, oh, this is culture. We still can’t identify that this is Indian culture and not Islam. We definitely still carry our culture forward.”
>
> Priyanka: “The choices I have made and the choices I make, and again this question of religion and culture, there’s a lot of things that we do culturally, that’s the generational thing, from one generation to the next.”

These responses highlight an important aspect that many South African Indians struggle to differentiate between religion and culture, as is evident in all three participants’ responses above. The lines between religion, ethnicity and cultural identity are often obscure due to immigration from the motherland of India and apartheid experienced by Indians who came to South Africa. While the laws and regulations of religion (Islam, Christianity, and Hinduism) are inscribed in the Quran, Bible and Veda, certain beliefs and values that were enforced on the earlier generations of Indians became normalised, as the Indians who migrated to South Africa needed to preserve their values and beliefs they settled into traditional conservatism (Meer, 1972). Social development scholar, Yusuf Bangura, in his paper ‘The Search for Identity: Ethnicity, Religion and Political Violence’ (1994) for the World Summit for Social Development, speaks about the implications, and intersections of culture, religion and ethnicity of people who migrate to new countries and struggle to locate their identities. Bangura (1994, p. 17) states that “Culturalist groups emerge when a community sharing both religious and ethnic affinities perceives itself as a powerless and repressed minority within a state dominated by outsiders”. This is the case of South African Indians in the community of Lenasia, as they have been segregated into a small township with different religions, languages, identities, and modern influences. Yet, cultural values and beliefs have been preserved to maintain a shared and common identity. Therefore, like the three participants above, it becomes difficult to distinguish between religions and ‘culture’ as these boundaries

have often been miscommunicated and practised under a shared umbrella of beliefs and values.

Divorce

With regards to divorce, as mentioned earlier, Meer (1972) points out that men and women were given equal rights to divorce in the Quran. While the Quran lays down the laws of how Muslims should lead their lives, the Hadith[17] provide further explanations on how to deal with aspects and situations that occur in life according to how the Prophet Muhammed did. The aspect of divorce in Islam and the laws about divorce are too large to discuss in this research. However, I will discuss divorce concerning the equality of men and women and on what grounds women have permission to seek a divorce. It is stated in the *Hadith* that Allah (God) dislikes the act of divorce. According to Shaykh Muhammad Abasoomar: "the most detestable of all permissible deeds to Allah is divorce" (mentioned in Sunan Abi Dawud Hadith, pp. 2170-2171; Sunan Ibn Majah Hadith, 2018). From this Hadith, one can deduce that while divorce is permissible in Islam, it is disliked. However, women are allowed to seek a divorce under four circumstances: 1) if she is unhappy with her spouse and she knows she will not be able to fulfil the rights of being his wife[18]; 2) if he ill-treats her (physical, verbal and emotional abuse; 3) if her spouse does not fulfil his rights that she has over him (this includes financial provision, necessities, separate accommodation from parents, and sexual relations); 4) if there is misconduct from the husband (if he is having an illicit relationship with another women or an affair) (Amani, 2011). While society and scholars have claimed that women are not allowed to seek divorce and use this to control women and show their subordination, this is untrue according to Islam, as we see in the time of the Prophet Muhammed that he complied with women's rights even in extreme cases - e.g., when a woman named Jamila came to the Prophet Muhammed claiming that she did not like her husband's physical appearance and she feared becoming a bad believer, the Prophet Muhammed granted Jamila her divorce (El-Ali, 2021). Divorce has increased significantly in recent years in Indian communities around the world according to Bharti Sharma (2011), an Indian theatre director, actor, and teacher,

[17] Hadith is a collection of narratives outlining the Prophet Muhammad's life and actions, it explains how he dealt with issues and matters of life. (Merriam-Webster.com)

[18] This is known as a Khula in Islam, where a woman doesn't want to remain in the marriage anymore due to her own reasons and returns the amount of money (dawry/bridal gift) given to her by her husband in fulfilment of their marriage.

in her article 'Mental and Emotional Impact of Divorce on Women'. Sharma (2011) says that "since women are considered as the binding force in the family, they are believed to be responsible for whatever wrong is done" (p. 125). It has been argued that women invest more in the family, take larger responsibility for the marriage, and therefore, perceive divorce as a greater failure than men (Kurdek, 1990; Chan et al., 2004, Sharma, 2011). This is evident in Naila's views on divorce; her response that women are not expected to divorce their husband's and must 'endure' until the day they die is emphasised. (In my personal domestic sphere, I could identify with these perspectives as my grandmother was told the same thing by her mother.)

> Naila: "So I was told when I got married, 'You don't come back here unless you come back in your grave, your coffin'. And I believed that. I think that's a strong thing for a good relationship, and for me, it was a disgrace after I got divorced, I felt very disgraced. So, if I look at other people in my life, their marriages are very cultural and traditional, where they have like six kids. What are you going to do? You can't leave the marriage – and that is steeped in our forefathers' ways of thought, that is a generational thing that needs to be addressed."
>
> Grandmother: "No not really, but a week before my mother passed away, before she left my house she said, 'You only leave your house when death takes you', like don't take divorce, it's not a nice thing in Allah's eyes, so you must walk out from your husband's house only when you die. My mother even gave my sister that advice. She also went through so much, her husband used to throw her down the stairs, and my mother used to tell her this."

Cultural practices, according to the women above, dictate the insistence on staying in unhealthy and abusive homes – in maintaining the expectation that in marriage there is the compulsion to be at the behest of one's husband. This entrenched perspective has had damaging effects on women who 'accept' abuse as there is no option of returning to their parents' homes. Moreover, it is the mothers who enforce this demand – women will not bring humiliation upon the family by being divorced. Their deaths are the only option for their return, and this tragedy leads to a protracted cycle of abuse and remaining in toxic and abusive relationships.

Chapter 2: Engaging Entanglements

This chapter outlines gendered roles, silencing and secrecy, loyalty and shame, and the impact it has on relationships and marriage. It further outlines the impact of media on the lives of individuals and the unrealistic expectations that media portray of love and relationships.

Gendered roles

From an Islamic perspective, there is no mention in the Quran or Hadith that household chores fall on a woman. According to Islamic scholars, Syed Bacha Agha and Muhammad Usman Tobawal (2015) in their article 'Rights and Duties of the Wife in Islam' state, "It is not a legal obligation of a wife, according to Islamic teachings, to cook meals or serve the house, and if a woman elects to refuse to undertake these works, a husband cannot compel her to do so" (p. 201). Zainab Al `Alawani, a scholar in Islamic studies, concurs with this view, stating, "The Qur'an and Sunnah do not specifically say that cooking and cleaning are part of women's married or unmarried obligations"[19]. Muhammad Abdul-Rauf (2000) in his research on 'The Islamic View of Women and the Family', says that "The Prophet himself used to share in the household work with his wife. He cleaned, swept the floor, mended clothes, and helped in the kitchen" (p. 58). Yet, many Muslim men and women believe that it is a woman's duty to carry out these roles. For example, Firoza says, "We do live according to our culture that women have to be at home, see to her family, her house chores, and that's how she will get on in life". While some women mentioned that their husbands did help out, they still felt obligated to thank them as if the man was helping them with duties that were only for the women (as a favour). Naila, says her husband helped but she did not expect more, "He helped me a lot, but I did not expect him to do more than what he was doing." Faheema says that her husband used to help her but over time things changed and she had to do it all,

> "Surprisingly, my husband used to help me initially a lot, but as time went by, he went back to cultural ways, where he expected me to do everything, but I think that was to a certain degree brought on by myself because it was a habit for us as women to do all the cooking and cleaning, etc. I felt like it was my duty and I did it, but then afterwards I had to do it all."

[19] (https://fiqh.islamonline.net/en/is-cooking-a-wifes-duty/)

Cultural practices train women to take care of the household, look after the children, and see to the chores (cooking, cleaning, washing, etc.). Bhangaokar and Kapadia (2019, p. 271) mention that "the woman's duty as a wife (*gruhini dharma*) is to look after the household". Patriarchy reinforced the idea that women are the caretakers of the household and the children (Walby, 1989; Fillion, 2022).

However, despite knowing that according to Islamic beliefs, the responsibilities of household chores are not an obligation on women, many women have settled into conservative family practices and take on the responsibilities without question. This research aims to understand whether women do so because it is expected of them or as an act of service to express their true love. Further, to understand how love exerts power over our lives as women, it is crucial to examine how women work hard to portray the front of a 'happy household' or 'happy housewife'. Ahmed in her book *The Promise of Happiness* (2010, p. 50) refers to the image of the 'happy household' or 'happy housewife' as a "fantasy figure that erases the signs of labour under the sign of happiness". She explains that the work women do underlines this form of happiness that justifies gendered roles and labour - this is not a duty of women only, but I believe these practices of household labour were expected of women before marriage, hence, they became 'acts of service' or an 'act of love'. Vincent and McEwen (2006) mention that in South Africa women assumed their position as household workers, "Traditionally women were socialised into assuming their positions in the home, as caregivers and unpaid household labourers" (p. 38). They further mention how these roles of domesticity are interwoven with romance in intimate relationships stating, "For many women, it is in the most intimate aspects of their lives in their sexual relationships with men that this hope continues to be thwarted" (p. 38). This act of love determines what women do to fulfil cultural obligations and follow traditions, as well as to preserve happiness (and love) in marriage and relationships.

Expectations from the family, husband/partner, and children often place a heavy burden on women, particularly about their roles as wives and mothers. These expectations create a cultural ideal of the 'happy housewife', where women are expected to excel in their domestic

duties and derive fulfilment (happiness) from their roles within the family (Ahmed 2015, p. 51). This 'ideal' portrays women as solely responsible for household chores, childcare, and maintaining an intimate connection with their spouses (Thagaard, 1997, p. 360). This culturally gendered division of labour places a disproportionate burden on women, limiting their opportunities for personal and professional happiness. As a result, women may feel pressured to prioritise their family responsibilities over their own aspirations and career goals (Thagaard, 1997, p. 365). This pressure, to conform to the ideal image of a 'happy housewife', results in feelings of inadequacy and failure for women who are unable or unwilling to fulfil these expectations. This can lead to a negative impact on women's well-being, as they may experience stress, anxiety, and a loss of self-esteem when they perceive themselves as falling short of the cultural and societal expectations placed upon them.

Veiled:

Veiled women

Oh you beautiful veiled women

Oh you resilient veiled women

Oh you beautiful and resilient veiled women

When will you let down

when will you let down the veils

will you let down the veils of your pain

of your pain caused because of love

your pain caused because of him

No, no your pain caused in love's name

Will you let down the veils of your suffering

Or remain silent

Will you suffer in silence because. . .

Because of love?

Will you let down the veils of secrecy

Or will you continue to hide

Will you hide the abuse and scars

For love?

Will you let down the veils

For love

When will you let down the veils

In love's name

Saajidah Madhi, 2023

Social scientist, Deepa Narayan (2018), eloquently speaks about Indian cultural practices placed on the women of India. In her ground-breaking book *Chup: Breaking the Silence about India's Women*, Narayan (2018) mentions seven habits Indian girls are culturally trained in (1) to deny the body; (2) to be quiet; (3) to please others; (4) to deny your sexuality; (5) to isolate yourself; (6) to have no individual identity; and (7) to be dependent. While it is important to note that these practices focused on women in India, I will demonstrate how these practices influence South African Indian women. Narayan, in a Ted Talk titled '7 beliefs that can silence women - and how to unlearn them' [20] (Baat, 2019) states that these habits that we thought

[20] https://www.ted.com/talks/deepa_narayan_7_beliefs_that_can_silence_women_and_how_to_unlearn_them?language=en

were appropriate and moral snatched life and possibilities away from girls and positioned men to be abusive.

Silencing and Secrecy

Indian families have a widespread belief that girls should be quiet or speak less (Narayan, 2018; Mullatti, 1995). *Chup* is a Hindi word meaning 'be quiet', or 'shut up'. It has become so common that it has been added to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, says Narayan (2018, pp. 60-61). In the opening of his *Ted Talk*[21], Indian actor and film producer, Shah Rukh Khan says, "A girl should be seen, not heard, 'Be quiet,' or, 'chup'. These words are often used to silence girls right from childhood, well into adulthood and deep into old age" (Baat, 2019).

From an early age, girls are trained to be quiet, speak softly, avoid voicing their opinions or arguing, and show respect for elders. "Girls are told, if you must speak, speak softly… Loudness breaks the cultural agreement to train good girls to become invisible, not to exist", says Narayan (2018, p. 57). Similarly, hooks (1989) and Lorde (1984; 2007) write about the silence black women are raised with and the experience of voicing one's opinion or disagreeing with authority figures, Lorde (2007, p. 41) sees it as the "death" of oneself. This also relates to the Grimm story told by Ahmed in *Willful Subjects* (2014, p. 62), where "the willful child, who will not do as her mother wishes, must be punished, and her punishment is necessary for the preservation of the familial as well as social order". It is important to note that although girls are taught to keep quiet, mothers are often the ones who uphold this instruction. Narayan (in Baat, 2019) states that "the goal of every loving parent is to raise 'good' girls, but what parents actually do is to constrain, confine and crush their girls, they prepare them for abuse". This is evident in Nuha's and Priyanka's responses,

> Nuha: "I think, I'm not someone driven by fear or anything like that, but sometimes for the sake of peace, as women we just give in, sadly. It is a cultural thing that we have learnt, and sadly, men also take advantage of that situation, and those norms.

[21] https://www.ted.com/talks/deepa_narayan_7_beliefs_that_can_silence_women_and_how_to_unlearn_them?language=en

> Priyanka: “I don’t know if it's strength or stupidity, but I think it comes from the way it goes from generation to generation, that we taught as Indian women to shut our mouths and to do the job and it carries, and I mean this generation, I don’t know if they smart or more stupid.”

Nuha says she keeps quiet for peace in her current relationship after having left an abusive one, and Priyanka picks up on how generationally, Indian women are taught silence. Narayan (2018, p. 66) further explains that girls are taught silence through the strongest values in Indian families: “respect, especially for elders, particularly men”. Kanaiyalal Motilal Kapadia (in Mullatti, 1995) supports this notion, “The patriarch of the Indian family is a protective, authoritarian figure worthy of respect by family members” (p. 16). The silence that women experience is evident in Naila and Hashmita’s responses, Naila says that “women will always give little more respect to males, to older males, they have a higher position, their decisions will be first, their solutions will go. Very rarely will it be the other way round.” Hashmita says,

> “Our family is still very traditional where the father is still very authoritarian, and his way is always the right way, and for a large part of it I’m telling you with my father, I just shut up and keep quiet and accept. We tell him now and then when to get off; because of age and what he is, we just accept, seriously we do, and some of his ideas, are downright terrible, but, sorry because of age we respect it.”

Similarly, Priyanka speaks about how her ex-father-in-law demanded respect and control,

> “It was his will, it was what he wanted, and what I was expected to give, because no one told us differently, we weren’t told that you have a right, you have an opinion, you were told, ‘you do as you told’, so when you have bad examples of men, bad expectations, and I think that’s the worst, the expectations, because you expected to do this, you expected to do that, they don’t ever tell you what you can do, they always tell you what you can’t do.”

The above quotation conveys the rage and frustration elicited by the many layers of abuse – verbal and emotional. To ‘do as you told’ is the silencing of women – the passive acceptance

of emotional control – much like children are meant to do. There is, in a sense, the treatment of women as subjects. On one hand, they are old enough to maintain a household and take care of cooking and children, and on the other, women are controlled like children. This confusion of the dynamic stems from patriarchal 'learnt' behaviour and remains enforced with tragic consequences. The women are never praised for caring for the household but instead are belittled as they are not men. From these women's narratives, it becomes clear that there is a hierarchy among men in the household – the father-in-law holds a higher position than the husband. In Indian family structures (joint family), the father is the head of the house and while the sons may get married, they return to the father's house with their new brides, hence, the father is still in control (Kakar and Kakar, 2009). This family hierarchy has been maintained and transferred from generation to generation. However, as evidenced in preceding quotations of participants, this dynamic is changing among modern families.

While the joint family structure did not develop in South Africa, many Indians, like Priyanka's father-in-law, still believed in those systems of control and dominance and demanded it. For Hashmita, the dominance is held by her father, and Naila speaks about men from a general perspective. Narayan (2018), Kapadia (1972), and Mullatti (1995) point to the fact that women's silence in deferring to authoritative men is regarded by the wider cultures and by individual families as a form of respect (hence, voicing oneself as a woman is considered disrespectful). While silencing is what women and girls are trained in by cultural beliefs, many women are an exception to this, as girls/women begin to question certain practices, equality and status in the family and community. As Hashmita raises a point on silence and it reminds one that, "If you keep quiet once, you going to have to keep quiet every time". Women have raised questions and continue to do so. However, they then become the problem, the killjoy[22], the wilful child.

King-Konk Cheung (1988)[23] discusses how two different narratives from different cultural backgrounds (Black and Chinese) open with similar parental warnings against speech. Cheung

[22] Ahmed (2014) refers to a killjoy as the one who asks questions that make others feel uncomfortable – the one who kills the joy in the room.

[23] Refer to article '"Don't Tell": Imposed Silences in The Color Purple and The Woman Warrior' (Cheung 1988).

quotes from the novel, *The Color Purple* (1982), by African-American novelist, Alice Walker, where Celie's stepfather threatens, "You better not never tell nobody but God. It'd kill your mammy" (Cheung, 1988, p. 162). In *The Woman Warrior* by Maxine Hong Kingston, Maxine's mother admonishes her daughter, "You must not tell anyone...what I am about to tell you" (Cheung, 1988, p. 162). These creative narratives capture the kinds of silencing that girls and women are subjected to daily. Naila, Nuha, Priyanka, and Cheung's interpretations draw on the power relations apparent in men's and women's voices, not just Indian women. Cheung (1988) mentions that silencing women's speech is a 'cultural' practice, and many cultures reinforce such practices, "culture disapproves of free speech, especially in women" (p. 168). African scholars address these issues in their writing, with Lorde (1984; 2007, p. 41) warning women that "your silence will not protect you", while Gqola (2015) addresses the issue of not speaking about the violence we experience in our daily lives resulting in us continuing "to live with the scourge of gender-based violence" (p. 67). While women are taught to silence their voices, and give respect, men tend to demand control and respect.

Loyalty

"Our culture places high moral value on loyalty to men and family secrecy" (Narayan quoted in Baat, 2019). This dynamic of power relation that men and women are raised with is then carried into relationships where the husband (as the leader) demands control and respect, and the wife is taught to be loyal and dutifully abide. Girls are trained to remain silent about arguments in a relationship or marriage as a form of loyalty which means that no one should know what happens in one's home, and as a woman, there is a need to present a 'happy' front. Kakar and Kakar (2009, p. 9) state that, "members often squabble among themselves but remain, in most cases, intensely loyal to each other and always present a united front to the outside world". "Loyalty binds the powerless to the more powerful, even when it is not in their best interest" (Narayan, 2018). Naila speaks about how she would hide arguments that took place with her husband as she believed they were small and petty, "I would hide it, smaller, simpler things, I would just hide it; I would feel like I'm being petty and they don't deserve such attention, and I would move forward. We were brought up very closed and very impersonal I would say, and very strict and rigid".

When I asked participants if culture teaches women to remain silent about issues of abuse or pain in their relationships or marriages, many said 'yes', but concurrently explained, that is what women were taught previously. However, because society and the world are evolving, women now have a voice. This is evident in Nuha, Firoza, Muneebah, Hashmita and Zubaida's responses. The majority also emphasised that mustering the courage and confidence to find their voices and speak up was extremely difficult.

> Nuha: "So, I think maybe 30 or 40 years ago our culture was a lot more secretive and tolerant and it allowed a lot of room for abuse in marriages and relationships, but in recent society and with our social norms changing to the degree that it is with women empowerment, with regards to women working, having their own financial independence, I think we see these norms and trends changing a lot. So now women are no longer that tolerant as they were before because they can now support themselves in one way, and as the societal norms are changing people are more open to talking about these things. So, because of these trends changing, I think it was more accepted for me to openly talk about it even though it took me a long time to open up."
>
> Firoza: "Well, South Africa is no more like before, women can speak out whenever they need to, or whatever has happened to you, you are free to speak (silent moment). Our culture always taught us, as they say in Gujarati 'sabr', means to 'tolerate' - women have to tolerate a lot."
>
> Muneebah: "I think for me it definitely had an effect on me where I lived in secrecy for a while, and I was afraid to say things or do things because of how I would be looked at or, uh, judged you know, but I think eventually as you learn and you grow, you know like now I feel like I found my voice, where I can speak up for the next person including myself, but somehow it still feels easier to speak up for the next person, than it is to speak up for myself."

Nuha talks about how women are empowered and financially independent. She also picks up on how forty years back women were more secretive and tolerant which allowed room for abuse. Ironically, Nuha uses the words tolerant and abuse simultaneously. Yet, according to

records in 2023, “gender-based violence in South Africa was rated the highest in the world. According to police figures between 2019 and 2020, there were an average of 146 reported offences each day of which 116 were of rape by someone they know”.[24] Thus, even though women are no longer as tolerant and there has been a change where women are more willing to speak up, the abuse has not ended. This brings to mind what Narayan mentioned to the audience in the Ted Talk earlier, “Nowadays, we see well-dressed, educated women like many of you in this room, all of you in this room, and myself, and we think the world has changed, but these external changes are extremely misleading, because, on the inside, we have not changed” (Baat, 2019). Narayan highlights an important aspect - women believe that change occurs due to external appearance, independence, education, or the ability to speak out on account of being less tolerant of patriarchal forces. Importantly, women have always been working or earning, and while they have not gone out to work in industry (as women were expected to stay at home and take care of the house and children), many women often resorted to home industries. My Nani and Firoza are great examples of this. Nani made and sold savouries to assist in financing the home and sending her children to school. Firoza knitted blankets and clothes as a pastime and her family still benefited from the sale of these. Hence, while these changes may have given women a better life, education and better work, women have always been working. Yet, the abuse in marriages and homes, the silencing and keeping the abuse a secret, and the domestic roles (internal changes) have not ended, and women still remain in these situations in the hope that things will change.

A Belief: Things Will Change

South African poet Koleka Putuma's work examines how cultural and traditional beliefs continue to impact a woman's life even after leaving her parent’s home. In her poem, *In the Emergency Room* (2017), she (Putuma, 2017, p. 66) recites:

Things you don’t tell your family:

Your marriage was a miscarriage

He almost killed you

[24] https://womenforchange.co.za/lets-talk-about-domestic-violence/

But you stayed

For the children

You said.

The poem is an extended metaphor – it links the death of an unborn child to the death of her marriage. The title highlights the death of the marriage that never reached fruition. Line one: "things you don't tell your family" - written by a black woman poet, evidences the silence she was taught, which is apparent in hooks' (1989), Cheung's (1988), and Lorde's (1984; 2007) writings. The fear and taboo of speaking about one's suffering is apparent, carrying forth the message of the silence women endure instead of voicing their pain because of shame and the disgrace associated with abuse or violence experienced at the hand of a husband (Murray, 2017; Wilson, 2012; Putuma, 2017; Fraser, 2007).

English scholar, Jessica Murray (2017), mentions in her article 'And They Never Spoke to Each Other of It' the silence of violence in women's voices by analysing three fictional narratives: *Dark Whispers* by Jo Macgregor (2014), *What About Meera* by Zainub Priya Dala (2015) and *We Need New Names* by NoViolet Bulawayo (2014), and states that the "unspoken, gendered attitudes that render women vulnerable to silencing and violence…tend to be shrouded in shame and secrecy – such as gender violence, female sexuality, and women's bodies" (p. 24). I asked the participants if they expressed care and affection towards the man abusing them, hoping that their situations would change. Many replied in the affirmative, some acknowledged they were in denial, and others admitted to the shame and judgement they would experience from family and the community.

> Nuha: "So, I always made excuses for his behaviour, I always had this ideology that I was going to change and fix and help him to change his behaviour, but up until this day I know that the change has to come from him and to this point in time I still see the same kind of behaviour in him as an individual."
>
> Faheema: "Yes, I definitely did; there was definitely a time when I was in denial of the fact that there were issues. In that way, it kind of helped me. I think it was a coping

> mechanism, where I would stay in denial and say, “No, love has its ups and downs”. It was a coping mechanism, but there was definitely denial at first.”
>
> Priyanka: “First, shame - shame because I went against my parents, so I didn’t want them to know what I was going through, then I had to prove myself to this person, then it was about making him seem more of a man you know, giving him, stroking his ego. Then it was about how people would look at me because that’s what society was, as an Indian woman, to say you having difficulty says that you doing something wrong, and I think for a long time that was the basis of things that I did when I was married, was what was I doing wrong.”
>
> Munnebah: “Definitely, I think I gave and gave and gave until there was nothing left of me until I wasn’t who I was anymore you know, so you basically sugar-coat everything that they say.”

These narratives highlight several points: self-blame and guilt, denial of the abuse experienced, hope that the situation will change, loyalty not to speak to others about the abuse and using praise to refract from the trauma and pain by expressing kindness and care to raise the husband's ego. Patriarchal culture has given men control over their wives/partners; hence, it has tied a woman’s honour and success to her husband/partner, further cultural beliefs have placed a woman’s honour to the extended family’s reputation. Her independence is rarely acknowledged as her identity. Rather, it is viewed as an extra income. Meer (1972) makes mention of how marriage takes precedence over all else among Indian women in South Africa:

> “Even when a young girl trains for a career, that career rarely takes precedence over marriage and will be easily abandoned if the husband opposes it. The career is a safety valve, in case of difficulties in marriage. It is also an added attribute brought to marriage, an added prestige bestowed on the husband. The fact that the wife is something - a teacher, for example, is of importance in itself but not for the independent identity it gives her” (p. 44).

Narayan (2018) mentions, “Girls learn that they must protect their parents from shame and dishonour”. This is apparent in Priyanka’s narrative - she remained silent for many years, afraid to speak to her parents and placed the blame on herself.

There are five categories identified by Yalda Sere, Nicolette v. Roman and Robert A.C. Ruiter in their article ‘Coping with the Experiences of Intimate Partner Violence Among South African Women’ (2021) for emotional coping in heterosexual relationships, namely: love, self-blame, hope, anger/fight and acceptance. According to Sere, Roman and Ruiter (2021), love was seen as the most powerful concept of why women remained in the relationship, as women, in most cases, believed that loving their partner helped deal with the abuse or, loving behaviours from their partner helped them get through the pain. This is apparent in Faheema’s response where she says she remained in her marriage because she loved her husband. According to Sere, Roman and Ruiter (2021, p. 9), many women resorted to self-blame as they believed they were ‘doing something wrong’ (like Priyanka). My Gran echoed this saying, “I got married of my own will, I blamed myself for it, so I didn’t tell anyone”. However, all participants hoped things would get better as Sere, Roman and Ruiter (2021, p. 9) state that some women used ‘hope’ as a coping mechanism in the belief that the abusive relationship would get ‘better’.

Women must comprehend shame and guilt because they are the reasons behind many women’s silences in relationships (Narayan, 2018; Brown, 2007; Westerlund, 2012). Fredrik Westerlund (2012, p. 518) states, “Our sense of shame is without doubt one of the strongest emotional forces affecting our behaviour and thinking”. Shame is a social emotion involving respect for others and their perspectives and some researchers think it takes on a moral value (Narayan, 2018; Brown, 2007; Thomason, 2018; Williams, 1993). This points to the respect aspect culture reinforces – women often remain silent to authority figures (most often men).

According to psychologist Brené Brown (2007, p. 29), “Shame is the intensely painful feeling or experience of believing we are flawed and therefore unworthy of acceptance and belonging”. Westerlund (2012, p. 531) says, “We can of course — and are often especially

liable to — feel shame before people who we love and who are close to us". Priyanka and Faheema's responses validate Westerlund's view: Priyanka points out the shame she felt and Faheema acknowledges her love that resulted in her hope for change. Guilt is often associated with a feeling regarding a specific situation or reaction. June Price Tangney (2011) mentions in an interview the difference between shame and guilt, "When people feel shame, they feel badly about themselves; when people feel guilt, they feel badly about a specific behaviour". Guilt and shame are evident in Priyanka's narrative as she feels guilt about her choices and questions her self-worth and behaviour.

Let's Talk about Abuse

Thus far, mention has been made of women experiencing various abuse. This ranges from emotional to physical to sexual abuse. Many of the participants in this study mention being in abusive marriages/situations. However, as aware as many of them might be of this reality and the changing nature of society as women are more 'voiced', the actual nature of their abuse was not often openly stated. There still seems to be a trauma linked to their experiences which prevents them from voicing the nature of their abuse. It is clear that even though times are changing, and women are speaking up about their pain and abuse, from my interview process it became clear that there is still fear of speaking about abuse especially when a person is still in an abusive marriage. While two participants, Mariam and Zaakirah discuss the abuse they experienced by certain men in their lives, participants who experienced abuse in their personal/intimate relationships were not willing to share or were hesitant to do so. Mariam speaks about the sexual molestation she and her grandson endured, she noted that she is only able to speak about it because when the same incident happened to her grandson, she confided to a therapist regarding the matter (at the age of forty) and she has finally forgiven the perpetrators.

> Mariam: "The molestation also happened in one sense that also happened it's also not necessarily someone far from family, yes for myself it happened to me, like really serious like putting someone's dick in your mouth when you were six/seven years old, in certain ways, but it's something you could never speak about it. It only came up

> when I was forty years old and I went for hypnotherapy and you start remembering, and when the memory came in, I refused to give the names of the people."
>
> Zaakirah: "So, since our last fight we stopped speaking, but then again, this year we had another huge fight, so he threw a glass at me. He was trying to like hit me with it or throw it at me but it landed at my feet and it shattered, and my kids saw that. He slapped my mother-in-law last year in front of my kids, so I won't ever speak to him again. As I said my husband is not abusive or anything, his verbally abusive, as I said in Ramadhan mostly because he's fasting, and he like says mean things which hurts, obviously, but I let him know when he breaks his fast, that what you said hurt me and I didn't like it."

Zaakirah speaks about how her father-in-law is physically abusive to her and his wife. However, when Zaakirah speaks about the verbal abuse experienced by her husband, she condones his action by providing a reason for his behaviour, 'mostly because he's fasting'. These incidents show how people are only able to speak after they feel safe, but many are still hesitant because of the shame and guilt they experience. Narayan (in Baat, 2019) mentions that "fear traumatises, fear truncates, fear drains life, women's fear keeps society stable. It serves society but it costs women". Therefore, I question if women remain silent because of love or out of fear.

In the name of love

As a young girl I was told

Love is blind

and Marriage is an eye-opener…

Oh my dear sister

Is that a veil that has ~~covered~~ your eyes?

That you fail to see how you have been controlled

In the name of love

You ~~conceal~~ his faults and lies

In the name of love

You apply make-up

To ~~cover-up~~ the bruises on your fair skin

In the name of love

You mask the vulgarity of his words

That over time has left you scarred

In the name of love

Fear, anxiety and stress

Have taken control

Over you

Yet

In the name of love

You continue to be his pillar of strength

in his time of need

In the name of love

You continue to provide the same shoulder he has abused

as a place for him to cry on

In the name of love

you continue to prepare his meals

after he criticised it and

told you it will never taste like his mother's

In the name of love

you continue to carry out these daily chores

in the name of love

is it for love or because of love?

Saajidah Madhi, 2023

Media's Influence on Love and the Ideal Image

Media is a tool used to communicate, store, and deliver information. This section will analyse how Bollywood movies portray romantic relationships and represent Indian culture through the portrayal of the 'ideal' Indian woman, Indian cultural beliefs, how abuse co-exists in heterosexual love relationships, and how the patriarchal status is maintained. There is an awareness that other forms of media, such as social media, do not have similar effects on individuals. However, this aspect will not be delved into. I aim to demonstrate how mass media plays a significant role in shaping ideas of love, creating unrealistic expectations and perceptions thereof.

Joseph Klapper's reinforcement theory from the 1960s states that media has little power over one's beliefs, judgement, and attitudes, and behaviours are confirmed by one's surroundings (i.e., school, peers, and family). George Gerbner and Larry Gross's 'cultivation theory' (1981),

however, proposes that repeated exposure to television over time can 'cultivate' viewers' perceptions of social reality and shape viewers' attitudes, perceptions, beliefs, and values (Hefner et al., 2017; Borah, 2016; Banaag et al., 2014). As cited by Jennifer C. Bun (2007), Gerbner and Gross believe that the "relationship between media messages and individuals' beliefs and attitudes about their social environment is curbed by overall television consumption." The 'social cognitive theory'[25] by Bandura (1986) mentions that individuals observe behaviours from direct social interactions or indirectly observe behaviours through media and internalise this information into their own beliefs and ideals (Bandura, 2001; Banaag et al., 2014). While Klapper's theory fails to support media's influence on individuals' behaviour, Gerbner and Gross (1976) and Bandura's (2009) theories support the idea that media does influence an individual's behaviour, attitude, beliefs, and knowledge.

As Jeanne R. Steele and Jane D. Brown (1995, p. 553) mention, "media present a certain set of messages or ideas about how the world works, and although some differences in interpretation and logic are possible, the dominant meanings will prevail." Research by Myrien Eulah Kezia G. Banaag et al. (2014); Hefner et al. (2017); Catelyn R. Ray (2022); and Bjarne M. Holmes (2007) look at how television and films shape an individual's beliefs and behaviours about love, "those observed in the media may serve as symbolic models, suggesting to individuals by example what constitutes an 'ideal' partner or relationship" (Banaag et al., 2014, p. 80). Bun's (2007) research looks at how romance novels influence individuals' perceptions and unrealistic expectations about romantic standards and relationships discussed in her article 'The Effects of Romance Novel Readership Beliefs, Romantic Ideals, and Relational Satisfaction'. The influence of media is evident in the portrayal of love in various forms of entertainment (television shows, movies, books, and music), where idealised and romanticised narratives of 'happily-ever-after' are often centred around and prevail (Hefner et al., 2017; Holmes, 2007; hooks, 2000; Steele and Brown, 1995). hooks (2000, p. 181) mentions, "The myth of true love - that fairy-tale vision of two souls who meet, join, and live happily thereafter - is the stuff of childhood fantasy". This statement

[25] The 'social cognitive theory' (SCT) began as the 'social learning theory' (SLT) in the 1960s by Bandura. It developed into the SCT in 1986 and posits that learning occurs in a social context with a dynamic and reciprocal interaction of the person, environment, and behaviour (LaMorte 2022).

indicates that from a young age, individuals are indoctrinated with ideal images of love, romance, and happily-ever-afters. It is evident that these narratives of romance and love create ideals of love and false expectations on men and women, as Firoza mentions that 'romantic love is best described' according to these tales, and Priyanka identifies that these images and narratives 'create false impressions' of love.

Drawing on participant's responses, Firoza identifies that 'romance and love are best described in stories like *Layla and Majnun*, *Romeo and Juliet*, and Mumtaaz and Shahjahan'. *Layla and Majnun* is a classic story of two lovers who were kept apart by societal and familial circumstances (Ahmadi, 2016). *Romeo and Juliet*, by William Shakespeare, is a play based on a romance that ends in tragedy of two Italian youths from feuding families. Novels like *Mills and Boons* have also largely influenced many readers, creating false impressions of love and unrealistic expectations, according to Deepika Asthana in her essay 'How Mills & Boons Skew Our Idea of Romance'. Asthana (2019) writes, "They idealise love and sex and encourage unreal expectations of a life of unbridled passion and trouble-free pregnancies". This proves that readers of these romance novels begin to internalise the perception that romance and love are based on fairy-tale images. While Priyanka does state that these fairy tales create false impressions and expectations of romance, she also admits to believing in them before she got married. However, it is important to note here that I did not directly ask participants if movies or media influenced their ideas of love, and that the women interviewees on their own created these connections to romance and love. Nuha also mentions in the interview how these images of intimacy and love relationships indoctrinate the minds of young girls and women:

> "It is very important, uhm, I think the media portray certain expectations of intimacy, love relationships that are very unrealistic, in the minds of women and young girls today. These expectations also have a large impact on the instability and the failure rate of relationships today."

Subhra Rajat Balabantaray (2020), a scholar in sociology and media studies, notes the abstract film theory, derived from Marxist theory, which argues that films are created to represent

reality, and individuals assume whatever is represented in movies to be true and real, thus, forming stereotypical images about a specific culture. Hall's (2013) research in Cultural Studies supports these theories when he suggests that repeated representations of stereotypes that we consume often lead to our beliefs and the meanings we construct of a culture or group of people. This indicates that repeated representations, or more time spent watching television shows or movies of 'what love is' or 'what a romantic relationship constitutes of', is what viewers internalise and may develop unrealistic expectations of romantic relationships and, subsequently, may be disappointed when real-life relationships don't mirror the media's idealised versions. Bollywood cinema often showcases the importance of family, the subordinate position of women in Indian society, and the idealisation of falling in love and getting married - it objectifies women by promoting a portrayal of an ideal image of women, who nurture, care for, and serve their families selflessly (Balabantaray, 2020). Unlike Western cinema or Hollywood, Bollywood cinema pays particular attention to the film and the music, the songs are often based on romance and love impacting viewers' ideas of love; these love songs are often played at actual wedding ceremonies or mehndi nights[26].

Bollywood Cinema and Songs

Bollywood cinema has made a point of showcasing romance and love. In Indian cinema, music, dancing, and lyrics are important sources of entertainment, regardless of the demographics of the audience, and the lyrics serve as a vehicle for telling the story (Balabantaray, 2020; Gopal, 2015). Mariam speaks about how her parents never spoke about love but as children, they watched Indian films,

> "So, one part, it was ironical. We had to watch all these Indian movies that were showing romantic stories and all the lovers and that, and they said don't you dare have a boyfriend you know. So, it was quite a contradiction because we were flooded with romantic songs of Indian stories and Indian you know, like all of us knew Muhammed Rafi and Kesh, I'm talking of those days, but at the same time, it was like 'don't you

[26] Traditionally Indian weddings host a Mehendi ceremony, during which the bride's hands and feet are decorated with intricate patterns by the application of Henna (Gullapalli and Sagi, 2014, p. 2).

> dare do that', and all of the romantic relationships in the movies of that time is that it was all secretive. I mean they were always hiding from their parents."

According to Rita Kothari and Apurva Shah (2017), in their article 'Dil Se: Love, Fantasy and Negotiation in Hindi Film Songs', "the pervasive influence of songs in shaping expectations of romance is manifest in now-parodic, now-earnest fashion in Hindi cinema's own self-referential memory" (p. 536). The Indian cinema industry is largely influenced by love songs according to Natalie Sarrazin (2008, p. 393). These songs are often used to express emotions and feelings that can't be verbalised (Sarrazin, 2008). One of the most overplayed Indian songs that I have heard at wedding festivals (I was part of a waitressing team for over 6 years in Lenasia) was *Tum Hi Ho* from the film *Aashiqui 2* (2013), which means "it's only you". This song's lyrics convey how much one needs one's lover, the opening verses being: "I can't live without you now, what's my existence without you". Another example is from the film *Umrao Jaan* (1981) opens with the lines, "I was dishonoured in so many ways ... the names of strangers was written with my blood ... why is it that her mention today could not make me happy ... why is it that her name today broke my heart, to love me or not is in your control ... but for me not to love you is beyond my control". Such lyrics create false impressions of love and romance and many start believing that their lives cannot continue without the person they love, as discussed by Kothari and Shah (2017): "Our attention is arrested by the seething desire of songs, their ubiquity in everyday life and forms of internal and external regulations that make direct and upfront expressions of romance difficult" (p. 533).

From the 1990s to the 21st century, Bollywood films' depictions of women have changed, as have the dancing moves (Balabantaray, 2020, p. 5). In the past, women in Indian cinema were typically represented as housewives, mothers, sexual objects of desire, weak and subservient to their husbands - films like *Dahej* (1950), *Devi* (1970), *Gauri* (1968) and *Pati Parmeshwar* (1988) created this portrayal (Ayushi, 2021). For example, in Pati Parmeshwar (1988), the husband of a devout Hindu wife spends much of his time with his mistress. Rather than divorcing her spouse, she endeavours to strengthen their union. In the hopes that he would see light, she accompanies her paralysed husband to the mistress and serves them.

Eventually, he repents, comes back, and she accepts him (Tripathi, 2013). In recent Indian cinema, we witness how women's roles have changed, with women being portrayed as educated and financially independent. However, the stereotypes attached to such women have not fundamentally changed as they are still viewed as sexual objects of desire and tied to domestic roles.

Romance images in media and Indian music influence the ideologies and expectations that one idealises, which leads to further disappointment and frustration when real-life situations do not reflect one's expectations. However, if we can find the courage to open ourselves up and speak about the issues we face in our daily lives, we can change the repeated cycle of our grandparents and great-grandparents. We can build healthier relationships, and create circles where women feel safe to share and learn from. I believe that one woman's struggle may be another woman's encouragement, motivation, or lesson. Iyanla Vanzant (2021) who is an American inspirational speaker and writer says, "When you stand and share your story in an empowering way, your story will heal you and your story will heal somebody else." The next chapter will discuss these issues further.

Chapter 3- Uncovering and Undoing

This chapter unpacks textile art as a narrative through my art practice and questions if healing is a possible outcome of art making. It analyses how artists and therapists use art to aid in creating safe spaces for women in communities. I propose unlearning as a practice that can aid in undoing the cultural norm of silencing and secrecy in relationships or marriages.

Art as Questioning and Healing

Humans are, as a species, addicted to stories. Even when the body goes to sleep, the mind stays up all night, telling itself stories (Gottschall, 2013). The artworks created in part fulfilment of this MA all carry the theme of storytelling and poetry to unveil the narratives of South African Indian women's trauma, pain and grief in their everyday lived experiences that are often silenced and secreted from the world.

South African feminist scholar, Nthabiseng Motsemme, in her article, 'The Mute Always Speaks' (2004), explores the harsh reality of ordinary women's daily experiences under a violent regime, where women articulated their "languages of 'pain and grief' through the language of silence" (p. 910). Motsemme (2004) underlines how the violence and violation of apartheid in South Africa impacted "relationships between husband and wife, mother and son, and women themselves", and how this impact has had a lasting effect even after the "original moment of violence" (p. 909). 'The mute always speaks' is an important concept as it unpacks how women found ways to communicate their silence of pain and grief when language and spoken words failed them.

The narratives interpreted in the artworks are collected from the participants in this dissertation. Six of the ten participants lived during apartheid while the four remaining participants were raised by parents who witnessed and lived during this oppression. The interview questions were not directed at finding out if the participants experienced abuse in their relationships, but rather focused on how these women survived difficult situations. The silences expressed in the recorded interviews and the physical and emotional ways women

articulated their narratives were translated and transferred into the making of the artworks (Hausse, 1990; Frankish and Bradbury, 2012). Materials such as textiles, fabrics, beads, scarves, wool, and ribbons, which encapsulate history, culture, and memory, were collected and used. This was essential in uniting narratives of different people in the community to visually represent the unity and strength women have continuously relied on. Head scarves, which hold a particular attachment to them, were gathered from women in the community. These were used to 'speak' the women's narratives - the stories are told 'out of' the scarves themselves. Prain (2014, p. 39) speaks about how collected materials hold their narrative, stating that, "the very act of creating something from a piece of clothing can bring us closer to the person who wore it". There is a constant political debate over the headscarf around the world, where some view the "head covering as a signifier of oppression and seclusion of women in Islamic societies while others see it as a symbol of resistance and liberation" (Sandikci and Ger, 2005, p. 62). Using the headscarf in my artworks is an attempt to reclaim the veil as a cloth that holds stories, belonging, memory, history and faith, as artists such as Amna Yandarbin, who identifies as part of the Noxci (Chechen)[27] community, visually reclaim the narratives of her people by telling their stories through the design and form of silk headscarves[28]; Seblewongel Gelan from Ethiopia prints the struggles and narratives of women from Ethiopia onto the scarves[29], and Asma Ahmed Shikoh from Pakistan collected scarves from 100 American Muslim women to create a beehive to commemorate how the Quran speaks about honeybees having special healing powers, and using these scarves shows how women coming together to share their stories through the scarves is an act of healing in itself (Chase, 2013).

I went on a collection drive in my community (Lenasia) and asked women to donate any materials that were no longer in use, especially their scarves. During this process, many women were eager to show me the artworks they made; some had them hanging on the walls of their homes. The intricate detail of the artworks and the narratives they associated with the works motivated me to create a space in my exhibition for these marginalised women, to

[27] Noxci are people who Russians refer to as, "Chechens;" a label picked up by the Western media. (Scalemag.online, 2021)
[28] Scalemag.online, 2021
[29] Inclusivetrade.com, 2023

showcase their work, and to grant them the recognition they have been deprived of due to socio-cultural and political restraints.

Textile as art has a rich cultural and historical significance, having been used for centuries by different cultures around the world (Prain, 2014; Garlock, 2016). Lisa Raye Garlock (2016), an artist and art therapist in her article 'Stories in the Cloth: Art Therapy and Narrative Textiles' states, "The historical roots of textiles run deep, exist in cultures everywhere, and continue to evolve in different ways" (p. 59). It pushes the boundaries of traditional art forms as previously in the West, textile art was considered a craft (Auther, 2008; Barrett, 2008; Dormer, 1997). Art was seen as expressive-based, creative and communicative, while crafts were viewed as a traditional, skilled, and repetitive activity (Garlock, 2016). Textile art provides a unique form of artistic expression that involves the manipulation and creation of fabrics and fibres to produce visually appealing and meaningful works (Hamlyn, 2015). Therefore, it has received more accreditation in recent years from galleries and museums. It encompasses various techniques such as weaving, embroidery, felting, and dyeing that are used to create intricate patterns, textures, and designs (Prain, 2014). Hence, these materials begin to communicate narratives filled with emotion, feeling, and stories, where language fails to carry the weight of the narrative.

Textile art, as a medium, combines both artistic and functional elements, as previously textile works were commonly only recognised for decorative purposes or clothing (Kenning, 2015; Auther, 2008). However, in recent times these works received recognition for their deeper significance as they hold and communicate narratives, memories, histories, and poetry, bringing people in communities together and preserving cultures (Prain, 2014; Garlock, 2016). Textile art as a form of narrative allows individuals to tell their stories and express their emotions through the materials and techniques they choose (Stuckey and Nobel, 2010). Prain (2014, p. 15) mentions, "For as long as people have been making things by hand, they have been telling stories through their handmade artwork". Individuals and communities have used textile art to reflect on social, political, and economic conditions of a particular time and place, providing insight into the experiences and identities of individuals and communities

(Nelson et al., 2005; Garlock, 2016; Prain, 2014). The *arpilleras* is a good example of this - it is a grim tale created by the women during the Chilean military dictatorship of Augusto Pinochet[30] that documented and denounced the oppression in a country where all typical channels of free expression were closed (Garlock, 2016; Prain, 2014; Bradshaw, 2019). According to Garlock (2016),

> "No one, including the media, was permitted to talk about what was happening, but ordinary women — mothers, grandmothers, wives, and daughters — gathered to sew cloth into their own personal stories describing what they and their families were experiencing. The women who made the arpilleras were not just telling their stories; they were stitching their lives back together, supporting each other, and healing traumas in a quiet and profound way" (p. 58).

The making of these artworks, as mentioned by Garlock (2016), is not just a documentation of events but the process encapsulates how art is a form of therapy. It brought women in communities together, created a network of resilient voices and each woman healed through her trauma and shared pain. Textile carries a "sentimental resonance" (Prain, 2014, p. 16) that encapsulates stories where paper and voice are unable to carry the weight or narrative.

My exhibition titled *Prevail* took place between the 18th and 26th of January 2024 at the Point of Order (TPO) in Braamfontein (Johannesburg). The artworks were made over three years (2021-2023), representing the journey of discovering and un-layering South African Indian women's lived experiences and narratives through artmaking and my poetry, as mentioned in this dissertation. The journey entailed oral discussions and a collection of materials from women in Lenasia. During the interviews, I asked participants, "What kind of support systems did you have in times when you felt hurt or violated in romantic relationships? Are there any ways in which you express your hurt/pain or any coping/healing strategies?".

[30] During 1970s and 1980s in Chile – totalitarian military regime of General Augusto Pinochet Ugarte.

Nuha: “So I write, I write my pain, I speak it… I have my friends I have support systems in place – I understand the importance of self-care and support to function as a human.”

Firoza: “I like to do my handwork so that keeps me going.”

Priyanka: “I think my sister is my biggest supporter, and mind you, she’s going through now the things I have already been through, and we have become co-supporters. We support each other; she asks for advice, and I always tell people when you give advice you give the good and the bad. People need to make their own choice; you can’t choose for them.”

Hashmita: ‘It helps when you have a village as a family, it really helps. Our house we are a village. Our numbers make us up.”

Muneebah: “I go to my aunts and my mother who I can speak to.”

Mariam: “I believe women are the supporters of women, and women need to find the friendship…and together as women, we can be a powerhouse.”

Firoza uses handwork (i.e., knitting, crocheting, painting, and embroidery) as a coping strategy. Nuha uses the process of writing to express her pain. Nuha, Munnebah, Hashmita, and Priyanka refer to family and friends as support structures in, highlighting the importance of sisterhood which offers safety, strength and belonging. Each artwork at my exhibition told a different narrative.



Fig.1. Saajidah Madhi, *Tracing Narratives,* (2021-2023)



Fig.2. Saajidah Madhi, *Tracing Narratives,* (2021-2023)



Fig.3. Saajidah Madhi, *Tracing Narratives,* (2021-2023)

The artworks above titled *Tracing Narratives* (2021-2023) in Fig.2 are a series of five pieces. The artworks titled *Tracing Narratives* (2021-2023) in Fig.3 are created by five women (Amina Madhi, Fatima Ismail, Rabia Ahmed, Zulaika Ahmed, and Rumana Manga) from Lenasia among whom I circulated a loom. At first, many only see the brightly coloured textile work hung on the wall. The intricate details and patterns draw the viewer in for a closer look as evident in Fig.1 and Fig.3 where the colours, fabrics, textures, and intricate patterns become much clearer. As storytelling has many layers and notions of expression with plot twists, adventure, and suspense, these artworks carry a similar narrative through colour, form, texture, line work, and shape. Toby Smith (2021) speaks about how weaving is more than the warp and weft - it is used to tell stories: “We can think of handwoven cloth as a form of voice, as a medium with which we can communicate the stories of our lives”. The artworks titled *Tracing Narratives* (Fig.2) explore the silencing and hidden narratives (abuse, pain, and trauma that women endure in heterosexual love relationships) through different textiles, thus creating a living archive of untold stories. In the narratives of these artworks, a needle replaces a pen, and cloth replaces paper. Ricia Anne Chansky (2010), a researcher in literature, wrote in her article ‘A Stich in Time: Third-wave Feminist Reclamation of Needled Imagery’ that “the needle stabs as it creates, forcing thread or yarn into the act of creation” (p. 682). Similarly,

the needle used in the creation of my artwork involves threading a needle through a cloth, which represents women expressing their "anger over oppression and pride in their gender" (Chansky, 2010, p. 682).

The intention of the artist telling a story, her story, their story, does not come instinctively unless one spends time looking closely at the artwork. The action of standing in front of the textile artwork forms an interaction and creates a form of communication between the artwork and its viewer. Traditionally, the assumption when being told a story is that it is either verbal or in writing. An artwork is not traditionally considered a means of storytelling. Yet, pictures in books are often viewed with great interest as they capture a different essence of the narrative, and people create connections to the image, or the story becomes more realistic and whole. This was the intention behind my artwork. Prain (2014) mentions,

> "Rarely are textile works simply end products—they are saturated with narrative, from the chain of events that led to their creation and the choice of materials used to the stories told by the pieces themselves, and finally to the accounts shared by those who have experienced an emotional reaction to these artworks" (p. 9).

Garlock (2016, p. 58) states that "making a story cloth is giving voice to events that are unspeakable, whether on a purely personal level or because society more broadly discourages talking about such things". Many women who participated in the artworks in Fig.3 shared their narratives while the artworks were in progress. The art of weaving is said to bring individuals in a community together, and that is the experience these artworks encapsulate. Rozsika Parker observes in *The Subversive Stitches* (2010, pp. 4-16) that, "embroidery has provided a community to women throughout history". Women have previously gathered to make things by hand using different skills such as sewing, embroidery, stitching and knitting, and in that process, relieved personal pain by sharing their burdens and accumulatively coping strategies and their resiliency (Garlock, 2016).

Textile allows me to create a visual representation of the weaving together of silences and intimacy (intimate cartography) that women experience daily. This is like Khan's artwork *When the Moon Waxes Red* (2009-2022), a video and installation of needle-lace narratives that create a family album in which she interlaces the stories of the women in her family told in poetic prose, highlighting the traumatic experiences of domestic violence.

According to Prain (2014, p. 15), "Textile-making is often taught through an oral history, with one maker teaching another how to knot, thread, bind, or weave". While art as a form of therapy has only been identified in the past few decades (Garlock, 2016; Hluska, 2016), women have always used these forms of making as a method by making clothes for their children or grandchildren or knitting a blanket to give as a gift. I, therefore, question if making artwork or clothing is a form of therapy and if it can heal women who experience abuse, pain, and grief in their love relationships.

Catherine L. Ripley (2023), in her article, 'How Art Therapy Can Help Survivors of Trauma Access an Embodied Sense of Safety', argues that, "Traumatic stress can disrupt systemic rhythms in the brain and body that enable a person to feel safe in the world" (p. 2). Gail Kenning (2015), a researcher and artist who works with socially engaged practices in older generations of women, explains that "textile activities such as knitting, crochet, tatting, and lace making have provided challenges, physical and mental stimulation, creative outlets, and social interaction for generations of women" (p. 52). Garlock (2016, pp. 60-62) states that the action of weaving, sewing, and making is an act of healing through trauma, "The act of making art, and sewing specifically, works on the brain and body in powerful ways… Sewing is highlighted as an important medium art therapists use". Research in art therapy resonates with all these perspectives, exploring how the act of weaving is a form of therapy as it allows an individual "to express emotions and tell stories through the interlacing of threads and fabrics" (Michaels, 2020). Art therapist, Molly Michaels (2020), mentions that "weaving encourages clients to explore their emotions and create a new narrative through the use of different textures and colours".

While the labour of making these works is intense, generations of women have used it as a tool of income (Prain, 2014), as a pastime, or even as a means of de-stressing. Women learnt the skills, practised them, and taught them to the younger generation as a method of communication, a way to speak their narratives without voicing how they were feeling, hence, this skill is passed down from generation to generation. Motsemme (2004) mentions that women have always been 'speaking' their pain and grief: "When we reject dominant Western oppositional hierarchies of silence and speech, and instead adopt frameworks where words, silence, dreams, gestures, tears all exist interdependently and within the same interpretive field, we find that the mute always speak" (p. 910).

The artwork *Tracing Narratives* (2021-2023) in Fig.3 represents women coming together in communities to create works and share their stories. While therapists and artists such as Ripley (2023), Kenning (2015), Michaels (2020), and Garlock (2016) who worked with participants who have experienced trauma and grief believe that art does assist in the healing process or aid in individuals expressing their emotions in a safe space, I question the validity of their assertion.

I recall my grandmother's sewing room when I was younger - she spent hours sitting on the chair in the sun, knitting. Today, I realise that making those knitted blankets and clothing helped her escape from the pain and abuse (physical and verbal) she was experiencing in her marriage. She was communicating and sharing her story with her grandchildren through textile gifts. Artist Sherri Lynn Wood (in Prain, 2014) constructed a way to help those who have lost loved ones process their pain and grief through improvisational quilt-making: "This process provides a safe yet active container for sorrow which will enable you to 'literally' touch your grief and stay present to the task at hand" (p. 104).



Fig.4. Saajidah Madhi, *Healing from Healing for,* (2022-2023)



Fig.5. Saajidah Madhi, *Healing from Healing for,* (2022-2023)

The installation artwork titled *Healing from Healing for* (2022-2023) in Fig.4 consists of ten scarf casts suspended from the ceiling at varying heights. The sculptures are cast from plaster of Paris bandage pieces that were put together using cross-stitches to create a representation of a scarf. From afar the sculptures look like scarves draped over a human head forming a figureless face. The sculptures embody the weight of healing from pain, trauma, and abuse (the silent tears and concealed wounds) – the plaster of Paris is associated with the healing of broken bones and the shape of the scarves represents the traditional garb of Indian Muslim women. As the viewer engages in the installation the bandage and the cross-stitches become more apparent, as in Fig.5 above. Suspending the scarves indicates the levels of healing – each scarf sculpture is placed at a different height - women heal at different stages. Furthermore, these are not mere pieces on a wall or shelf – they sway as they hang on the red string that represents women's agency instead of victimisation, women who are survivors of the silent abuse, trauma, grief, and patriarchal control experienced in heterosexual relationships. Red is both a colour of love and abuse and its significance here is the creation of women's agency – taking control of their own lives. This is apparent in Khan's artwork *When the Moon Waxes Red*, and Nicola Laure al-Samarai (2019, p. 39) writes that, "Khan 're-tunes' victimising attributes into agency: Poor overworked women are transformed into survivors of sexist, racist, and classist violence, into fighters for life within an all-encompassing patriarchal order". The installation in Fig.4 commemorates a community that is relevant to a particular social group (Traditional/Modern Muslim headwear for females).

The intention of the artwork is for people to be immersed in the installation. By casting a range of shadows as seen in Fig.5 (some dark, others light) on the walls and ground, the installation has an encapsulating sense effect on the audience, representing the women who came together and those who will still come together to share their experiences and heal from their pain and trauma. By physically walking through the installation the viewer becomes immersed in this community and their presence completes the scene. The art installation (Fig.4) relates to the artwork by Haroon Gunn-Salie, *Amongst Men* (2015), in which the artist

recreated four hundred *kufia*[31] sculptures that hung from the ceiling to commemorate a sense of mourning for the loss of Abdulla Haron[32].

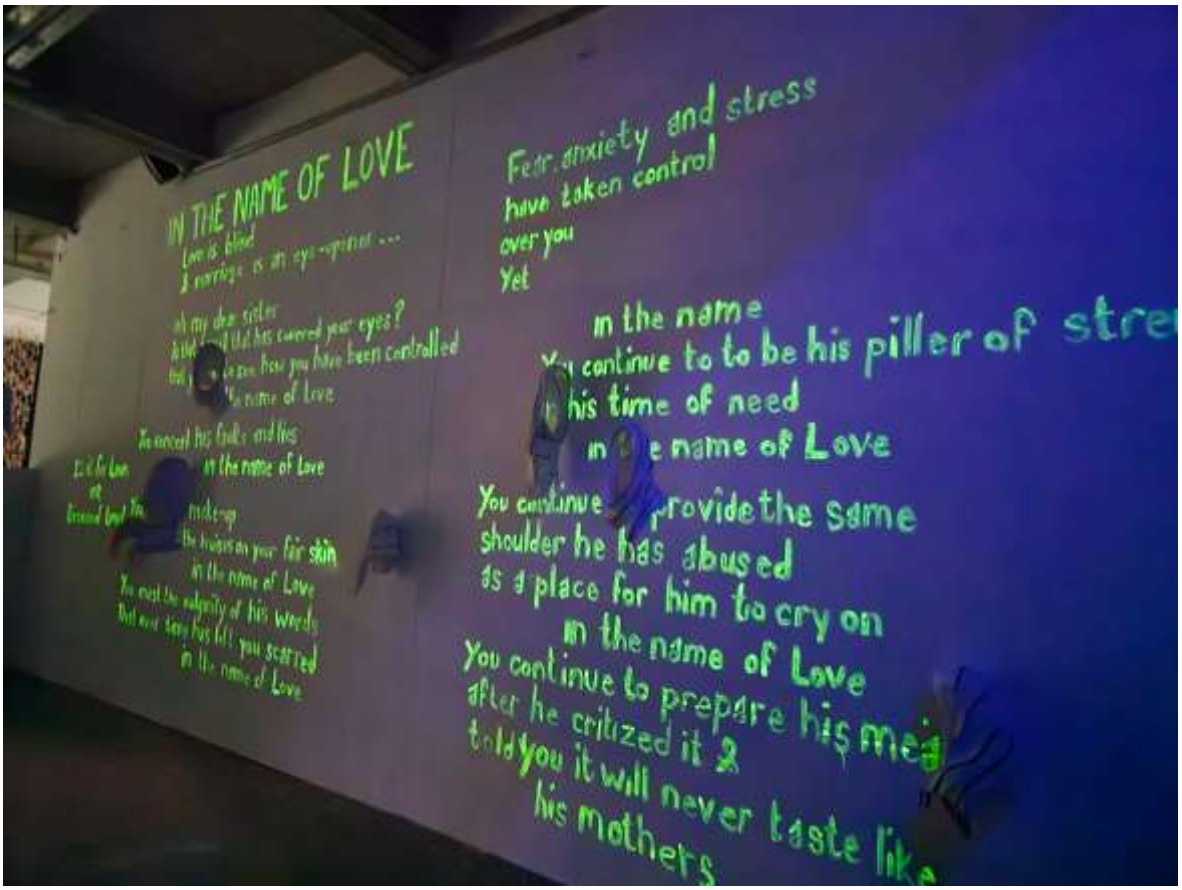


Fig.6. Saajidah Madhi, *Visions of,* (2023)

The glow-in-the-dark artwork titled *Visions* (2023) in Fig.6 is a poem written on the wall behind the sculpture installation of Fig.4. If one looks at Fig.4 above, this artwork is not visible immediately when viewing the wall. This research is based on narratives that have been silenced and secreted from communities and the world. During my research what became evident was the period over which trauma unfolds – it is not a linear or immediate process, and often, is not completely exposed. The glow-in-the-dark artwork only becomes visible when the space is dark but then too, it is not completely visible - viewers can read a few words or phrases at a time, but to see the entire work would take hours, even days. This artwork

[31] Also known as a Kufiyyah, it is a traditional headdress worn by men from parts of the Middle East.
[32] Imam Abdulla Haron was a South African Muslim cleric and anti-apartheid activist who died in 1969 in Cape Town.

allows viewers to experience the time, commitment, and courage it takes from an individual to expose her narrative of trauma and pain.



Fig.7. Saajidah Madhi, *Beyond the Veil,* (2023)



Fig.8. Saajidah Madhi, *Beyond the Veil,* (2023)

The beaded veil titled *Beyond the Veil* (2023) in Fig. 7 and 8 was intended to represent the colour, joy, and festivities of Indian culture as beads hold a symbolic history in India (Bhatt, 2016). While the colours and shine/'bling' of the beads bring joy, they also add value and status as in India the colour of beads played a significant role in communication - Medha Bhatt (2016, p. 23) states that "Colours played a significant role in communication in the beadwork of Saurashtra[33]". Previously, Indian homes used beaded veils/curtains instead of doors to create separations between spaces. The main purpose of the beads in my installation was to serve as a veil/curtain between the upper and lower spaces, as the room that is created above in Fig.8 is a safe space for women, with the beaded veil serving as a partition/boundary from men. Only women were allowed to step into the space beyond the beaded veil, and this concept left men feeling threatened at the opening of the exhibition but also created a scene of exclusion. A 'safe space' means that women can talk freely and relax without the worry of attending to men, as novelist Virginia Woolf (1928) explains, for a woman to be able to write and voice her stories without restrictions she needs 'a room of her own'.

[33] Saurashtra is a region in Gujarat, India



Fig.9. Saajidah Madhi, *Beyond the Veil,* (2023)



Fig.10. Saajidah Madhi, *Beyond the Veil,* (2023)

The art space above titled *Beyond the Veil* (2023) in Fig. 9 and 10 was created as a safe space for women. Women in communities gather in circles over tea and coffee (tea-time conversations). These conversations are often where women get the courage to speak about their day-to-day lives, expressing their issues, pain, grief, and trauma. These tea-time conversations are used as coping strategies for women and form a support structure, of healing through and healing from. Similarly, *A Feminist Tea Party*, an ongoing project by visual artists Caitlin Rueter and Suzanne Strobe which began in 2010, is a performance and installation artwork that has been installed at several different venues - it recasts each space as a home and an open forum to discuss essential and discomforting issues with humour as viewers are invited to have tea, sweets and conversations (mentioned in Schor, 2017).

I dedicated the space in *Beyond the Veil* (2023) which can be seen in Fig.8 to the women in the community who made artwork and did not receive any recognition. The three artworks on the wall that can be seen in Figs.8 and 9 were made by Farida Surtee, an elderly woman from Lenasia in her late 70s, using advanced embroidery skills. The knitted cloth on the floor in Fig.10 and 11 was made by Rookshana Dinath. The centrepiece on the table with the candles and painted stones in Fig.11, along with the artwork against the wall in Fig.10, were made by Shaheda Ahmed. Significantly, these women are named – they are recognised through their works which were often seen as mere hobbies rather than creative voices conveying their narratives and freeing them from their daily routines. These hand-crafted pieces are old and were taken from the homes of these women – they have emerged from enclosed spaces into the public domain, much like the abuse they endured. This was the purpose of my collection drive and engagement with women from my community – their stories must be told, and they must be removed from the shadows through their created pieces.



Fig.11. Saajidah Madhi, *Circles of Strength,* (2023)



Fig.12. Saajidah Madhi, *Circles of Strength,* (2023)

According to Garlock (2016), working in groups or coming together in circles builds strength, healing, and survival. Women have gathered in communities for centuries and built safe spaces to speak and share their daily challenges and difficulties (Garlock, 2016). These circles create a support structure for women to heal and subsequently move forward. The *'Circle of Strengths'* was developed by Kate Hudgins and Francesca Toscani as part of the therapeutic spiral model, and has been used by different organisations, communities, psychodramatic and meditation groups (Giacomucci, 2020). *Circles of Strength* in Fig. 11 represents a network of circles, women from communities coming together to share their narratives. These artworks also referenced mandalas, which are sacred artworks used to evoke healing, spiritual development, and meditation (Sangam, 2020). The word 'mandala' means 'sacred circle' and they are created from the inner circle outwards, using different colours and creating different patterns (Sangam, 2020). While the artworks *Circle of Strength* in Fig. 11 and 12 were created in the same way, they are not mandalas, but serve a similar purpose to that of healing and therapy. Group expressive arts therapy supports social skill development and social bonding and helps clients develop safe and trustworthy relationships (Crenshaw, 2006; Teoli, 2019).

Art serves as a catalyst for collective unlearning, bringing communities together to challenge oppressive systems and address social injustices. Artist and community activator, Jessica Vellenga (in Prain, 2014) mentions, “Our stories are reflections of ourselves. Treat them with respect and honour those who are willing to share their experiences with you” (p. 234).

Un…

How can we change

what has already been engraved in our minds

How can we undo

what has already been instilled in us from childhood

How can we forget

what has already been taught to us

How can we reverse

the effects of generational and cultural practices

that have conditioned us to behave and live in a certain way

How can we unlearn

what our grandmothers and mothers have passed down to us through birth

How can we take back

Our innocence

Saajidah Madhi, 2024

Unlearning

To navigate through the challenges of a constantly evolving world, it is essential for individuals and societies to be open to unlearning behaviours that may no longer serve their best interests or align with their new realities (Becker, 2008). This process involves questioning deeply ingrained beliefs and assumptions, challenging societal norms and stereotypes, and

being willing to let go of archaic generational practices to embrace new ways of thinking and acting (Hislop et al., 2013).

According to the *Collins English Dictionary*, 'unlearn' means 'to get rid of something previously learnt or try to forget by putting it out of one's memory' (Agnes, 2010). This definition may be relevant to some researchers (Hedberg, 1981; Nystrom and Starbuck, 1984) - Bo Hedberg (1981, p. 18) explains it as "a process through which learners discard knowledge", and Paul C. Nystrom and William Haynes Starbuck's (1984, p. 53) refer to unlearning as "discovering the inadequacy of and 'discarding' existing ideas", I do not find the term 'forget' or 'get rid of' effective in the process of unlearning behaviours and values, as forgetting learnt knowledge or discarding it from one's life does not mean that the knowledge disappears - it might still impact and impair one's decisions and judgement in the future. Thomas Grisold, Alexander Kaiser, and Julee Hafner (2017) in their article, 'Unlearning Before Creating New Knowledge', support this viewpoint "that knowledge cannot be discarded or eliminated in order to make space for the creation of new knowledge" (p. 4614).

According to Karen Becker (2005, p. 659), a researcher in management and development of people in the workplace notes, "there is a genuine lack of empirical studies in the area of unlearning". Other researchers, such as Hislop et al., (2013); Grisold et al., (2017); Matsuo, (2019), also support this research. While research and literature have dedicated much attention to organisational-level unlearning (Akgün et al., 2007; Tsang and Zahra, 2008; Hedberg, 1981; Nystrom and Starbuck, 1984; Starbuck et al., 1978), individual unlearning has been studied further in recent years by Hislop et al., 2013; Becker, 2005; MacDonald, 2002; Rushmer and Davies, 2004; and Matsuo, 2019. Hence, the primary goal of this research is to unlearn previous generations' misguided beliefs, behaviours, and false assumptions of what a girl/women should be to succeed or be accepted in society, individual unlearning and the processes required will be discussed in more detail.

Emily J. Klein (2008, p. 80), in her article 'Learning, Unlearning, and Relearning', states that "by unlearning I mean letting go of deeply held assumptions about what it means to be a teacher, what classrooms look like, what the essence of teaching and learning is". Individual unlearning, according to Becker (2005, p. 660), is defined as "the process by which individuals consciously choose to give up, abandon, or stop using outdated knowledge, values, or behaviours". Hislop et al. (2013, p. 8) add to this definition that, "what is unlearned is not permanently lost to people and may be utilised again at some point in the future". Geraldine MacDonald, a researcher in social care, in her article 'Transformative Unlearning: Safety, Discernment and Communities of Unlearning' (2002) proposed a model called 'transformative unlearning', explaining three steps an individual should undertake in the process of unlearning: questioning, reflecting, and giving up certain values, assumptions, knowledge and practices, which no longer benefit an individual. These definitions and explanations are essential in understanding the process involved in unlearning. An individual has to transform learnt knowledge (Mac Donald, 2002) by making a conscious decision to stop using that knowledge, values, or behaviours (Becker, 2005; Hislop et al., 2013; Tsang and Zahra, 2008), and letting go of deeply held assumptions which are false or no longer benefit an individual (Klein, 2008), while recognising that what is unlearned is not permanently lost from one's memory (Hislop et al., 2013).

From a young age, girls are taught by their mothers and grandmothers' skills such as cooking, cleaning, handwork (stitching and mending), and serving the men in their lives. While some are necessary skills for survival, to undo the injustice of these skills being gendered (on women) by older generations based on cultural values or beliefs, we, as the next generation, need to 'transform'. As MacDonald (2002) suggests, the knowledge acquired by questioning where these norms originated, thereby educating the current and new generation - boys and girls - that these roles are not the responsibility of women only (they are false and misguided assumptions). They are not expressions of love, but rather duties and are often forced gender bias. Transforming this learnt knowledge will not only put an end to men expecting and demanding their wives/partners/sisters to serve them or perform these roles in the household but will create a dynamic working environment where both parties share the roles without 'labelling' the actions as responsibilities placed on a gender but rather a joint

responsibility. Macdonald (2002) states that this process is deeply emotional and challenging for people to undertake, but as Ahmed (2014) points out, those who constantly question norms to right the wrongs that have been done are considered as being 'willful' and 'killjoys' - killing the joy in the room, "When you stray from the official paths, you create desire lines, faint marks on the earth, as traces of where you or others have been". While this is just one example of how we, as a community, can transform learnt knowledge by undoing the injustice of cultural norms placed on a specific gender, there are certainly many norms that need to be questioned and raised in Indian communities, such as, why women are looked down upon when they want a divorce, why a woman's success and honour lie in her husband's and family's hands and are not her own, why is a woman's independence is a threat to society, etc.

Art can serve as a powerful tool for facilitating the unlearning process, allowing individuals and societies to explore and challenge their existing beliefs and perspectives (Hislop et al., 2013). By engaging in artistic expressions, individuals can delve into their subconscious and confront hidden biases and ingrained patterns of thinking. Through art, they can dismantle harmful societal structures and narratives, opening space for new ideas and perspectives to emerge (Wright, 2001). For women to realise that self-love does not mean validation from others, nor does being 'loved'. These cultural biases are merely means of enslaving women, forcing them into protracted positions from which many only emerge with great difficulty. My exhibition is a testament to the fact that women can be brought together – by bringing their created pieces into a single space - they exist as a united front, a sisterhood and this is their power, their voices.

Conclusion

This research delved into the foundation of the lives of South African Indian narratives and daily life experiences by using a narrative and autoethnography as a research methodology. It explored how storytelling and poetry are used as a tool to uncover how Indian and patriarchal culture impact South African Indian relationships of 'love'. The various narratives, interviews and art practices weave together the silences in women's narratives. I have argued that silencing and secrecy prevented women from speaking about the abuse they experienced in relationships and marriages, leaving them feeling trapped in cycles of shame, guilt, and self-blame. My poetry acts as a decolonial tool to address issues that have culturally and over generations been difficult to speak about, and narratives that I could not address due to confidentiality.

This research showed how love and patriarchy are social constructs by looking at the works of hooks (2000, 2004); Fraser (2008); Sternberg (1988); Ahmed (2015); Beall and Sternberg (1995); Vincent and McEwen (2006); Hall 2013 and Walby (1989). I explored South African Indian history, which was further divided by apartheid where communities and the people held on to conservative values and beliefs to preserve a sense of belonging and cultural identity. This segregation created generational practices of Indian cultural practices, which developed into embedded practices in the lives of South African Indians. While this perspective is not exclusive to South Africa, my focus was on the women of Indian descent in my community. Through qualitative research and one-on-one interviews, I showed how love, patriarchy, Indian cultural beliefs such as silencing and secrecy impacted participants' relationships and marriages. While most of the women I interviewed state that times have changed and women are less tolerant and more open to sharing their traumatic experiences, I still believe there is an aspect of secrecy when it comes to speaking about personal abuse – women were not as forthcoming for an interview that questioned them about their personal experiences of abuse. While it might be that women have gathered the courage to speak among friends about these issues, there is still a great hesitation and fear of their narratives

being exposed outside. However, this dissertation is a voice for the unvoiced and perhaps in part, a healing in some way for those desperately in need of it.

Furthermore, it explored the impact media (particularly Bollywood cinema and songs) has on individuals, creating unrealistic and false impressions of love and romance. Media has influenced many individuals by the imagery and songs portrayed of romance and happily-ever-afters, which has significantly impacted relationships as many individuals are disappointed when real life doesn't resemble what they have seen in movies and read in novels – as described by one of the participants (Nuha) who does counselling in the community of Lenasia.

I explored how unlearning is an act of transformative learned knowledge by not forgetting but relearning, to build safer relationships based on equality and shared responsibilities. As a visual artist, I am invested in how using one's hands in the making by means of physical engagement with an artwork is a therapeutic activity. Therefore, I demonstrated how art and making through my creative practice and the works I collected, is a form of therapy that women use to heal from their pain and grief. The art exhibition which was open from the 18th until the 26th of January 2024, aimed at taking the viewer on a journey through the lives of South African Muslim women. Through my artwork and art practice, I interrogated how veiling as a practice is present in women's lives by actively exploring strategies of covering, layering, uncovering, recovering, and entanglement as tools to voice my subjective position of the silence in women's narratives through the practice of weaving, stitching, and beading. I demonstrated the narratives of a marginalised group of South African Indian Muslim women living in Lenasia by dedicating a space in my exhibition to showcase the artworks they have been making, but due to socio-political issues and cultural limitations, have not received the exposure in the art field, as the arts in Indian communities are viewed as a hobby, rather than a career or profession.

Limitations of this research

While this research focused mainly on South African Indian Muslim women from a specific location/geographical region, this topic relates to women globally, therefore, by focusing on one community, the research is limited in not addressing other groups of women. The number of participants who took part in the interviews, and the fact that participants were close family and friends, may have altered my perception of how to write about the participants' involvement. Although there was diversity in the women's narratives, participation by a larger number of women might have provided more insights into the lived experience of women where love and Indian cultural practices influence their intimate partner relationships**.** A larger group of participants may have identified additional issues of importance to this research. Using the interview questions as a guide, resulted in not asking participants further questions and thus, restricting the discussion. A crucial limitation to this research was that participants were not willing to speak about what types of abuse they experienced in their relationships, as many felt vulnerable to the consequences of their narratives being exposed. Therefore, further research is required into the co-existence of love and abuse (types of abuse) and to how Indian cultural practices in South Africa impact individual women's experiences and relationships.

Being a member of the community of South African Indian women in Lenasia brings this research full circle as I also navigate and explore my position within this narrative. In granting a voice to so many voiceless women, I too have been spoken for.

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Appendix A:

Interviews conducted with 1. Firoza, 2. Naila, 3. Nuha, 4. Faheema, 5. Hashmita, 6. Priyanka, 7. Mariam, 8. Zaakirah, 9. Muneebah, 10. My grandmother (Nani).

The original names of the participants have been replaced with a pseudonym and their original identity is only known by me. The interviews were audio-recorded, and nine interviewees were sent the interview questions in advance. The final interviews were conducted in Lenasia, and the participants were allowed to edit their responses to best represent their narratives. The 10th interview, with my grandmother (Nani), took place under different circumstances as she was in severe distress due to her health issues. As a result, the questions were simplified for her, and her responses were limited to essential information.

Within the interview transcripts (attached below), the strategic use of ellipses (...) indicates pauses by the participants during the interview. This silence, occurring despite participants having prior access to interview questions, is important to understand, as the emotional taxation associated with revisiting traumatic experiences is significant to the findings of this research. Furthermore, expressions such as ‘yeah’, ‘uhm’, ‘ah’, etc., along with all other discourse, have been included in the transcripts to retain the authenticity and accuracy of the speakers’ statements. The retention of the original words spoken by the participants, despite the grammatical errors they present, provides an insight into the frustration, confusion, contradiction, and hesitation that the participants experienced during the interview process. Thus, highlighting the impact of abuse in the lives of South African Indian Women.

For reference:
Ethics Clearance Protocol Number: H23/03/16.

1. **Firoza interviewed by Saajidah Madhi (SM)**

   Date of Interview: 09 September 2023

Saajidah Madhi (SM): Can you give me a short background about yourself? Your ethnicity, religion, and what work do you do? Or are you a full-time mother and/or housewife?

Firoza: I'm a full-time housewife and I'm Muslim. I'm an Indian in my early seventies but I pass my time by doing handwork like crocheting, embroidery, knitting, and sewing. I help in the community by volunteering, and I go a lot to this place known as *Khadijatul Kubra*, where there are only old people; I'm a part of them and I visit them very often.

SM: So, we all experience and understand love in different ways. If you were to give your definition or understanding of love, what would it be?

Firoza: Love may be defined as an intense emotional feeling of affection for another person. This affection varies with different people and the type of love we feel for a mother, for example, will be different from the love shown to brothers, sisters, sons, daughters, friends and so on. Romantic love is, of course, best described in the stories of Layla and Majnu, Romeo and Juliet, and Mumtaaz and Shah Jahan. Some may also describe their love for their pets as love for their animals, so we can see that love has various forms.

SM: What attributes would you associate with the word 'love'?

Firoza: … By doing a lot for them, helping them wherever they need to be helped with problems and difficulties. It could be your children, it could be your husband, but love is sacrifice, a lot of sacrifice and giving, but I wouldn't say pain.

SM: Reflecting on your life growing up, can you recall how your parents/guardians spoke to you about romantic relationships and intimacy?

Firoza: We were from those years, right, we go far back, many years ago. It was a time when parents were not very open with their children, so they didn't tell us about love.

SM: Reflecting on your romantic love relationships, if your partner did something ethically wrong (e.g., physical abuse, verbal abuse, emotional blackmail, etc.) and it led to you experiencing pain, suffering, and trauma, have/would you keep quiet about it?

Firoza: Well, I didn't experience this, so if I had… look I'm married over fifty years, but if I did go through it, I would speak to someone close.

SM: Did/Would you cover it up by expressing care and affection to this person in the hope that they would change?

Firoza: Definitely, I would do that.

SM: As a South African Indian woman, do you feel like your background and practices growing up have led you to live a life of secrecy and silencing, or has it educated you to speak up and seek help against gender abuse?

Firoza: Well, South Africa is no more like before. We can speak out whenever we need to, or whatever has happened to you, you are free to speak… Our culture always taught us to make, as they say in Gujarati, '*sabr'* which means to 'tolerate'. We have to tolerate a lot.

SM: Personally, do you feel like generational and cultural practices influence the way you live your life, and has it shaped the love choices you have made/make? How have these practices impacted your life?

Firoza: Yes, I do agree with that. We live according to our culture that a woman has to be at home, see to her family, her house chores, and that's how she will get on in life. Well, today it's different, they no longer do that. You are free to go out to work, you do your housework and everything, but my times were different.

SM: Do you feel like these choices have shaped the love choices you made?

Firoza: It has in a lot of ways.

SM: As a woman, do you feel like patriarchy holds a power dynamic in your personal family and love relationships? If yes, how so?

Firoza: Well, look, it does make a difference if men have the power, but you can't do everything that they say or agree to them because you are also human. You also have a mind, you are also educated, so you do need to tell them where they are right and when they are wrong. You rather keep quiet for peace's sake.

SM: Do you feel like we, as women, due to generational practices, uphold patriarchy in our homes?

Firoza: No, I will tell both, the son and daughter to do the same thing. If it's necessary to go out, you go out. Both of you do the housework and help. I won't let the daughter do something else and the son does something else, they must be equal.

SM: Do you think it's important to educate or speak to young girls and women around you about love, relationships, and intimacy?

Firoza: Very, very, important, both the male and the female.

SM: If you could go back, with all the knowledge and experience you have now about love, relationships, and intimacy, would you have preferred your parents to educate you regarding such, or do you prefer living and learning from your own experiences?

Firoza: I would have preferred them to educate me, but they were not educated, and I educated myself in every way.

SM: As a woman, can you give or share one lesson or advice that you have learnt on love, relationships, or intimacy?

Firoza: To tolerate and have respect for your husband. Whenever he comes home, you must make sure that whatever you are doing you must stop, see to him, welcome him, and see that the table and his food are ready. There's a saying that "the way to a man's heart is through his stomach". Then, if you have any complaints or anything, first ask him how his day was, tell him how your day was, and if there was a problem or something (e.g., about the helper) then you share it together.

SM: What kind of support systems do you have, for times when you have felt hurt or violated in romantic relationships? Are there any ways in which you express your hurt or pain, or any coping and healing strategies?

Firoza: I love to take my walks; it clears my mind. I like to do my handwork, so that keeps me going.

2. **Naila interviewed by Saajidah Madhi (SM)**
   Date of Interview: 09 September 2023

Saajidah Madhi (SM): Can you give me a short background about yourself? Your ethnicity, religion, and what work do you do? Or are you a full-time mother and/or housewife?

Naila: I am a Muslim Indian in my forties, and I am a teacher. I balance everything, but I think the most difficult thing is being a single mum with not much support, but we carry on. I am from Lenasia.

SM: So, we all experience and understand love in different ways, if you were to give your definition or understanding of love, what would it be?

Naila: It's very broad first of all, because we love our children, parents, and students that we teach. We love our friends, then, of course, the romantic love, but in all of this generally I would say love is pure and unfiltered, giving, and two-ways. So, it's reciprocal - I love you, I love my child, my child loves me, my students love me. Obviously, it's not so simple. So, a true bond will obviously look beyond all the mistakes, errors, hurt, and challenges.

SM: What attributes would you associate with the word 'love'?

Naila: Bonding, nurturing, nourishing, giving, sustaining, and progressive, and that is love.

SM: Reflecting on your life growing up, can you recall how your parents/guardians spoke to you about romantic relationships and intimacy?

Naila: Oh no, that was all banned. You were not allowed to look at the opposite gender. You were not allowed to think about it. Ah, it was not something we spoke about until we got married and then too, it was taboo. You can't, you are a Muslim girl. There are rules and

regulations, and I think even if there were rules and regulations, there were certain things that we needed to be told about, certain barriers that needed to be broken, especially in this modern world that we are in now.

SM: Reflecting on your romantic love relationships, if your partner did something ethically wrong (e.g., physical abuse, verbal abuse, emotional blackmail, etc.) and it led to you experiencing pain, suffering, and trauma, have/would you keep quiet about it?

Naila: No, I didn't, that's what everyone says. That was the problem. I didn't speak to people; I didn't have that throughout my marriage. It was only in the last year, the last and final moments. I, first, for a while, kept quiet about it, but then I had to confide in someone. I could not bottle it up. I could not deal with it. I had to speak about it, and so I did, and I acted out in marriage, I did. Not in the sense of fighting physically.

SM: Did/Would you cover it up by expressing care and affection to this person, in the hope that they would change?

Naila: Yes, I did. I had to have a lot of patience. I had to realise our ancestors and foremothers all just kept it in and kept quiet, and pursued, and continued, and you know, they struggled, but they continued in their relationships. I was unable to deal with this type because I felt like I was a person, and I needed my respect and my dignity. I couldn't just… it didn't work out for me, but I couldn't just be silent about it, and I spoke out, while most people don't.

SM: As a South African Indian woman, do you feel like your background and practices growing up, have led you to live a life of secrecy and silencing, or has it educated you to speak up and seek help against gender abuse?

Naila: I would hide it. Smaller, simpler things. I would just hide it. I would feel like I'm being petty, and they don't deserve such attention, and I would move forward. We were brought up very closed and very impersonal I would say, and very strict and rigid.

SM: Personally, do you feel like generational and cultural practices influence the way you live your life, and has it shaped the love choices you have made/make? How have these practices impacted your life?

Naila: Yes, I think I do. I had a good husband who shared a lot of things. He helped with my son. I cannot lie, he did help. He did nappies, he did nights, and he helped me a lot. I did not expect him to do more than what he was doing… Yes, they do. So, I was told when I got married, that you don't come back here unless you come back in your grave, your coffin, and I believed that. I think that's a strong thing for a good relationship, and for me, it was a disgrace after I got divorced. I felt very disgraced. So, if I look at other people in my life, their marriages are very cultural and traditional, where they have like six kids. What are you going to do? You can't leave the marriage and that is steeped in our forefathers' ways of thought. That is a generational thing that needs to be addressed.

SM: Do you think that these cultural practices shaped the love choices you make or made?

Naila: Yes, I think they do, because somehow, you always looking for someone who is similar to the traditions you come from, even though there are traditional barriers. You will find someone from that same train of tradition, and people will tell you in your family, you can't marry someone from out. You have to find someone with similar practices and languages. The older people will usually tell you this.

SM: As a woman, do you feel like patriarchy holds a power dynamic in your personal family and love relationships? If yes, how so?

Naila: Patriarchy does play a major role in our family and love relationships because usually, we have to stay at home and do the same traditional answer… Males are always out there doing something else. I don't like it, I hate it. Uhm, I feel like sometimes it's very unfair, the roles that are played. Unless it's just stipulated that way, and we just go with it, but patriarchy

is their culture. Religiously, we are told that we should make '*shura'* and speak together and make decisions. So, there is a difference.

SM: Do you feel like we, as women, due to generational practices, uphold patriarchy in our homes?

Naila: Yes, we do uphold patriarchy in our homes. We always will give a little more respect to males, to older males. They have a higher position. Their decisions will be first. Their solutions will go. Very rarely, will it be the other way round.

SM: Do you think it's important to educate or speak to young girls and women around you about love, relationships, and intimacy?

Naila: Yes, I think it's very important. Especially, when they are at that age you know of getting married. Most importantly, I would like to know their views, their feelings, and their thoughts. I would like to warn them about certain things and advise them about certain things. I think our mothers should have done that. We were always told that you must be submissive, you must not create conflict, and then we didn't know how to deal with the conflict, because we just expected it to be like our mothers. Then, these males have also changed along the way, and influences have changed. So, these young girls need to be told, that there will be challenges, they need to be able to deal with them, and they need to find resolutions, and then if they can't, whatever happens, it's very important to be given advice about marriage, love, intimacy, and relationships.

SM: If you could go back, with all the knowledge and experience you have now about love, relationships, and intimacy, would you have preferred your parents to educate you regarding such, or do you prefer living and learning from your own experiences?

Naila: Yes, definitely…

SM: As a woman, can you give or share one lesson or advice that you have learnt on love, relationships, or intimacy?

Naila: Aaah… it's fickle. It changes all the time. I just wish people could communicate more feelings, both males, and females, and that would avoid a lot of issues, and problems.

SM: What kind of support systems do you have in times when you have felt hurt or violated in romantic relationships? Are there any ways in which you express your hurt/pain or any coping/healing strategies?

Naila: My coping strategy when I was in the midst of my hurt and pain… I just spoke out to the person causing the pain, but it wasn't working, but yeah, after my separation, it was counselling at the Islamic helpline. That was my major way of coping. I speak about my problems and pain, and I feel that's how you find solutions. I can't just keep quiet. I need to speak.

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3. **Nuha interviewed by Saajidah Madhi (SM)**

   Date of Interview: 27 August 2023

Saajidah Madhi (SM): Can you give me a short background about yourself? Your ethnicity, religion, and what work do you do? Or are you a full-time mother and/or housewife?

Nuha: I'm an Indian Muslim lady in my early thirties, with many roles in my life. I'm a mother, a daughter, a teacher, and a counsellor.

SM: So, we all experience and understand love in different ways, if you were to give your definition or understanding of love, what would it be?

Nuha: Sacrifice, pain, tolerance, and acceptance are just a few words that I would say come as part and parcel of love.

SM: Reflecting on your life growing up, can you recall how your parents/guardians spoke to you about romantic relationships and intimacy?

Nuha: So, I was always a rebel, so romantic relationships were always something that I pursued, but religiously it was always wrong. Uhm, I was always reminded about the religious aspect and how wrong it was from that point of view.

SM: Did your parents ever speak to you about intimacy?

Nuha: Uhm, it may have not been my parents, but I remember getting good touches/bad touches talk from my aunts. Uhm, yeah, and that was it. No one ever gave us any other talks about intimacy.

SM: Reflecting on your romantic love relationships, if your partner did something ethically wrong (e.g., physical abuse, verbal abuse, emotional blackmail, etc.) and it led to you experiencing pain, suffering, and trauma, have/would you keep quiet about it?

Nuha: So, I did experience all those types of abuses, and it was very hard to tell anyone about it or express what I was going through at that time. It felt like it was me that was doing something wrong, and it was almost like, I had to learn to accept it and come to terms with it. So, in total, I stayed in that abusive relationship for four years.

SM: Did/Would you cover it up by expressing care and affection to this person in the hope that they would change?

Nuha: So, I always made excuses for his behaviour. I always had this ideology that I was going to change, and fix, and uhm, help him to change his behaviour, but up until this day, I know that the change has to come from him, and to this point in time, I still see the same kind of behaviour in him as an individual.

SM: As a South African Indian woman, do you feel like your background and practices growing up have led you to live a life of secrecy and silencing, or has it educated you to speak up and seek help against gender abuse?

Nuha: So, I think maybe thirty or forty years ago, our culture was a lot more secretive and tolerant, and it allowed a lot of room for abuse in marriages and relationships, but in recent society, and with our social norms changing to the degree that, it is with women empowerment, with regards to women working, having their own financial independence. I think we see these norms and trends changing a lot. So, now women are no longer as tolerant as they were before because they can now support themselves in one way, and as the societal norms are changing, people are more uhm, open to talking about these things. So, because of these trends changing, I think it was more accepted for me to openly talk about it, even though it took me a long time to open up.

SM: Personally, do you feel like generational and cultural practices influence the way you live your life, and has it shaped the love choices you have made/make?

Nuha: Yes, I'm a firm believer in observational learning and role-model behaviour. We do learn from those around us. We do see what those around us do and we do act those behaviours out in many ways.

SM: How have these practices impacted your life?

Nuha: So, I believe that in order for systems and cycles to change, we have to be the change we want to see in the world. So, for those reasons, I have not allowed those cycles to continue. I have taken a stand where I wanted change to happen.

SM: As a woman, do you feel like patriarchy holds a power dynamic in your personal family and love relationships? If yes, how so?

Nuha: I think it does, sadly, even in my current relationship. I think I'm not someone driven by fear or anything like that, but sometimes for the sake of peace, as women, we just give in. Sadly, it is a cultural thing that we have learnt, and sadly, men also take advantage of that situation and those norms.

SM: Do you feel like we, as women, due to generational practices, uphold patriarchy in our homes?

Nuha: Yes, we do, because uhm, if you go back to my definition of love, you will see that we are groomed in such a way that we have to be the tolerant individuals that allow certain things to just happen, even though you want to take a stand against it. For peace and peace of mind, and happiness' sake sometimes.

SM: Do you think it's important to educate or speak to young girls and women around you about love, relationships, and intimacy?

Nuha: So, it is uhm, important, but I also feel like you have to tread carefully because we are seeing so many changes in family dynamics, in family structures. Because of the change in roles, whether it be the role of a mother, the role of a father, or whether it be the independence that individuals have. We are seeing family structures break down, which are then having an impact on our next generations, because of uhm, because of the new trends that are happening. It's also creating a new imbalance in our society, and it's a scary situation because a family is the first structure of a child. If there's no stability in a family structure, how will there ever be stability in society, and the ripple effect will continue because of the imbalance?... It is very important, uhm, I think the media portrays certain expectations of intimacy, and love relationships that are very unrealistic in the minds of women and young girls today. These expectations also have a large impact on the instability and the failure rate of relationships today. But, yes, it's very important to speak to them because we as mothers have the ability to nurture our children and help them create the expectations that are more realistic, and at the same time, incorporate what we are living in, which is again the generational influence that we have on them.

SM: Did you ever feel or experience shame or guilt for speaking up or for seeking help?

Nuha: No, I think when I was in the situation it was very difficult to get the help. It was something that, at the time, I felt very ashamed and embarrassed of, but now being out of that situation uhm, I don't feel guilty anymore. I'm happy that I didn't continue with that relationship because it would have destroyed me further, and I've also realised how it has shaped me to be a lot harder as an individual, which is not the nature of a woman, but because of situations and circumstances, those changes have occurred to me as an individual.

SM: If you could go back, with all the knowledge and experience you have now about love, relationships, and intimacy, would you have preferred your parents to educate you regarding such or do you prefer living and learning from your own experiences?

Nuha: I don't think my parents could have done anything different. I think they brought us up in a very loving environment, and with that love, it created its own expectations going forward

into my marriage. I like that I made my own mistakes because I can hold nobody accountable, but myself, for the mistakes that I made. In a way, there is no better way to learn than from your own mistakes, but at the same time, we need to look to the past and see how we can break it, we don't always have to make the mistakes ourselves. So, a bit of a contradiction there but…

SM: Would you have liked your parents to have taught you?

Nuha: Yes, but I don't think they had the foresight to see what was to come. So, that's why I say I don't blame them, I don't hold them accountable, because what they taught me, taught me to be who I am today and to nurture the relationships I still have to maintain, but they didn't equip me to deal with an abusive relationship, because I was brought up in a loving functional family, and based on the fact that I chose a spouse that was from a dysfunctional, toxic environment, I had to endure the abuse that I was put through. It had nothing to do with my parents' upbringing and their speaking to me or the lack of communication from their side.

SM: As a woman, can you give or share one lesson or advice that you have learnt on love, relationships, or intimacy?

Nuha: I think that as women, we need to realise that we are in control of our own happiness. We don't need like, social media, and like the world portrays it, that you need a spouse to complete you, and fulfil your desires, and stuff. As a woman, you need to know yourself. You need to understand yourself well enough to allow someone into your space, and to allow someone to be with you, but not completely allow them to be in control of your happiness.

SM: What kind of support systems do you have in times when you have felt hurt or violated in romantic relationships? Are there any ways in which you express your hurt/pain or any coping/healing strategies?

Nuha: So, I write. I write my pain. I speak it. I try my best not to allow it to become a part of me because I feel like if I externalise the pain, it won't shape who I am moving forward. But, then again, the way I see love is, that love is associated with pain. So, uhm, I have my friends, I have support systems in place. I understand the importance of self-care and support to function as a human.

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4. **Priyanka interviewed by Saajidah Madhi (SM)**
   Date of Interview: 23 September 2023

Saajidah Madhi (SM): Can you give me a short background about yourself? Your ethnicity, religion, and what work do you do? Or are you a full-time mother and/or housewife?

Priyanka: I'm South African Indian, middle-aged, and my religion is Hindu, but I fall under the Tamil category. I'm a teacher – that's what I have been my whole life. I had four children. I now have three, my son passed away. So, three girls. It's not that easy and I'm a single parent.

SM: So, we all experience and understand love in different ways, if you were to give your definition or understanding of love, what would it be?

Priyanka: I think in that way I'm very cynical. I used to be one of those who used to believe in love, fairy tales, and a knight in shining armour, and you know, you grow up reading all these books and watching movies. So, you create a false impression of what you think love is, and what I understand of it now, is that true love will exist between a parent and child, but between partners? I don't think so. I think it's more comfort than it is love. So, first, it's that hormonal reaction, chemical reaction, but then I think you just become comfortable with each other, and as people, we don't like to change. So, do I believe in love? No, I don't.

SM: What attributes would you associate with the word 'love'?

Priyanka: Trust, honesty, and loyalty are my keywords.

SM: Reflecting on your life growing up, can you recall how your parents/guardians spoke to you about romantic relationships and intimacy?

Priyanka: [*Laughs*] Well, if you consider the time that we grew up in, no, there was no discussion about it. You would look at the relationship between your parents. You would look

at the relationships mostly between the people at school because that's where you start forming the idea of what it's supposed to be. Parents never spoke to you about topics like sex, relationships, uh, they never told you. So, you went into a lot of things blind, and that was for me very difficult because they never spoke about it. I never spoke about it, even when I got into relationships, and I decided to get married, and whatever experiences I had thereafter, I never spoke about it, because it was always that quiet, keep things to yourself.

SM: Did they speak to you about it after you got married?

Priyanka: Nope, no. There were no such discussions, and it was difficult to have discussions with them because they were not open. You tended to keep things to yourself.

SM: Reflecting on your romantic love relationships, if your partner did something ethically wrong (e.g., physical abuse, verbal abuse, emotional blackmail, etc.) and it led to you experiencing pain, suffering, and trauma, have/would you keep quiet about it?

Priyanka: I most definitely did!

SM: Did/Would you speak to someone about it?

Priyanka: Once, I was out. I spoke to many people. I felt like I needed to change the perception. I would speak to my children about the relationships they need to be in. I would speak to fellow survivors about their experience and my experience because it gives you strength, it gives you a different perspective on the choices that you made and the life you had to live, and the choices you had to make while living there.

SM: Did/Would you cover it up by expressing care and affection to this person in the hope that they would change?

Priyanka: First, shame. Shame because I went against my parents. So, I didn't want them to know what I was going through. Then, I had to prove myself to this person. Then, it was about making him seem more of a man you know, giving him, stroking his ego. Then, it was about how people would look at me because that's what society was. As an Indian woman, to say you having difficulty says that you are doing something wrong, and I thought for a long time, that was the basis of things that I did when I was married, was what was I doing wrong. Even though people didn't tell me these were the things that I should do, but people would look at me as the woman. You are the homemaker; you are supposed to keep things together. So, when things start falling apart, what did I do wrong? What am I supposed to do to make it right? So, you just give in, and give in more, and do more, and lie more, and all of the things that will go against your better judgment. You just end up doing it, and then I think, there comes a breaking point, where you got to consider that is this what you want, or you make a change. The hardest step is whether you can take a life or not, that's a hard step.

SM: As a South African Indian woman, do you feel like your background and practices growing up have led you to live a life of secrecy and silencing, or has it educated you to speak up and seek help against gender abuse?

Priyanka: Yes, yes. South African Indian exactly, that says it all. We see what the relationships were with our parents, our uncles, and aunts, and even someone like my grandmother. I think she was an amazing woman. I didn't know my grandfather because he passed before I was born. I thought she was an amazing woman. I still think she is an amazing woman, even though she passed, but what I've come to learn about her life after she passed, and I think about the heartbreak because it hurts me that she would have gone through all the things she went through. Nobody knew. No one knew, and I think we carry that from generation to generation. So, I decided I'm not like that with my kids, even with the kids that I teach. I'm not going to allow that to happen. You don't keep quiet, because if you don't inform these kids; what is it that we are doing?... I don't know if it is strength or stupidity, but I think it comes from the way it goes from generation to generation. We are taught as Indian women to shut our mouths and to do the job and it carries, and I mean this generation, I don't know if they are smart or more stupid because, in a way, they realise if something is not working, they get out, but also, they get into it too quickly, and that option of getting out, you don't

know whether it could have worked or those kinds of things, but I always say the moment you see the red flag, don't even wait for marriage.

SM: Personally, do you feel like generational and cultural practices influence the way you live your life, and has it shaped the love choices you have made/make? How have these practices impacted your life?

Priyanka: Yes. Definitely. The choices I have made and the choices I make, and again this question of religion and culture. There are a lot of things that we do culturally. That's the generational thing, from one generation to the next. Whether it's the way we pray, the way we dress, or dress others. You enter homes. The way you enter, what you teach your children, the way your children behave, all those things. So, all of that is shaped by what we are taught, and I think a lot of the time what we are taught is watered down, from what it should have been. From generation to generation, things get a little changed here or changed there, and then you end up with something completely different. So, yes, it has influenced me in a big way. From the time I got married, it's been, you got to keep quiet, you the wife, whatever he said in the bedroom stays in the bedroom, and it doesn't matter that the neighbours could hear it, but that you don't speak about it.

SM: As a woman, do you feel like patriarchy holds a power dynamic in your personal family and love relationships? If yes, how so?

Priyanka: It did. It did because the man is revered, the money maker, the protector, and that was the thing in my relationship. If I look at my parents, that was my father, but my father has never been the dominating type. He would go to work, provide, and come back. The only thing he asked for was a plate of food and respect, but when I look at my own relationship, like, for example, my ex-father-in-law, that's what it was. It was their will. It was what they wanted, and what we were expected to give because no one told us differently. We weren't told that you know you have a right; you have an opinion. You were told, you do as you are told. So, when you have bad examples of men, bad expectations, and I think that's the worst

– the expectations – because you expected to do this, you expected to do that. They don't ever tell you what you can do, they always tell you what you can't do.

SM: Do you feel like we, as women, due to generational practices, uphold patriarchy in our homes?

Priyanka: Yes, yes. A lot of the time. It's because of the relationships we get to see because the men get to eat before the women because the men must be served first. In whatever occasion it may be, whether it's a wedding or a funeral, it's always about the men first. They sit on chairs and tables; you have to go sit in the kitchen.

SM: Do you think it's important to educate/or speak to young girls and women around you about love, relationships, and intimacy?

Priyanka: Definitely, I do that all the time. Whether it's my own children, whether it's the kids that I teach and cousins, but not my aunts, because they will probably look at me as if I'm crazy, but I also think there are a lot of women in stable relationships. Whether it's stable because it is that way or they don't want to cause waves. They don't see what you see. They don't understand because they have never been in that situation. So, sometimes you speak to people and for them, it's a foreign concept, and they are like, "Oh! You a bitter person or you just someone that wants to cause waves", and "Don't teach my child that", or those kinds of things. It's not about converting the youngsters, but it's about opening their eyes. It's about making them see. It's about giving them the skills to make better choices. Again, that's the thing. Everything is hidden. If someone goes away then people say, "Oh this person's daughter fell pregnant". The next thing you know? She's gone on holiday. "Where has she gone to?". "Oh no she's studying somewhere or she's working somewhere!".

SM: If you could go back, with all the knowledge and experience you have now about love, relationships, and intimacy, would you have preferred your parents to educate you regarding such or do you prefer living and learning from your own experiences?

Priyanka: I don't think my parents had the knowledge. I don't think my parents would have been able to give me those tools, because they were living in the system, you understand. They couldn't have taught me what I know now because the way they lived was fine. Well, they might have not been happy, but for them, it was normal, even though we see it now as oppression for us women. We see it now. They didn't know. For them it was normal. It was just accepted. So, my parents wouldn't be able to teach me. I remember my mother asked me last year, this is like ten years after having left my marriage, and my mother asked me why I stayed. She couldn't understand why I stayed in that marriage for seventeen years, and I said to her that when you are in that cycle, you don't see it. You don't see the light. You don't know that there's something different that you can do. It's almost like you brainwash yourself into believing that this is the way it is supposed to be. I always say for someone to change, it's never a happy thing that forces you to change, it's always something that will break your heart. It's pain that forces a person to change. So, even with these young girls that say, "Oh I'll change him! It's never going to happen!". As women, we are taught to compromise, and we compromise so much, that we actually lose who we are. Teachers teach you the lesson, then give you the exam; life gives you the exam, and then you learn the lesson.

SM: As a woman, can you give or share one lesson or advice that you have learnt on love, relationships, or intimacy?

Priyanka: Always pay attention to red flags. Don't rationalise it. Don't find a reason for it. See it for what it is and understand it in its context.

SM: As a teacher, if you have to think of unlearning as a practice, what step or advice would you give to unlearn practices?

Priyanka: Know who you are. Learn who you are. A lot of the time, we young women, form our identity based on the person we are with, so we don't discover who we are. First, discover who you are. That's where your strength is. So, in order for you to learn anything else, it comes from a safer, secure, more absolute place. We carve our identities from what we learn

from people around us – whether it's friends or family. We don't actually know who we are, so that's the place to start.

SM: What kind of support systems do you have in times when you have felt hurt or violated in romantic relationships? Are there any ways in which you express your hurt/pain or any coping/healing strategies?

Priyanka: I think my sister is my biggest supporter, and mind you, she's now going through the things I have already been through, and we have become co-supporters. We support each other. She asks for advice, and I always tell people when you give advice, you give the good and the bad. People need to make their own choices. You can't choose for them. My mum, even though our relationship used to be strained, I think now she realises a lot. We have been closer now than we have ever been, but there are a lot of things that I would never tell her. The burden of carrying those kinds of things at her age isn't what I want her to go through. My father neither, but I have friends I talk to. So, yes, from the time I started teaching, I would take the children for counselling, and I would sit with them because they didn't want their parents to know or want them there. So, I think a lot of the healing I had to do by myself because when you are a mother you have to think beyond yourself while you are trying to find yourself.

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5. **Hashmita interviewed by Saajidah Madhi (SM)**
   Date of Interview: 18 November 2023

Saajidah Madhi (SM): Can you give me a short background about yourself? Your ethnicity, religion, and what work do you do? Or are you a full-time mother and/or housewife?

Hashmita: In terms of culture, I'm a Hindu person. I'm a teacher. In a nutshell, that's who I am. I follow my religion and culture to the best of my ability, but it's not usually in line with what people expect me to do. Yes, I'm Indian and I follow the Hindu religion, and I'm from Lenasia.

SM: So, we all experience and understand love in different ways, if you were to give your definition or understanding of love, what would it be?

Hashmita: Love, for me, is your ability to respect and understand another person, and let them be who they want to be. For me, that's love. Give people a chance to grow and allow a sense of happiness to filter through. That, for me, is love. Not me pushing my beliefs down their throat, that's not love.

SM: What attributes would you associate with the word *love*?

Hashmita: I think love is about… being there, being present, and giving people a space to be there when a person needs you. That's love. Being motivating and encouraging people to be who they want to be, and being supportive, that is love. That's my understanding of love. I know that airy fairy flowery love. I don't think, that for me, is so much love.

SM: Reflecting on your life growing up, can you recall how your parents/guardians spoke to you about romantic relationships and intimacy?

Hashmita: Oh no, no, they never. That is not even a… I don't even think up to now they spoke to me about it. Up till now, no one spoke to me about it.

SM: Reflecting on your romantic love relationships, if your partner did something ethically wrong (e.g., physical abuse, verbal abuse, emotional blackmail, etc.) and it led to you experiencing pain, suffering, and trauma, have/would you keep quiet about it?

Hashmita: Okay, so, I forgot to mention in the beginning, I'm single right, and I have seen people go through hectic abuse and that. Whenever I was introduced to someone, I felt someone was going to suffocate my life. The way I want it to be. I'm a *Guji* girl, and we have very traditional ways of behaving and very traditional ways of doing things, and anytime someone didn't go along with my way of thought and allowed a little bit of freedom to be... I mean one guy told me straight, uhm, oh I see you eat meat and I'm a vegetarian, I will allow you to eat meat. I'm thinking… excuse me, are we going into a marriage or is this some kind of a contract? Because, clearly, I can see upfront, that he is the boss, and I must follow his instructions. That did not sit well with me. So, like I said, I will stay away from things like that. If I spot it early, I will stay away from it.

SM: Did/Would you cover it up by expressing care and affection to this person in the hope that they would change?

Hashmita: That's what we do all the time. That's what we do. We try and pretend like, no, listen, look, we know where you coming from, and we understand where you coming from, but you know, try and see this, but you know, the thing is that you are forced to try and go along with a situation that you know is downright against what you need it to be. We're five girls in the house and one boy, and you think, that my father would change? No. Hell no. He's not going to change. The only time I felt like, for example, in our family, our family is still very traditional. Where the father is still very authoritarian and his way is always the right way, and for a large part of it, I'm telling you with my father, I just shut up, keep quiet, and accept. We tell him now and then when to get off, but, because of age and what he is, we just accept.

Seriously, we do, and some of his ideas are downright *gewaz* terrible, but yeah. Sorry, because of age, we respect it.

SM: As a South African Indian woman, do you feel like your background and practices growing up have led you to live a life of secrecy and silencing, or has it educated you to speak up and seek help against gender abuse?

Hashmita: The culture and tradition tell you to accept. Believe me, I do, but I'm telling you, life has taught me that if you don't talk up, you going to be abused. No, that's true. Life has taught me that you know what, if you shut up, it just gets from bad to worse, and there's no way getting out of there. You just going to get stuck in an abusive relationship. So, you have to take a stand. I took the stand and said, "Do what you want to, I'm not getting married to that guy and that's it", and look, unless you want to get married yourself, I'm not going down that road. No, but that's it. You have to take a stand.

SM: Personally, do you feel like generational and cultural practices influence the way you live your life, and has it shaped the love choices you have made/make? How have these practices impacted your life?

Hashmita: Yeah, but I think, by talking out a bit, by bringing out slow change, we have changed. A lot of thinking in our house, for example, now my father understands being a single woman. As long as you can take care of yourself, it's accepted that that's okay. In the past, I don't know for how long, he was still looking for someone, to get you married because you know you 'off-cuts' now. That, no, you have to go down that road, but life has taught us. Like, my sister did get married, and her marriage did break up because of an abusive relationship. It did break up, and guess what? We went there and we took her out of it. We made sure we took her out of that situation. Yeah, well now, she's in another relationship, and she's happy, but guess what? it's her choice, and that slowly, but surely… Life teaches you a lesson.

SM: As a woman, do you feel like patriarchy holds a power dynamic in your personal family and love relationships? If yes, how so?

Hashmita: It did; it doesn't anymore. It did. It did for a long time. I think many people are understanding that the stronghold in the family is the mother.

SM: Do you think so? Do you think that there is respect and leadership?

Hashmita: Leadership, look in our society and that, see any family function, who is driving that force? The mother. Check any cultural event and everything. Everything is alive because the mother is throwing it. As long as we carry on pointing it out, look who's the leader. We point it out in our family, *Kabumasi* is the leader. You bring it out so people can see. Yes, the funding may be this one, but the leaders and our culture are kept alive, and this whole patriarchy is kept alive because our mothers are telling us to listen to our fathers.

SM: Do you feel like we, as women, due to generational practices, uphold patriarchy in our homes?

Hashmita: Yes, but here's the thing, the older women.

SM: Do you think so? I still think there's a distinction between gendered roles and responsibilities.

Hashmita: But I'm looking at my family, and I see a lot more people changing. Look at my brother, I mean growing up with five sisters and being the youngest… Yes, we do that, but I'm telling you, the next generation is not doing that. The next generation even the children are growing up knowing that there is a balance between the two. My nephews I see growing up, see strong women. My brother-in-law is looking after the children at home, while my sister is working. So, the next generation, you know, but my mother is still, you know, I listen to the same, but the next generation knows. We know that the women are strong. All the women are educated, all have strong jobs, and most of the family, our family, the women, have stronger jobs than the males.

SM: Do you think it's important to educate/or speak to young girls and women around you about love, relationships, and intimacy?

Hashmita: Yes, yeah. We have to, because at some point, if they don't understand what is right and what is wrong, they will never know the difference, and as long as they are told, that he's in charge. There's no such thing as he's in charge, sorry. They must know that love is about fairness. That you have a say. You must have a voice.

SM: If you could go back, with all the knowledge and experience you have now about love, relationships, and intimacy, would you have preferred your parents to educate you regarding such or do you prefer living and learning from your own experiences?

Hashmita: Eyy, I learnt on my own, and I'm glad I learnt on my own. What my parents taught me, if I go along with that, I'll still be… You know when I called the guy the first time, it was in some village, I don't know which one, and it was like, *"nommer asseblief"* [*screams*]. Two and three relationships like that. Until I was like, that's it. I will make my life choices, thank you very much.

SM: As a woman, can you give or share one lesson or advice that you have learnt on love, relationships, or intimacy?

Hashmita: If you keep quiet once, you going to have to keep quiet every time. No, seriously. Right? Because if they get away with it once, they think they going to get away with it again, and again, and again, and trust me it starts off with emotional abuse. It's going to go down very, very bad for you. The minute you become a doormat, expect to be trampled on.

SM: What kind of support systems do you have in times when you have felt hurt or violated in romantic relationships? Are there any ways in which you express your hurt/pain or any coping/healing strategies?

Hashmita: You know what, people usually withdraw during this time, luckily… Like I have seen with my sister she was withdrawn. She was like, she lost weight, she became ahhh, an image you know, but it helps when you have a village as a family, it really helps. Our house? We are a village. Our numbers make us up.

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6. **Muneebah interviewed by Saajidah Madhi (SM)**

   Date of Interview: 18 November 2023

Saajidah Madhi (SM): Can you give me a short background about yourself? Your ethnicity, religion, and what work do you do? Or are you a full-time mother and/or housewife?

Muneebah: So, I was brought up in Lenasia. I'm Muslim, Indian, in my early forties. I was brought up in a traditional Indian home. Currently, I'm working as a financial accountant. Uhm, I'm a housewife, not a wife, but a mother, mother of three. So, basically, I'm the breadwinner in my family, and uh, I also take care of my kids. So, I'm basically working and working at home.

SM: So, we all experience and understand love in different ways, if you were to give your definition or understanding of love, what would it be?

Muneebah: To me, love is selfless, is being selfless. It's doing what's best for the person you claim to love. Whether it means, uh it's an action. It's most likely an action that you have to do. It might make you ah, unhappy in certain ways, but it's something you have to do. To me, it's being selfless. Doing things for someone to see them happy or to do what's good for them.

SM: What attributes do you associate with the word love?

Muneebah: Empathy, compassion, respect, loyalty, commitment, I would say it's all that.

SM: Reflecting on your life growing up, can you recall how your parents/guardians spoke to you about romantic relationships and intimacy?

Muneebah: I don't recall such things. The first time I can think about something romantic, or you know, was the night after I got married. I think it was the first time my mother asked me

such a question. So, it wasn't something spoken about or that I can even recall. I learnt things on my own you know, by reading up or finding out. It wasn't something that we spoke about.

SM: Reflecting on your romantic love relationships, if your partner did something ethically wrong (e.g., physical abuse, verbal abuse, emotional blackmail, etc.) and it led to you experiencing pain, suffering, and trauma, have/would you keep quiet about it?

Muneebah: Yes, I think I have been through it a few times in my life, and uhm, while I eventually spoke up, I kept quiet about it for most of my years living with the abuser. I would say that it took me long to believe that I wasn't doing anything wrong and that I deserved to be happy. Until I got to a point where, now I was stuck and I had no other choice, but if I wanted a better life, then I would have to make the move. I stuck it out for years, for like six years, and then eventually just finally, *Alhamdulillah*, I got the courage to, with Allah's help, to let go.

SM: Did/Would you cover it up by expressing care and affection to this person in the hope that they would change?

Muneebah: Definitely. I think I gave, and gave, and gave until there was nothing left of me. Until I wasn't who I was anymore, you know? So, you basically sugarcoat everything that they say, and you always think. I think I was always brought up to think, especially with my aunts. My aunt would tell me that somebody could be showing the world what a piece of [vulgar term] they are (sorry for my language), but she would always look at the one good thing about this person, and somehow that always stuck with me. So, I think for me, I would always think about the one good thing about that person, and then forget about all the hundred things that are really affecting my life, and looking at that one aspect, and think that I was bad, and I was wrong. If I wanted to leave, or you know... So, I definitely did, you know, cover it.

SM: As a South African Indian woman, do you feel like your background and practices growing up have led you to live a life of secrecy and silencing, or has it educated you to speak up and seek help against gender abuse?

Muneebah: Uhm, I think for me, it definitely had an effect on me. Where I lived in secrecy for a while, and I was afraid to say things or do things, because of how I would be looked at or uh, judged, you know? But I think eventually as you learn and you grow, you know, like now I feel like I found my voice. Where I can speak up for the next person, including myself, but somehow it still feels easier to speak up for the next person, than it is to speak up for myself. So, I feel like I'm still on that journey where even though now I can still speak up for myself, I still struggle internally. I need to have more boundaries with myself, to do what's best for me, you know? I definitely feel like it had an impact on me. Whereas now I'm feeling it was negative before, and now it feels like I'm taking that background and I'm trying to use it in a positive way to help myself, as well as to help others.

SM: Personally, do you feel like generational and cultural practices influence the way you live your life, and has it shaped the love choices you have made/make? How have these practices impacted your life?

Muneebah: Definitely. Well, we grow up in places where, like here in Lenasia, where there's a lot of culture and tradition here. So, it's easier to go with it, than to go against it. Like the first time I married, I remember thinking my aunt and uncle were the perfect couple and so, that is what I needed to work towards, you know. So, the first guy that wanted to get married to me, that was like Muslim and things. I got married and after that disaster, I said I'll never marry an Indian guy in my life. So, I went to marry someone else, but that also made me realise that I was quite naïve in my thinking, because even though culture and everything does affect a person and the way you grow up, around you, you learn those behaviours and grow up in that environment. It's like second nature to you, and you tend to look for the same things, and without even realising it, that you actually going and attracting the same thing. I felt like I had to get out of here, to a world where there are ten thousand different cultures and people to learn that. This world is so vast and there are so many different people, and basically from there, find myself. Not to say that I choose what I like, but I still follow, and I

try to make it simple. Where I follow Islam, *Sunnah,* and Allah, instead of the traditions and all of that.

SM: As a woman, do you feel like patriarchy holds a power dynamic in your personal family and love relationships? If yes, how so?

Muneebah: I do, like if I take my first marriage, it was more like the man has the power, and the man controls things, and I think with Islam also, people misunderstand the concept of when they say the man is in charge. Yes, the man is in charge of protecting his woman and looking after her, but it doesn't mean that he has the right to bully her or boss her around etc., but sadly... In my home, I'm trying to change that. Just the other day, I shouted at my son, because he said something to my daughter that she's the woman, "you must go in the kitchen" and something of that sort. I can't remember exactly what he said, but when I heard it, I said, "That's not a joke, that's something very derogatory and it's not right". To me, I feel like it's my responsibility to teach these boys. When people say all boys are the same, I say no, my boys are not going to be like that, because they need to learn that. Yes, men and women have different roles in society, but when it comes to humanity, and it comes to cleanliness, and your ability to do things for yourself, and each person should be responsible, because each person is a human being, and everyone needs to be able to do things for themselves. So, it's a struggle, even in my own home, even though I am trying to change it. It's like society tells us this is the way it is, and all these outside influences. So, it's very challenging, but it's definitely something I'm trying to change in my home. Where we each have a turn to cook and do the washing etc. We all have to work together and realise there's no patriarchy in this house, and we all are affected by each other's choices here. So, we need to be responsible and caring of the next person. Adding on to what love is, love is caring for yourself, but caring for those around you.

SM: Do you feel like we, as women, due to generational practices, uphold patriarchy in our homes?

Muneebah: It's a challenge because we live in a society like that. Even though women have equal rights. Like, I don't believe in feminism, and I don't believe in patriarchy. I believe that Allah gave specific roles to women and to men, and Allah does say all must be kind to each other. Allah doesn't say a man must be unkind or controlling, but he's supposed to have the wisdom and the understanding of how to be a man. Like, strong when he needs to be and gentle when he needs to be, and a woman at the same time is more gentle, but it seems like women are stronger these days – stronger wills, stronger everything, where they've come to like, overtake men. Some women are manly these days, like, they are doing more male things than the men are doing.

SM: Do you think it's important to educate/or speak to young girls and women around you about love, relationships, and intimacy?

Muneebah: Definitely. Any opportunity I get, in fact, I look for opportunities to speak to not just young girls, but even our boys, because our boys are going to be married one day. So, they need to learn how to treat women. I think I'm a very open person, like, any question they feel they can come and ask me. They ask me very strange questions sometimes, and I feel like I have to answer it. Sometimes, you have to answer it age appropriately, but if you not going to tell them, they going to learn it from the wrong sources, and they going to have their own concepts. So, I feel it's very important for us to have open communication with our girls and boys. It doesn't matter whose child it is, and my guidance for that is, I think of the Qur'an and the *Sunnah*, and then living in today's world, adapt to the situation we are in. I wish that someone was there for me to speak to and tell me things that I found out the wrong way or later on in life.

SM: If you could go back, with all the knowledge and experience you have now about love, relationships, and intimacy, would you have preferred your parents to educate you regarding such or do you prefer living and learning from your own experiences?

Muneebah: That's a difficult one to answer because I feel like I'm the kind of person that's stubborn and I need to learn by myself. I'm hands-on, like, experience is my best teacher, but

I definitely wish that our parents were more open with us about certain things so we could be more aware, and more educated. Like, when I got married the first time, my mother said, “Don’t get married”. She said, “Wait a little, don’t just rush in”, and I said, “No I’m getting married I just need witnesses”. Whereas my stepfather said, “No, you must get married, don’t make sin”. While I appreciate that he was looking out for my interest there, today if someone has to tell me they want to get married young I will say, let them, but there are some things that I wish I could speak about and would be easier to speak about. Like, I can tell you now, the questions my daughter asks me, I would never ask my mother. I would never have because I didn’t feel confident enough to ask that question.

SM: As a woman, can you give or share one lesson or advice that you have learnt on love, relationships, or intimacy?

Muneebah: When you speak about love, the first thing I think about is my whole journey, learning to love myself and I struggle with that. I grew up thinking I wasn’t supposed to be born … [context omitted due to its sensitivity and will of the speaker]

SM: What kind of support systems do you have in times when you have felt hurt or violated in romantic relationships? Are there any ways in which you express your hurt/pain or any coping/healing strategies?

Muneebah: So, the first thing I do is I talk to my Allah. That is my first go-to place because I believe that only Allah can change things. While I am human, and I need people to talk to, I go to my aunts and my mother who I can speak to, but I feel like if I have my Allah, I don’t really need anyone else. So, my salaah and dua are what gets me through.

7. **Faheema interviewed by Saajidah Madhi (SM)**
   Date of Interview: 17 August 2023

Saajidah Madhi (SM): Can you give me a short background about yourself? Your ethnicity, religion, and what work do you do? Or are you a full-time mother and/or housewife?

Faheema: So, I'm Indian, I'm a Muslim in my early forties. I do have a part-time job. I'm a receptionist/secretary, the other part of my day is being a housewife and a mum.

SM: So, we all experience and understand love in different ways, if you were to give your definition or understanding of love what would it be?

Faheema: Love is, uh, the best love is the love of Allah and that is the truest love. Also, loving yourself, which we don't do so often, uhm, we seem to leave loving ourselves for the last. Uhm, love doesn't do things, love… love is, uhm, love. It's an emotion, it's a beautiful emotion if taken care of, but it doesn't do anything. There's more than one kind of love for sure. It's not just love in romance. There's love in everything. There's love in action, in people. There's love in the joys of love also, that brings out love. Love is a broad spectrum. If you, by nature, are a loving person then you see love, and you feel love, and you know love.

SM: Reflecting on your life growing up, can you recall how your parents/guardians spoke to you about romantic relationships and intimacy?

Faheema: My parents? They never showed intimacy and love in front of us. I think the love language they used in my parents, was like acts of kindness and goodness. My mum showed love through food. When I think back on that, the way she cooked and the food she made, it was just amazing, and I think that's how she showed us love. In her actions, she showed love. She was not a hugging person and a loving person, and me by nature was always a hugging and kissing person. Our love languages were so different, and I always said, "Mummy, why don't you hug me more often?", but it wasn't the way she loved, and my daddy was a silent

guy. I think they were brought up where they weren't shown any intimacy or actions of love. So, he never ever done it in front of us. They never ever hugged or kissed or said 'I love you' in front of us. They never ever expressed love in words. In our home, there wasn't that, but there was lots of love. Now when I look back, the love was in the stability of our life. That was where we saw love, where we knew love. With my mum, we spoke openly about things, even before marriage, but not intimacy. Just sex as a subject, but uhm love, not so much. She loved her romance books. She would go and hide away, and read her books, and I think that's where my sister and I got the love of reading from. We used to read a lot of romance.

SM: Reflecting on your romantic love relationships – if your partner did something ethically wrong e.g., physical abuse, verbal abuse, emotional blackmail, etc., which led you to experience pain/suffering/trauma: Did/Would you keep quiet about it?

Faheema: Initially I would, because I was always a person that will first access a situation, but not all the time. While we were together, I fought hard for my marriage. I fought hard for my love. Like, if things were not the way they were supposed to be, I would fight. I was not a quiet one. I think that fighting got too bad and led to a divorce.

SM: Did/Would you speak to someone about it?

Faheema: After things got really bad, my mum encouraged me to go for counselling. We went jointly as well.

SM: Did you experience shame or guilt, is that why you didn't seek help in the initial stages?

Faheema: I always felt like if I could sort it out in my own home, that's why I kept quiet initially. I would speak to a close family relative, or my mum, we were very close.

SM: Did/Would you cover it up by expressing care and affection to this person in the hope that they would change?

Faheema: Yes, I definitely did. There was definitely a time when I was in denial of the fact that there were issues. In that way, it kind of helped me. I think it was a coping mechanism, where I would stay in denial and say, 'no, love has its ups and downs'. It was a coping mechanism, but there was definitely denial at first.

SM: As a South African Indian woman, do you feel like your background and practices growing up have led you to live a life of secrecy and silencing, or has it educated you to speak up and seek help against gender abuse?

Faheema: So, I never lived with abuse. In our home, there was no abuse, not even verbal abuse. Like, one day I remember, I just said '*blady'*, and my dad said, "In our house, there's no swearing, ever". So, like, there was no abuse. Maybe with my brother? He was like an angry person, but my parents never allowed it. So, because of that, we had a very sheltered life. So, when I was in a marriage, it was a big shock. I think my ex-husband came from an abused home and an abusive life, physical, mental, and emotional. So, like, that's what he brought into our home, and it was like a shock, but I got help when I was abused.

SM: Personally, do you feel like generational/cultural practices influence the way you live your life, and has it shaped the love choices you have made? How have these practices impacted your life?

Faheema: Yes, definitely. Cultural and generational practices make every effect on our lives, and it did in my life. There were times that we didn't know the line between religion (Islam) and culture. Up until now, recently, I came into contact with my transport lady who is Hindu, and when we compared our lifestyles, I realised, oh, this is culture. We still can't identify that this is Indian culture and not Islam. We definitely still carry our culture forward, you know. So, I think through knowledge, we can change that. Like learning more about what is right, and also with life, I think I learnt a lot of things, but definitely, we bring culture forward.

SM: Can you give one example of how it has impacted your life?

Faheema: In our home, growing up, the girls did the work, and the boys chilled a lot of the time. When I got married, surprisingly, my husband used to help me initially, a lot. He used to cook and look after our child, but as time went by, he went back to, you know, cultural ways. Where he expected me to do everything, but I think that was to a certain degree brought on by myself, because it was a habit for us as women to do all the cooking and cleaning, etc. I felt like it was my duty, and I did it, but then afterwards? I had to do it all. What's different is that because of awareness, I don't identify between a girl and a boy with my children. I try, okay, maybe sometimes we do, and my daughter will say, "You only ask me and not your son", but I make sure that he helps with cleaning and the dishes. Because I'm a single mum, I expect them to help me in all facets. So, change will take a long time, but awareness first makes you realise that you need to change, but it takes years because it's so embedded in our culture. It's so embedded in our habits and ways. So, to bring that forward will take time, and I hope with the help of Allah that I can change it and change that for my children.

SM: As a woman, do you feel like patriarchy holds a power dynamic in your personal family and love relationships? If yes, how so?

Faheema: Yes. Unfortunately, yes. Now, because my parents have passed on and we need to sort out the inheritance… I think this also goes back to our practices. Where we expected our brothers to do this, and it's been nine years that my father is gone, but they haven't stood up and done anything. Recently, I spoke to my sister and realized that we need to do it.

SM: Do you feel like we, as women, due to generational practices, uphold patriarchy in our homes?

Faheema: Yes, we do. In my situation, that's the way I was brought up, and that's what I thought it would be like when I got married. I will have someone to support us, and I won't have to work. Not that I never worked, but I thought he would work, and I will look after the house, but shoooh. My marriage was a rude awakening because he was unstable. In the five years that we were together, he had ten jobs and a lot of the time in between he was at home.

I had two babies, one after the other and I was shaken, but after that, I had to be a man. I had to be a mum. I had to be everything for my children. It was a shock.

SM: Do you think it's important to educate/or speak to young girls and women around you about love, relationships, and intimacy?

Faheema: Definitely, that's why we have a support group. At the moment, the support group is not going so grand, because I don't know people just don't seem to like, and want to come out and admit that there's these issues, but I want to be that person that can go out and help someone. I want to teach as many people as I can, even if I don't do it on a big scale, but in little ways. I always encourage young girls to be strong, to take control of their lives, and definitely for love, to let go of those romantic notions and expectations, but also not to be hard, because there is beauty in romance and love. Initially, when I got married for the first year, it felt like all those romance books I read about. It's not all doom and gloom, and men also have feelings. There is softness and kindness. You just have to be real. Feelings are beautiful. It gives you something to live for. It brings joy.

SM: If you could go back, with all the knowledge and experience you have now about love, relationships, and intimacy, would you have preferred your parents to educate you regarding such or do you prefer living and learning from your own experiences?

Faheema: Education is key, and I would give it to my children because it's a horrible thing to be walking in the dark because you just feel like, 'Why did they teach me math at school?', 'Why didn't they teach me this?' and 'Why didn't they teach me how to survive this?'

SM: As a woman, can you give or share one lesson or advice that you have learnt on love, relationships, or intimacy?

Faheema: … You know love, and relationships, and intimacy… Okay, intimacy is something that's shared as well, but I just say that a relationship is like an adventure. So, expect anything to happen. It's not a smooth ride. It reminds me of that movie with Lara Croft in *Tomb Raider*,

where she's on an adventure and next thing? She's hanging on a rope. So, now that I'm unmarried and safe, I wonder if I would consider another adventure.

SM: What kind of support systems do you have in times when you have felt hurt or violated in romantic relationships? Are there any ways in which you express your hurt/pain or any coping/healing strategies?

Faheema: The first is my *Musallah*. They don't call it a magic carpet for nothing. You read *salaah* and something happens, and second is the support of my friends and the people around. My family, my cousins and aunts, a lot of my family. If I just call out, they are here.

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8. Zaakirah interviewed by Saajidah Madhi (SM)

Date of Interview: 18 November 2023

Saajidah Madhi (SM): Can you give me a short background about yourself? Your ethnicity, religion, and what work do you do? Or are you a full-time mother and/or housewife?

Zaakirah: So, I am Indian Muslim. I'm forty-two years old. I finished school. I went to university, and I worked in the advertising field for four years, and when my big son was born, I left because it was too demanding and I would come home late, sometimes 8 pm or 9 pm, and it wasn't the life for a mother. So, instead of putting him in a daycare, I decided to leave. I left advertising for good; I never went back. Then we moved to Lenasia, and I started teaching at a public school. It was part of an English programme, and I did it for five years, and then my second son was born. Then, I had to leave that as well, to take care of him, and he was born with thalassemia. So, he was sick every two weeks, and the principal wasn't very understanding. So, I left, and I was at home selling things from home, and then this TEFL course came up, and so I did that. I'm in Lenasia for eighteen years.

SM: So, we all experience and understand love in different ways, if you were to give your definition or understanding of love what would it be?

Zaakirah: Love has to be, not just the being in love, but everything that comes with it. The compassion, understanding, uhm, a give and take. Lots of communication. Helping each other out. Just being there for each other, even if you don't say 'I love you' very often. Just, you know, the hug, the kiss, the touch.

SM: Reflecting on your life growing up, can you recall how your parents/guardians spoke to you about romantic relationships and intimacy?

Zaakirah: So, like my mum was very open with us. I have two sisters, one is older and the other younger, so I'm the middle child. My mum was always open with us. So, we spoke

openly about these kinds of things like relationships and whatever. I didn't have a relationship in high school as such, but I had friends, not a boyfriend. My father was a bit more strict, so I couldn't go out with my friends and all of that. Only in matric, my father allowed my class friends to come over and study. Uhm, so, speaking about love and relationships and that, I only did it with my mum and not my dad. My dad only found out about my husband before he came to propose. My mum knew, but not the father. We spoke about intimacy, but not in detail. We would watch movies together. After sixteen, I was allowed to watch movies that were rated PG. So, we used to watch together, but not really a conversation or a real conversation, yeah, not actually.

SM: Reflecting on your romantic love relationships – if your partner did something ethically wrong e.g., physical abuse, verbal abuse, emotional blackmail, etc., which led you to experience pain/suffering/trauma: Did/Would you keep quiet about it?

Zaakirah: I actually speak up if I'm uncomfortable about something. I feel like I have become this bitter kind of emotionless person. So, I just say what I need to say and get done with it. I don't take any [vulgar term] from anyone. In the beginning, he didn't like that, but now he doesn't care if I speak my mind. It's probably not even being heard; in one ear, out the other. So, it's fine, but as long as I say my piece, that's okay.

SM: Did/Would you speak to someone about it?

Zaakirah: I need to talk to someone and that's why I wanted to do this. I don't have anyone here. I really needed to speak to someone, but I didn't get the chance to.

SM: Did/Would you cover it up by expressing care and affection to this person in the hope that they would change?

Zaakirah: No, I wouldn't do that. I'm not that kind of person. If you do something wrong, I will blame you, and you must own up to it. I don't sugarcoat things. I'm not like that, and I wasn't brought up like that. In fact, my in-laws felt I was very straightforward when I got married and

they never liked that because I used to say things the way they were. I don't believe in hiding behind the truth or sweeping things under the carpet thinking it will be okay. I wasn't brought up like that.

SM: As a South African Indian woman, do you feel like your background and practices growing up have led you to live a life of secrecy and silencing, or has it educated you to speak up and seek help against gender abuse?

Zaakirah: I think, yes. When I was in high school, my father and his brothers were in like a family business, and like, everybody is in everyone's business all the time. Uhm, they didn't really like that I went to high school, or that I completed my matric, or that I went to university or anything like that. So, yes, in that way, the family actually, it was very Indian, or Muslim Indian mentality. But, my sister, when she finished matric, she started studying BCOM and she was doing it through UNISA, and obviously, you have to send in your assignments and whatever. I'm using her as an example to explain what I mean about my family. So, she was doing well, and her final assignment, my father couldn't go to the post office to post it. So, he sent my cousin who is a few years older than my sister, but he is from that family that doesn't think that women should be out in the working world and should get a degree and you know… Very oppressive and things like that. He didn't mail her final assignment and so, she had to flunk out and whatever. It was very upsetting for her. My sister is twelve years older than I am. I was much younger. I didn't understand it then, but then my mum reminded me later about what they did and all that. Then my sister enrolled in a design course, where she learnt how to sew. Like a typical Indian women kind of scenario, but it was an internationally recognized course, where she got to experience other stuff. She became a dressmaker, and that was before she got married. She used to sew for us. My mum was also a dressmaker, and then it stuck. After she married, she worked as a teacher. I never follow in her footsteps. She's a typical example of this, but I insisted on what I wanted, and my mother always backed me up. So, I got to go to university and finish, because like, my other cousins didn't get the opportunity, but I had to stand up and do it, and my father understood because of what happened with my sister. My uncles didn't like it, but, because I went, my younger sister got to go.

SM: Personally, do you feel like generational/cultural practices influence the way you live your life, and has it shaped the love choices you have made/make? How have these practices impacted your life?

Zaakirah: So, my in-laws are very old-fashioned. They are not from India, but they feel like they came from there, even though it was maybe their grandparents that came from India, or one came from India. They are very… when it comes to life… they are very in that mindset. It's very hard to even change them or talk to them about changing, and so, they have expectations, and I am living in it because they have expectations of how a daughter-in-law should be, and I'm not the way they want me to be. Not so much with my mother-in-law. She would speak about you to your husband and not really deal with any situation directly. She would sweep things under the carpet or rug, and just move on. My father-in-law? I'm not his daughter. I'm not like his daughter. So, that was the biggest issue living with them, because I'm totally different from her. She was brought up the way they wanted and I'm not like that, and as I said, I won't take anyone's [vulgar term]. If you open your mouth and you speak to me in a certain way, I will speak back to you like that, and so that's what I did, and he didn't like me because of that.

So, that whole incident that happened. When my second son was born, because I just said, it was Ramadhan, and it was *Iftaar* time, and the baby was in the pram, and he started to cry. So, I pushed the pram to try and pacify him without taking him out. He was already fed and instead of stopping my *Iftaar*, and taking him out, I knew what he needed. The father-in-law got very upset and said, "You mustn't make babies cry, you are not allowed to make them cry". He can't handle it when my kids used to cry, but now I think he's got dementia sort of, and he forgets. We noticed it from the beginning of this year and his brother passed on from the same thing. So, we assume it is. It's not diagnosed because my husband, his sister, and his mother don't want to diagnose him, but we all think it is, but they won't act upon it, to get the man help or medical assistance, or anything like that. So, yeah, that whole cultural uhm, behaviour of my in-laws, my husband grew up like that. His grandparents lived with them, so he used to share a room with his grandparents because there wasn't enough space in the house. So, he grew up with that kind of background and I didn't. My grandparents passed before I was born or was very young. So, I never really had that influence from my

grandparents, and that's why I think, not my respect, but I wouldn't treat an old person, because they are old, and they need special treatment. That's what Indians believe and that's what my in-laws believe as well. I'm not like that, as I said, and my mother went through a tough time with her in-laws. With my grandfather, because my grandmother passed away before she got married and he was like the patriarch of the family, and what he said went, and my father also got tired of that, because they all lived in the same home. Like he and his brothers, and his wife and their kids and everybody in one huge house, and what the grandfather said, you had to do. But he liked my mother in a way that he gave her freedom. He made her get her license so she could drive him around, but also opened a small café for her, so she could run it for herself and make her own income. But, in ways it wasn't good for her, but he gave her in little ways, and then it developed like that. We never grow up like that because my parents moved out by then. So, my father-in-law and I can't get along, because I'm not like his daughter. He says nasty things and like my husband won't defend me. So, yeah, because they are too Indian, too cultured, too grown up in that way. Like I'm not afraid to say anything to you. We live in the same house, but we don't talk. We don't greet. With my mother-in-law we okay, but not my father-in-law. So, since our last fight, we stopped speaking. But then again, this year we had another huge fight. So, he threw a glass at me. He was trying to like, hit me with it, or throw it at me, but it landed at my feet, and it shattered, and my kids saw that. He slapped my mother-in-law last year in front of my kids. So, I won't ever speak to him again. As I said, my husband is not abusive or anything, he's verbally abusive. As I said in Ramadhan mostly, because of fasting, and he like, says mean things which hurts obviously, but I let him know when he breaks his fast, that what you said hurt me and I didn't like it. But this time he stood up for me when my father-in-law fought with me, but like that was it, like after, it was like just forget about it, and if it happened, it happened and whatever.

SM: As a woman, do you feel like patriarchy holds a power dynamic in your personal family and love relationships? If yes, how so?

Zaakirah: No, because I never allowed it to. Even if my father-in-law wanted to dictate, I never gave him the chance, and my husband even put his foot down with that and set the boundary. "This is my wife, and I will tell her what to do, but you will not tell her what to do". But my

father is like that, he's like the patriarch of his home and he keeps reminding us of that, like when we go home, we just have to make one comment and he's like, "But this is my house, and you don't tell me what to do in my home". So, my father in that way still is.

SM: Do you feel like we, as women, due to generational practices, uphold patriarchy in our homes?

Zaakirah: So, looking at my mother-in-law, I would say yes. She went with it and let it happen. My mother wasn't like that, but she did experience that in her early marriage and once they moved out, that was it. My mother doesn't allow him now to dictate to her, and she has her own independence and works. So, even though she did go through it, she doesn't any longer. I'm not like that and neither is my younger sister. We speak, but my elder sister is. She listens to everything her husband says, and she even fights for him.

SM: Do you think it's important to educate/or speak to young girls and women around you about love, relationships, and intimacy?

Zaakirah: I think it's very important. Especially with our Muslim girls who think it's all a bed of roses, and want to finish school, and just get married immediately, and think it's going to be that way forever. It's important for them. For their mothers to talk to them. For them to get kind of classes in *madrassah*, which I don't think they will ever do, but it's important for them to know what it's actually about before you get into it. I feel the divorce rates are so high because of it. I feel like no one is educating the young girls about what it is. Like my situation as well, I would have probably divorced my husband years ago, but I had my kids and I think maybe I'm not in love with him anymore, but I still do love him, and I know it's a big difference and all, but we kind of have that thing. Not because I allowed it to get there, but it developed like that. I still love him; I may not be head over heels anymore. I may hate him at times, because he ruined my life, and I wish he could do more for us. I wish he wasn't in the financial situation he is in today, but I try to make my life better for myself also.

SM: If you could go back, with all the knowledge and experience you have now about love, relationships, and intimacy, would you have preferred your parents to educate you regarding such or do you prefer living and learning from your own experiences?

Zaakirah: Like my mother was a little more open, and my elder sister only before I got married.

SM: As a woman, can you give or share one lesson or advice that you have learnt on love, relationships, or intimacy?

Zaakirah: I don't think I'm the one to be giving advice. I can safely say, don't expect too much when you fall in love or when you get married, because yes, you love your husband. These days there aren't arranged marriages, so, you meet and get to know each other, and you fall in love. That's what happened with my husband and I. His cousin introduced us, and we had a telephonic relationship for most of it and then we got married. So don't have very high expectations. Always know that, yes, you fall in love with that person but it's not always going to be rosey and all of that for the rest of your life. You going to have to work hard at your relationship, at your marriage, and I feel the only way you can achieve that is through constant communication with your husband.

SM: What kind of support systems do you have in times when you have felt hurt or violated in romantic relationships? Are there any ways in which you express your hurt/pain or any coping/healing strategies?

Zaakirah: I don't. Really. I have no one here. When I speak to my sisters, they say *Insha'Allah* things will work out, even like my mum does. When my father-in-law and I get into those fights, my sisters are always there for me. I try to speak to my husband. I feel like he's in it too and he should know, and he is my partner, and he should share what I feel. I speak to him even if he doesn't say a word in response. Just so I can let it out and make him or share my emotions with him. My mother just feels like, you laid your bed and now you need to deal with it, and that's how she feels. When I spoke to her about my mother-in-law once, she actually shouted at me. She started screaming at me in Gujarati. So, I know I can't talk to her

at all. I told my sisters to tell her about my father-in-law’s situation. Then she phoned, but it's fine.

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9. Mariam interviewed by Saajidah Madhi (SM)

Date of Interview: 25 December 2023

Saajidah Madhi (SM): Can you give me a short background about yourself? Your ethnicity, religion, and what work do you do? Or are you a full-time mother and/or housewife?

Mariam: I'm Indian Muslim. For a long time, I was like, one of the first people in my family to go study at university. So, that was very unusual first of all. Everybody in my age used to get married by the age of seventeen or eighteen years old. I, basically, stretched it till twenty-one. Everyone was in the same ethnic group, but not only in the same ethnic group, they were in the same caste system or same villages. So, I broke a big norm. First of all, I went to university which was like, unknown. It was during apartheid, so we needed ministerial consent to actually get to university. That was a big thing. I signed myself a loan because my mum had it all planned that I was going to marry her nephew, and everything was planned up there. It was traditional. Nobody came to propose or actually check you out, because it was like she's taken in a sense. So, those relationships were like, not… you didn't have a choice in that generation. We were very conservative but at the same time, there was an openness. We did naughty things. There were always cousins coming or holiday friends that you met, and you had that holiday romance when you visited because that's how it was. So, in the beginning, I wanted to do medicine, but I was sick, so I shoved that. I got married and when I got married, I became a housewife. So, in one sense I travelled a lot because my husband was studying. For seventeen years, I was a housewife then I went to study again. I went to university and became a doctor. My fourth child was two years old when I was at varsity, and I finished ten years later. I practice as a homoeopath and as a naturopath, but when I just qualified, my husband moved countries, so I had a problem. I had to give up my practice to go and live life. It was a lot of sacrifices because we come from a background where you always have to keep the family. You always putting yourself under. You sacrifice for your children, and your husband, but I found the secret in sacrifices. The secret in sacrifices is when you do it, then somehow, there's a bigger opening for you. So, when I went to Europe, I thought I'm now a doctor, but I can't practice because my degree is not recognised. You don't know people, your patients, but in that process, I then discovered what I'm doing, which made

me globally recognised. So, I couldn't have been in the same spot as a doctor working years or a housewife, if I didn't take that unexpected leap. To become a doctor was a sacrificial jump. I made a sacrifice because my children were struggling at school, so I went 60km for a school for them.

SM: Last part of this question, are you from Lenasia?

Mariam: I am from Lenasia, yes. I went to school there. When I got married, I also lived there for about seventeen years.

SM: So, what was the first degree that you studied?

Mariam: Oh, I was doing science. I didn't get accepted for medicine, so I did chemistry. I was very ill. I had low hypoxic levels, and I was asthmatic. I was hospitalized many times, so my concentration levels were not good. I was making the same mistake in chemistry. It was also depression because of the medication, cortisone, and energy levels. I still have hypoxia so the concentration level, like you slower in understanding, but, when I came seventeen years later and you had a passion and a purpose, it was much easier, and also to know what to study, because you have wisdom behind you. The focus was much better.

SM: So, we all experience and understand love in different ways, if you were to give your definition or understanding of love what would it be?

Mariam: In my case, very early in my relationships, like when exploring men or boys, I was betrayed. Obviously, I had a boy, like experimental puppy love type of a thing, and the guy was basically, uhm, two-timing you and your friend. So, I'm talking about twelve-thirteen years old. I made up my mind at that age that I'm not interested in boys. I want to study, so that's how I focused more on myself. So, when I went to university, I met my husband. I didn't think I was beautiful or things like that. If I had to label it, she's clever, she's intelligent and guys didn't want clever girls, they wanted pretty girls. They didn't want clever, intelligent girls. So, the Indian community I had like almost cut off like she's too smart, she asks too many questions. You don't want somebody that answers back and anything like that. So, I was really not a very good candidate from the Indian community. I remember, at university, these guys

were talking. They said, “We all have girlfriends” and go out, and they would say they “Like that chick”, or “This is my girlfriend”, and when you ask them, “When are you getting married?”, they say, “No, we want virgin girls”. So, I used to have this disgust about Indian men at that time. They all wanted virgin girls, but they were not necessarily virgins themselves. So, these were issues for me. I felt that gender was a big problem. Boys were given preferences, so my brothers were given preferences. My mum would always say, ”Come you need to bake for your brothers” for instance, but there was never like the brothers needed to do something for you. It was always, you had to do something for them, and even if you eating food, they said, “Leave that piece of meat for your brother”.

SM: So, you explained your experience of love, but if you have to give the word *love* a definition what would it be, how would you define it?

Mariam: Love for me meant someone who is more knowledgeable than me. Somebody that I could share things intellectually with. To fulfil every aspect of my life, that was our vision of love. They must be intellectuals. We must be able to have discussions with them. They must be good-looking, helpful, and kind, and help you around the kitchen, and do all sorts. We had this idealistic idea of love, which was actually nothing you know. It’s like, this romantic version of love. It’s something that we get very quickly in a relationship, realising that it’s a delusion. But, if you ask me now, I would say, a kind person, very generous, because if they have those two qualities, they’ll be able to be soft. They are kind so they will be able to put up with any discrepancies or difficulties. They could be how clever, but if they can’t be kind and generous, they won’t be able to sustain the relationship in some sense.

SM: Reflecting on your life growing up, can you recall how your parents/guardians spoke to you about romantic relationships and intimacy?

Mariam: No, never. My mum never even spoke about periods. So, when I had my period, I was the only daughter. It was a subject that was so taboo for my mother that I actually had to go to my aunt because it was like the other aunts actually filled in what your mother couldn’t. So, romantic relationships for them in the beginning was a no, no. You don’t get

involved. So, one part, it was ironical. We had to watch all these Indian movies that were showing romantic stories and all the lovers and that, and they said don't you dare have a boyfriend, you know. So, it was quite a contradiction, because we were flooded with romantic songs of Indian stories, like all of us knew Muhammed Rafi and Kesh. I'm talking of those days, but at the same time, it was like don't you dare do that. All of the romantic relationships in the movies of that time is that it was all secretive. I mean they were always hiding from their parents. That taboo was there. You don't. If you are caught, you are in big trouble.

SM: Reflecting on your romantic love relationships – if your partner did something ethically wrong e.g., physical abuse, verbal abuse, emotional blackmail, etc., which led you to experience pain/suffering/trauma: Did/Would you keep quiet about it?

Mariam: Personally, it's happening, and if you ask, for myself? It happened. Not only with the husband, it happened with the brother. It happened in childhood with sexual molestation, which nobody talks about. I have to go back to like three, and four… not even three, maybe two years. I remember. Maybe it was not malicious, but where a young boy was 'playing' with you when you small, you just tend to sleep. That time we used to sleep, lots of people in the area, which actually explored your genitalia at that age, but there's a memory of that. The molestation also happened. It happened to me, like, really serious. Like putting someone's [vulgar term] in your mouth when you were six/seven years old. But it's something you could never speak about. It only came up when I was forty years old, and I went for hypnotherapy. I started remembering, and when the memory came in, I refused to give the names of the people. It wasn't the trauma. The reason that became a big issue was with my husband. So, my point of the matter here is that, basically, I believe sexual abuse and covering it up has been part of our community quite badly, and it continues generationally. When I say generationally, only when my grandson was abused a few years ago, we took legal action against this person. My grandson spoke about it and went to the facilities. A different generation, but then I learnt it through a four-year-old. When he comes and says something like that, it's not easy to believe. So now, we look at three generations. I can't say if my mum was abused. So, this sort of trauma is very common among friends, family, and neighbours. It happens in the community, and its being happening for years. For me, personally, it changed my perception of men. So, obviously, I was six years old and had a traumatic experience. Who

could you take it out on at that age? So, my brother and I had huge problems. My attitude towards him was not soft, so he obviously reacted with physical abuse. I remember him just lashing out at me and the relationship up until now, there isn't that sense of trust. They don't understand where the source of the problem came from. I don't know how it's going to change in the future generation, but I can talk for myself. As a Muslim, I think Allah covered these people's *sitar*, and actions. I have a choice either to expose, or just let it be because it's something between them. For me to go forward, to work through that trauma, I had to learn to forgive and move ahead. But, in terms of discussing it, I think it's important because our generation of people don't talk about it. Especially my aged people, they don't talk about it. It's not even to judge them. It's people who do wrong actions that they are not answerable for and there's no consequences for them. It's a fact that, as a community, we got layers of secrecy that is there, and I think it's widespread. Nobody will go expose a brother or an uncle, because legally, it's abuse, it's rape, it's sexual molestation, but the community that we come from, refuses to unleash and expose any of these because they don't want anyone to go to jail. There's a guilt concept, there's a concept of splitting the family, and it does because in my generation we kept quiet, but in my grandchild's generation my son decided to take action. The two families that were united before, forever split and there's nothing they will say, like other innocent people that were involved. Like, the brother of the victimiser, they didn't do anything, but the families get split in the process because there's no other way. If you put someone's brother in jail, there's no way they going to talk to you. So, that created a huge rift in the community in terms of family and friends.

Talking about the situation is understanding that all of these relationships are fear-based. Why don't our people talk about it? Because they are fearful, and they don't trust that there's anything better. They don't trust that we can have a better life. Then you are fearful, because of finances, your economic status, or that you will be victimised by the community. You are fearful because your parents will ask you, "Why did you come back?", that you being critical. You are fearful because you will be told that you a failure. But we got to turn it around as women, by not accepting this, but moving on. I chose to stay in some way an abusive relationship, because of the husband-situation. It's not that he's abusive in a physical way, but it is like you can and you can't. When you create your own boundaries and respect the

other person's contribution towards your growth, then you creating terms where you won't be able to be crushed down.

SM: Did/Would you cover it up by expressing care and affection to this person in the hope that they would change?

Mariam: Ohh, that's a difficult one. It's a very tricky situation. I remember one day explaining to my husband. I called him. I even wrote a poem called *A Cracked Jar*, because he's cracked, he cracks you up. Let's turn this whole thing around. Do you think Allah decided us to be this perfect being? We are designed to be broken. We come up with values, we have to unlearn everything we learn, and then we come back together, and when we come back together, it's like Japanese art, with the gold lining. So, whenever my husband did something terrible and if he changes that behaviour, and comes to say sorry, then I said to him, "When you apologised for that wrong action and tried to patch it up, then I see you as this cracked jar with a golden lining". It earns my respect. That's the story of how to look at it. If I look at our jar, we have over thirty-eight years of cracks, and a lot of golden threads, because it's about the forgiving and trying to find the peace.

S.M: As a South African Indian woman, do you feel like your background and practices growing up have led you to live a life of secrecy and silencing, or has it educated you to speak up and seek help against gender abuse?

Mariam: No, I think I had a very outspoken mother. Our family was very loving and loud. My dad was very soft. I think we were silenced in the beginning, but it didn't stop me from following the patterns of my generation, my parents' generation. I think either my personality, my nature, my inclination, my interests, my love, or a book or whatever it is. I broke the laws, so it didn't apply to me.

SM: Personally, do you feel like generational/cultural practices influence the way you live your life, and has it shaped the love choices you have made/make? how have these practices impacted your life?

Mariam: Yeah, I think it does. I think most people repeat the mistakes of their parents. Like, I have seen cousins who have daughters, who are carbon copies of their parents, and they make the same mistakes. So, it's almost like a learnt skill. It's either I fight it or it's like if you can't beat them, then join them. I think that's a big story with Indians because it's not easy. It's human nature, and even culturally it's not easy to go against the grain. For me, I went against the grain. So, in terms of community, yes, family patterning generation after generation they make the same mistakes.

SM: As a woman, do you feel like patriarchy holds a power dynamic in your personal family and love relationships? If yes, how so?

Mariam: Yes, there is a patriarchal story. I think there are two sides to this. In the Indian community, it appears that the men are patriarchal, but the women are the rulers of the house. I mean all over, they call the shots. 90% of the time women are the rulers of the house because they do it for the wrong reasons. There isn't a balance because if there was, then we wouldn't have the problems we do. In my family, I think my husband is very stubborn, but I do fight for my point, so I can do what I do.

SM: Do you feel like we, as women, due to generational practices, uphold patriarchy in our homes?

Mariam: Yeah, I think my parents did that a lot. The boys? The cake was made for them, the baking was done for them, the choice of meat was theirs first, and you dishing out for them first. So, yes, it was very much.

SM: Do you think it's important to educate/or speak to young girls and women around you about love, relationships, and intimacy?

Mariam: Yes.

SM: If you could go back, with all the knowledge and experience you have now about love, relationships, and intimacy, would you have preferred your parents to educate you regarding such or do you prefer living and learning from your own experiences?

Mariam: … This is a difficult question. Things unfolded. They came with their background. I think they did the best they could with what they had. They came with their destiny as well and they accepted that. They had good lives. They had difficulties, but how they carried themselves through the difficult times, I will cherish and remember. So, I'm not going to say there wasn't anything wrong with them. They had difficult times. They had burnt factories and, loss of income. My mother was like the queen and then went down to the dumps. She had to learn to live in a humble setting. So, how they dealt with their difficulties in their generation, we give them ten out of ten. They had patience, tolerance, mercy because even when their partners failed them, they didn't leave them in a lurch and say, "You didn't provide for me", "You didn't do this for me", "You were a failure". They just said, okay, we in this together. So, that was a good lesson to learn from them.

SM: As a woman, can you give or share one lesson or advice that you have learnt on love, relationships, or intimacy?

Mariam: I think people should learn softness, especially in this generation. We must stop fighting. We always fighting. At one point, I was fighting for my rights and fighting for this. I think we need to be soft, and by being soft you can actually have fun, because then you not critical, you not demanding, you not pushing people beyond their limits of what they can do. If you are soft, you can actually have mercy on them, and they can have mercy on us.

SM: What kind of support systems do you have in times when you have felt hurt or violated in romantic relationships? Are there any ways in which you express your hurt/pain or any coping/healing strategies?

Mariam: Mine is the flight one, because if I feel suffocated in an environment which is very oppressive, then my coping mechanism is to travel or go to a *zikr*. I go and visit people who are remembering Allah, and by going to that gathering, it basically brings perspective, because

Allah is your focus in a *zikr*, so that you can come back and accept the human failures and regard them as human. The other thing is, I always went to a friend's place. I found a safe place. I would visit somebody. I had a car, I would drive. If my husband made me mad, I would drive to Bryanston. I would go for four days or three or two days, visit somebody, offload, vent. Oh, yes, we all vent, but I think we should reach a time where venting is not in a sense of criticising but actually wishing for something different. I think I believe firmly; that women have to understand there's too much emphasis in today's generation with romantic love, the men must fulfil everything. I believe women are the supporters of women, and women need to find friendship just as men found the *Sahabas* as their friendship. Together, as women, we can be a powerhouse because we will never see the way a man sees things. We are like a hand in a glove. Nuclear families have been destroyed. If women have women counterparts as their friends, we can raise these kids like someone said yesterday, "It's the village that raises the kids" and I said I like that idea. The women with the women, and the kids with the kids.

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10. Nani interviewed by Saajidah Madhi (SM)

Date of Interview: 5 August 2023

Saajidah Madhi (SM): Can you give me a short background about yourself? Your ethnicity, religion, and what work do you do? Or are you a full-time mother and/or housewife?

Nani: I am a Muslim Indian woman. I grew up in Carolina (Badplaas). We are fourteen siblings. I didn't finish school. I only went to standard four because my parents didn't want me to go, because I started late, because I was suffering with my hearing, and we moved to Newcastle for school. I started school at eight years old, and then my parents took me out, and I started working in my parent's shop. It was a grocery shop, and then I started working somewhere else because there was no one to support the family. So, my sister and I went to work. We worked on Market Street. I used to buy my brother's school clothes and shoes because while I was working, they were schooling, so I had to buy it.

I met your grandfather long after that. I was twenty-eight when we met and got married when I was twenty-nine. I met him on our way to Durban for a holiday in December, in a taxi. When we came back from holiday, he came to propose for me. My parents were not happy, Ma wasn't happy. Someone told my mother some stories about his family. So, Ma didn't want me to get married, but then he threatened me and said he wants to get married. He said he will get someone to hit me, so I didn't tell my parents. I said I will marry him. Then we got married. He wanted me to get married in court because he said maybe I will turn around and go away. So, we got married in court. After we got married, I came to live with his parents. We lived there for six years, then we moved out after my second child. Then we went to stay in Fita's and from there we went to Grasmere, we stayed there for ten years on the farm.

SM: Was he good to you?

Nani: I used to make samosas and sell them. He would go out hawking on the weekend and sell vegetables. We used to go on holiday, and it was good. After Grasmere we went to East London, then to King Williamstown, then we moved back to Johannesburg.

SM: Was he ever abusive to you, did he ever hurt you?

Nani: Yes, too much. When we moved to King Williamstown, I went to work for my brother, and every evening when I came home, he wanted his food ready, and if it wasn't ready, he would catch me by my hair and pull me, and he used to say, "You brought me here, what must I do?". He never used to do anything. He used to go fishing and sit at home. Then my brother got him a small shop and he started a Tupperware business. Then he opened an ice cream depot. I used to go every morning to the business. Then we left to come to Johannesburg. I stayed with your mummy, then we found a house and moved.

SM: While you were married, did you ever tell anyone what was happening to you?

Nani: No, because I got married on my own will, I blamed myself for it.

SM: Did your parents ever speak to you about love?

Nani: No.

SM: Did you know anything about it, what did you expect when you got married?

Nani: Just a happy life.

SM: Did you ever speak to your daughter about love?

Nani: No, because she could see how her father treated me. She used to see how he handled me. She was more mature than me. She finished school and studied; I only went till standard four… Sometimes he never used to talk to me for weeks. He used to tell me to shut up if I tried to talk. He used to tell me I must listen to what he says, never ever let me talk or listen to my story.

SM: Did you ever want to leave?

Nani: Where would I go? It was only my brother who knew what I used to go through.

SM: Did you feel safer when you came to stay with us? Or was it too late?

Nani: Not too late. I shouldn't have moved, but I couldn't help him. Like food and everything, my hands used to cramp in the water. So, I had no choice to move, because he used to put the geyser off the whole day. He only put it on for one hour in the morning, and I had to wash dishes, and so I had no choice because I couldn't manage it. My pension money paid for everything in the house, and before pension, I used to use my samosa money to pay for everything – even to put my son in college. I had to pay for his education, and then I had to borrow, and I had to pay it back. We didn't have any money to pay anyone. I wasn't allowed to have friends, only my family. Only if he takes me to my family then I could go, but I must put petrol so he can take me. If I wanted to do shopping, I must put the petrol and I had to pay for all the shopping. When his truck and that is broken, he used to ask me for money and so I had to give him, and if I didn't give it, he would scream and shout. But when we had the farm, he used to milk the cattle and sell the milk.

SM: Do you wish your mother spoke to you about love, and marriage before you got married?

Nani: No, because she had so many children, there was no time.

SM: Did your mother ever give you any advice?

Nani: No, not really, but a week before she passed away, before she left my house she said, "You only leave your house when death takes you". Like, don't take divorce, it's not a nice thing in Allah's eyes. So, you must walk out from your husband's house only when you die. My mother even gave my sister that advice. She also went through so much. Her husband used to throw her down the stairs, and my mother used to tell her this.

SM: But Islam doesn't teach us that it's okay to abuse another person, especially your wife?

Nani: Yes, but with your sister it was different. She had her parents to stick to, I had no one. Everyone was married, no one would care about me. My father cared about me, but he passed away before I got married.

SM: Did you speak to anyone when things got difficult, or you were in pain?

Nani: No one. Who to speak to? and who can I blame? I blame myself, but they only listen to your stories and won't be able to help you.