

At Home, At Work: Indian Immigrant Women in Colonial East Africa (c.1920-1940)

Savita Nair

Furman University

ABSTRACT

Situated in the broader context of the South Asian diaspora, Indian Gujarati merchant families in colonial East Africa participate in creating a modern history of migration. Building on preexisting connections between western India and eastern Africa, families create networks and recreate community in a unique diasporic context. Constituted not only of men, but also women who accompany and follow their entrepreneurial, adventurer husbands, and later daughters and wives, Gujarati business families are ensured a place in the historical record as a constituent community in British East Africa. In this new colonial site, newly marked by the railway systems, market towns, mills, ports, and commercial institutions, diasporic families maintain their household's multiple and dynamic functions to capitalize on the economic profitability of the "home" and, thus, enable women to participate in retail activity.

This essay argues that once women are included in an examination of Indian immigrant life in East Africa, then the fluidity of motion and shifting loyalties among a globalized and mobile community force us to re-imagine place and patriarchy. Mobility gives rise to the *dukawalli* - the female counterpart to the *dukawalla* - one who runs the shop. Consequently, we are allowed to challenge dichotomized notions of household and work, to question universalizing conceptions of patriarchy, and to demonstrate how women are enabled in new ways inside and outside of the home.

Home and work. We circulate from one to the other and back again, daily. In the context of another circular movement, migration across the northwestern Indian Ocean, this essay focuses on “home” and “work” for Indian families in colonial East Africa. The activities taking place in and around the home, particular configurations of physical space and social expectations enable particular activities and, thus, recreate families and communities. Home, a modified nationalized home, is recreated in East Africa not by the men who trade but by the women who run the home and run the shop. Including women’s narratives into the picture of Indian Gujarati families in East Africa is an intervention into a historiographical field saturated with political histories of colonial policy and economic histories of presumed male-centered business activities. Material about family life, and women’s activities in particular, challenge some aspects of typical social roles and gender dichotomies, therefore, making a transformed, and not simply transplanted, Gujarati cultural landscape.¹ I hope that these suggestions begin to provide useful insights and encourage future research into the home life and work life of women that have been rendered absent in scholarship about Indians in East Africa.

Information about how women in merchant families are at home and at work opens our understanding of immigrant life.² The spatial configuration of the family business and the family residence in urban and semi-urban East Africa is critical because it allows for simultaneity of activities and identities. Indeed, women are *at home* at work, and also at home at *work*. Here, the emphasis matters and must be placed at the physical location that challenges where the private space ends and the public begins. An architectural venue

serves as a literal blurring of so-called public and private spheres of activity. This paper analyzes the daily lives of East Africa Indian women as part of daily life more generally. Thus, women are simultaneously objects and subjects. The research does not isolate women's experiences or gather material exclusively with women or their empowerment in mind. To study them singularly, out of context, would be as inaccurate as to render them invisible by only studying the activities of men. Rather, I opt for a strategy in which women historicize the South Asian diaspora and also contextualize Gujarati cultural life in East Africa. In this way, women extend the historical geography of India.

In her introduction to *Woman as Subjects*, Nita Kumar summarizes the problems of writing about women in South Asia. She lists four approaches: 1) to include women in topics of study and of disciplinary focus, 2) to view them as prime subjects, movers and shakers, remaking the world, 3) to study the "patriarchal, ideological, and discursive structures" in which women exist and which eliminate their agency, and 4) to see the "hidden, subversive ways in which women exercise their agency even while outwardly part of a repressive normative order."³ In the first approach, Kumar is critical of simply inserting women into places where they had been missing. She sees this move as further objectifying women. For the second, Kumar challenges the view that women act only as willful, rational, and meaningful actors as unreflectively fitting women into a masculine model. For the third and final approaches, she summarizes the historical and anthropological study of women as polarizing women's experiences into a normative discourse characterized by control on one side and a subversive discourse characterized by

resistance on the other side. While acts of dichotomizing abound, I suggest that her idea that “to make women further the object of our gaze”⁴ necessarily further objectifies them is somewhat premature and that her critique does not make such an approach completely fruitless. In fact, Kumar accepts that it is difficult to ascribe subjectivity to those who are already constituents in the history of the objectified.⁵ Given that the historiography of East Africa Indian women is practically nonexistent, objectification as a consequence may be a necessary, though temporary, hazard.⁶

Gujarati women’s work in colonial East Africa should be understood in the context of scholarly literature about women at home and work, immigrant women’s daily lives, and the changing religious/cultural environment. Socio-political contexts do make women recipients of symbols that characterize them, no matter how they choose to interact, perceive, or rebel against the symbols and the array of roles associated with them.⁷ In the case of Gujarati women, religion and community expectations play a large role in how they could participate in social exchanges. While the notion of an indigenous “South Asian” feminist discourse vis-à-vis “Western discourse,” “colonial discourse,” “Enlightenment modernist discourse,” or “postmodernist discourse” has been refuted, scholarly writing on myths,⁸ folklore,⁹ literature,¹⁰ and psychoanalysis¹¹ provide some answers to what differentiates South Asia from the West. And even those seemingly distinct features, such as caste, religion, and region, are obfuscated when investigated in relation to colonial constructions of them. Thus, I reiterate Kumar’s assumptions that inform my own project: 1) “there is no ‘South Asian’ outside history” and, 2) South Asian realities necessarily include socio-economic processes as well that may or may not be characterized along with

cultural constructions.¹² South Asian women have been *inside* history and *outside* South Asia, and this study provides a glimpse into one of those social, economic, and cultural realities.

Scholarship and popular understandings about women's spaces tend to divide realms of work and home, equating them with "public" and "private," making it difficult to adequately discuss the interrelated nature of activities. Responding to a critique of universalistic systems of relations, previous scholars developed an analytical framework that posit women's work as confined to the home and men's as distanced from that home.¹³ Dichotomies became a solution to universal explanations. Thus, opposition between home and away was renamed as any of the following the dichotomies: domestic/public spheres, subordination/domination, powerlessness/power, and passivity/agency. Fortunately, extensive research and writing since challenges much of what was once thought of as undeniably private: sex, the body, ritual, disease, gossip, and the home.¹⁴ Specifically within the discourse of Indian nationalism, home (*ghar*) and the world (*bahir*) were equated with women's and men's domains, respectively. As Partha Chatterjee states, "...one gets an identification of social roles by gender to correspond with the separation of the social space in *ghar* and *bahir*."¹⁵ It is safe to say that women's isolated association with domestic domains and men's with public space have been neither accurate nor have provided complete descriptions of social relations. The alignment of women with home and the consequent subordinating of that relationship as a structural and cultural construction continually need rethinking.

At its most general level, the following section offers evidence that challenges the idea of work and home as public and private arenas of activity. A diasporic reality complicates the activities of East Africa Indian merchant families. Women's experiences provide new evidence for how migratory displacement has the potential to prompt cultural change. Although I do not want to produce or reinforce assumptions about pre-migration conditions for women in India as static and wholly patriarchal, I seek to examine the diasporic context of women's home/work as a step toward revisiting domesticity and patriarchy in Gujarat for future study. The overseas context is significant because only in this site and during this period are Gujarati women enabled members of a non-indentured community where they continue to maintain networks and be informed by Gujarati cultural life in Gujarat. At minimum, being overseas meant that Gujarati women could participate in economic exchanges out of necessity and in more direct, visible ways than previously possible. The family solidarity that became pronounced among migrants is evident in the life histories explored by my larger study, and is quite possibly a feature of family business in motion more generally.

Situated somewhere in a historiographical matrix of women in South Asia, women's work, domesticity, family economy and family business, and the South Asian diaspora are the histories of *dukawallis*:¹⁶ the female counterpart to a *dukawalla*, the person with whom customers interact because he/she run the store. *Dukawallis* are Gujarati women whose daily lives move back and forth between storefront and home in colonial East Africa. I first heard the feminized term from an Ismaili woman whose grandfather (well, actually *grandmother*) ran a store in Tanzania during the 1930s and

1940s.¹⁷ The phenomena of women working in shops, standing behind counters, interacting with customers, and doing business seem to be more common among Khoja Ismailis. Ismaili communities have a history of mobility based in part by the guidance of their spiritual leader, the Aga Khan.¹⁸ Over several generations, the Aga Khan has supported a so-called progressive vision of women within the Ismaili community by not requiring veiling.¹⁹ Accordingly, not veiling allowed Ismaili women to establish with ease a position inside the shared space of a shop since there are no community-based inhibitions toward viewing. They are not “veiled” by cloth or behind the walls of their homes. It is precisely the configured space joining home and store, along the urban colonial streetscape, that enables a choice of partial or whole exposure for these *dukawallis*: immigrant women, wives of merchants, storekeepers, and home keepers. Architecture allows their activities to take on new directions and to have new meanings.

While Gujarati women establish a role in the family’s economic and social standing in East Africa, their participation in social change is far from revolutionary in the history of working women immigrants. Parallels with immigrant business families from South Asia are useful, such as in David Rudner’s *Caste and Capitalism in Colonial India: The Nattukotai Chettiars*, which focuses on a merchant-banking Tamil community and challenges common assumptions about kinship, caste, and commercial organization. Rudner’s work informs my thinking about Gujarati business families in East Africa, and the social and commercial networks they form. He traces the community’s commercial expansion and trade migrations into Ceylon (1870-1930), Burma (1870-1930), and Malaya (late-nineteenth/early-twentieth century), discusses affinities and trusts among Nakarattar

descent groups, and stresses without reifying the importance of marriage alliances and kin networks for conducting business.²⁰ Missing, however, is a discussion on the role of women in the family business, outside of women's structural positions within male-initiated marriage alliances. Thus, my study aligns with Anne Hardgrove's work on Calcutta Marwaris, who experience and reproduce public community identity necessarily on idioms of gender and kinship. Movement to Calcutta complicates the cultural politics of Marwari communities, including in the politics of women's practices and in their status within the community.²¹ Calcutta Marwaris are a migrant group in which continual additions to the community represented who they are. Thus, their social identity is marked more by "flow" than by "fixedness."²² Similarly, I see East Africa Indians as a fluid, transitory community with women as an integral creating constituent.

The advantage of referring to migratory groups like the Chettiars and Marwaris is that they, like Gujaratis in East Africa, are in their new locations and create their communities through trading, capitalist alliances. These alliances are made largely through kin and other relations over wide expanses of land and oceans where systems of credit were vital and the need for trust was paramount. And, while Hardgrove's work is particularly useful to consider how communities put into practice and understand women's participation in family, work and politics in culturally specific ways, the history of Jewish immigrant women in early 20th century United States provides a valuable contemporaneous comparison. Work, home, women, and the influence of immigration are the subjects of Susan Glenn's *Daughters of the Shtetl*.²³ The following synopsis about Jewish immigrant women in early twentieth century New York City establishes through life histories that a

sharp divide between home and work did not govern their lives. In this way, the personal stories of Gujarati and Jewish women in retail business in an immigrant environment share a great deal, although important differences warrant discussion.

Glenn argues persuasively that Jewish immigrant working women had their own version of “New Womanhood” by influencing change through labor activism, consumer activism, and social reform practices. Glenn states, “The concept ‘New Womanhood’ or ‘New Woman’ entered the American vocabulary at the turn of the century. Between 1890s and 1920s it was used to portray the continuous, dramatic renegotiations of gender concepts as women experimented with new kinds of public behavior.”²⁴ Initially, the term described “ambitious, career-oriented, middle-class American women.” Later the idea implied a rebellious challenge to female restraint and asexuality to be replaced with social-sexual experimentation. Women sought to “take their place alongside men as companions, pals, and partners, participating socially as well as politically in worlds formerly reserved for men.”²⁵ Historically, the “New Woman” of late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century America represents dramatic changes in terms of female education, sexual and economic freedom, and women’s participation in the labor force, especially in previously male domains of business and the professions.²⁶ Some noteworthy statistics include the following: women are only 6.4% of non-agricultural female workforce in 1870, but grow to 10% in 1900 and 13.3% in 1920; women employed as clerical workers increases from less than 1% in 1870 to more than 25% in 1920; and, finally, women undergraduates at the University of Chicago increases from 40% in 1910 to 50% in 1920.²⁷ Social usefulness and personal autonomy characterizes “New Womanhood.” The woman’s movement of

early-twentieth century America stressed women's duties and feminists emphasized women's rights. The movement "demanded the removal of social, political and economic discrimination based on sex and sought rights and duties on the basis of individual capacity alone."²⁸ While what has been described about the idea of the "New Woman" in America does not reflect the degree or exact nature of changes in Gujarati women's worlds (either in India or in East Africa), it does serve as a useful backdrop for what I argue is a change in the extension of boundaries and in the visibility of women in "public" spaces. What I suggest destabilizes common perceptions and scholarly work about women in commercial households.

Like Jewish immigrant women in New York, Gujarati women in East Africa participate in activities that affected communal and economic life that are elsewhere in the province of men. As Jewish women pursue their own trades, a woman's work often depended on her husband's, whether this was an artisan's trade or commercial enterprise. Before migration, Jewish women in late-eighteenth century eastern Europe help in stores formally run by their husbands or maintain stores of their own. Since Jewish men often engage in jobs that require them to travel for long periods of time, women's running of the family business has been often out of necessity.²⁹ Both mothers and daughters, especially children of merchants, are familiar with a world of commerce because they help by waiting on customers in the family store or keeping accounts from a young age. Similarly, Gujarati women, especially those with caste and kinship connections to commerce, grow up in households where commerce is the way of life, a means of survival, and a cultural

ritual. Notably, Gujarati women often run the shops when their husbands are away conducting business in East African market centers.

The general success that Jewish women have in playing a role in the family's commercial enterprise, and subsequently the Jewish economy, Glenn discusses as a product of a "peculiar structure of Jewish economic life" and an ethic of earning a living by working for one's self.³⁰ For instance, within a typical model of Jewish marriage, there exists an expectation of male-female partnering in the responsibilities of earning money for the family. However, the decidedly subordinate position of women in the society keeps them from having authority over moral/religious realms of family life. Nevertheless, Glenn suggests that this notion of a partnership, of shared duties, create flexible gender roles and help to undermine stereotypical patriarchal power.³¹ Significant differences exist, however, for Gujarati families in the areas of partnership, religious authority, and activism. Gujarati women are not able to make use of their migrant status to the extent that partnership and activism became characteristic features of their work in shops. Instead, Gujarati women are fulfilling their cultural duties *despite* the appearance of partnership or collaboration. Rather than being a product of the "structure of economic life," as was the case for Jewish women, Gujarati women are working in the stores because of the structure of *immigrant* life. While the exact factors that help to undermine patriarchal power in a Jewish family could not be argued as easily for a Gujarati one, the basic inclusion of women in the family's commercial enterprise – most especially in an immigrant context and from generation to generation – is a notable parallel.

Within scholarship on South Asia, much of the study of women's work is depicted as something that occurs outside of the home. Whether agricultural labor, factory or millwork, or clerical and professional pursuits, the focus is away from the domicile, and subsequently, presented as empowering. Historical accounts about women in *modern* South Asia correlate with *colonial* narratives about civilization and the "veiled and enslaved woman"³² in need of upliftment. Colonial writings overstate, if not partially misrepresent, South Asian women as cloistered. Attempts to historicize the experiences of South Asian women by focusing on their daily lives and work in order to promote women's agency seem to only, and by definition, further characterize them as exploited and subordinate objects of patriarchal power. Nevertheless, over time the historiographical attention on *work* has resulted in a shifted, refocused lens; women's lives do not revolve solely around husband, family, and children. Fields and factories took the focus away from the home and hearth.

In a reductive depiction, South Asia often is seen as a "traditional" agricultural society and, thus, South Asia's women are in the fields. Scholars agree that Indian women's contributions to the agrarian economy fail to be recognized or are incorrectly characterized as marginal and unproductive.³³ Recent trends in scholarship about South Asian women do expand the focus to industrial sectors.³⁴ Women have been working, have been exploited, and have been the objects of legislation in factories and mills since possibly as early as the 1850s in the first cotton and jute mills and certainly since the 1890s in Bombay's textile factories.³⁵ Since the 1980s, scholarship on South Asian women aims to include them where they are omitted and to correct portrayals that deny them agency.³⁶

While stellar contributions abound, I contend that women's "work" and "labor" have applications and meanings that are multiple, overlapping, and shifting and that many are still left unexplored. The complexities of South Asian women's work are too numerous to expand upon here, but they do include organized and unorganized sectors. Here, I focus on the areas that are left out of official documentation and academic study: non-waged work in the home, for family, or for family business.

What is missing from the literature is women's participation in areas other than agrarian production, and industry;³⁷ that is, business, retail and wholesale. Ironically, these types of business are traditionally held by and through families, so the absence of women in the discussions is both surprising and yet expected. Business families are understood as large extended families headed by men, creating a network of male relatives. By engendering the business family, and simultaneously adding business to South Asian women's history, I bring together seemingly disparate realms of activity that were connected intimately for many Gujarati women in East Africa. I suggest that the "where" and the "when" of home and work come together to provide a new forum, a new historical context to open a discussion and question the dichotomies. Where do women work? They work in the shop-cum-residence. When do they work? They work when they are not in Gujarat, and when their immigrant husbands must be away to tend to other business matters.

I will first outline the architectural venue of where women's work has been situated, first on the island of Zanzibar and then to East Africa's inland areas during the early decades of colonial rule. Then, I will explore how the day-to-day activities of East

Africa Indian women challenge dichotomies of public and private. An outcome of my research is an understanding of just how powerfully Indian nationalist thought entered the homes of East Africa Indians. My material adds to studies about small business by engendering them and increases understanding of women's history by including business practices. Finally, I will suggest that the Indian nationalist projects take hold in colonial East Africa as a result of the imaginations and activities of Indian immigrant women, and subsequently make women the creators and keepers of a cultural home.

Architecture of Immigrants: Storefronts and Homefronts

Historically, the island of Zanzibar's long-standing commercial and migratory nature has been a stepping-stone to the eventual large-scale trading networks that grow between western India and inland East Africa.³⁸ Accordingly, Zanzibar's marketplace planning and domestic architecture are the predecessors to what develops later in commercial centers along the coasts and interiors of East Africa. By the end of the eighteenth century, Zanzibar is made up predominantly of thatched huts, with only a few stone houses. While these straw structures remained into the first few decades of the nineteenth century, the population grows quite significantly as the local Omani merchant classes enjoy a lucrative trade.³⁹ Durable stone houses increase in number, some of them occupied by Indian merchants. By the middle of the century, members of the Omani ruling class build a large number of homes near the Sultan's palace complex and on preferable sites near the seafront. A typical Arab house of the period is as follows:

Massive but simple whitewashed square building built of coral rag and mortar and had a flat terrace on the balustraded roof. Long and narrow rooms were arranged

around an open courtyard in the middle to permit ventilation and light to penetrate the rooms. The courtyard was a functional area reflecting the vocation of the occupants, who were involved in trade as well as in plantation production.⁴⁰

Religious beliefs greatly inspire domestic architecture. Privacy for female family members⁴¹ influences Omani domestic design to include a “gradient” or “spiral” of privacy. Public spaces are on the ground floor; domestic quarters on restricted upper floors are reserved only for women. Upper stories have disproportionately small exterior windows to shield women from the public’s gaze. In contrast, inner verandahs opening toward the courtyard are broad and spacious, and “women of the household spent much of their time there attending to various household chores.”⁴²

Encouraged by the ruling Omani classes, a class of Indian merchants magnifies in number, profits in trade, and settles with families. Indians tend to invest their profits to expand the scale of their business rather than spending on conspicuous consumption and buildings. Most of their houses are plain and functional, small and lacking an inner courtyard or carved doors. In 1835 their shops are described as ““mere holes raised a foot or two above the street.””⁴³ Their houses are arranged in narrow streets converging towards the market place and the Customs House. The front of the shop, being the most valuable part, is very narrow, only 12 to 14 feet wide. At night, the shop sometimes converts into sleeping quarters.⁴⁴

But all merchants, like their places of work and domicile, are not alike. The cultural specificities of Hindu and Muslim Indian merchants vary enough that the details deserve description. Hindu merchants originating from areas of Gujarat, *baniyas*,⁴⁵ do not

initially bring wives to East Africa, and accordingly, do not reproduce their community, due to cultural-religious prohibition of women crossing overseas.⁴⁶ By the late 19th century, such prohibitions are overcome and they establish a resident Hindu community in areas of East Africa. Muslim Indians, mainly Khoja Ismailis, on the other hand, do not face similar cultural restrictions on mobility and settle earlier. By the 1840s, there are 26 married women in 165 Gujarati Muslim households, and by the 1870s, there are 700 women in 500 households in a total population of two thousand.⁴⁷ They live in houses that were two stories high. Living quarters are moved to the upper floors, with some having verandahs along the outer walls, while the rooms behind the shop are used as storerooms. The nature of the work requires families to put in long hours. Men conduct the outside business, while women administer the retail shop. Two points are important here: 1) the spatial configuration of the home that combines commercial and residential use, and 2) the social reality that women often run the shop. However simple, these two highly underemphasized, if not ignored, aspects of life in this burgeoning colonial economy shed light on notions of women's space, work, family, home, and community.

Now, we move from Zanzibar Island across the waters to inland East Africa. Kisumu, on the shores of Kenya's side of Lake Victoria, had been the last stop on the Uganda Railway's first major artery. Being a major port connecting the British East Africa Protectorate and German East Africa from 1905 onward, Kisumu attracts larger numbers of traders and business people, creating a thriving Indian marketplace. By 1908/9, as with all British colonial urban settings, residential segregation prevails. Indians are housed in the "Indian Residential Quarters" or "Asiatic Government Quarters," which are adjacent to

the bazaar.⁴⁸ Over the next two decades, housing and commerce becomes more integrated, although still segregated from African and British communities as Indian-owned business thrive and post-World War I Kisumu enjoys sustained economic growth. The Indian bazaar goes through several planning cycles, adding needed roads and other improvements, reflecting the wealth of Indian merchants.⁴⁹ Nairobi, too, witnesses similar transformations in the city's composition, namely, in the number of Indians and Indian shops. A 1901 map of Nairobi City indicates various landmarks, such as "Protectorate Offices," "Railway Offices," "Coolies Landies" (where railway "coolies" were housed), and more notably "European Bazaar." A 1905 map of the same area shows a much larger area demarcated as "Government Offices" and "Government Officers' Houses," but in addition to "European Bazaar" there is an "Indian Bazaar."⁵⁰ The influx and permanence of Indian merchants are evident.

As far as domestic structures themselves are concerned, there are two categories of Asian houses in 1920s Kisumu: 1) the residential, and 2) the "business-cum-residential" dwelling. Within these two categories, there are single and double story buildings. Possibly the most common, however, was the business-cum-residential double story.⁵¹ This type represented a clear departure from previous two-room tin houses and tents. One plan for a double story, business-cum-residence, shows the street-side storefront, with wide glass windows and two entrances for customers. A third door on the façade leads to an open backyard from where stairs lead to the separate dwelling units above the store. In the dwelling area, above the street there are pairs of parallel rooms (bathrooms, sitting rooms, bedrooms, verandahs, and kitchens) making it possible for one or two families to occupy

the space.⁵² It has been argued that such “shop-cum-residences” evolved in response to the needs of the business families who worked and lived in them. This particular built form suited the long hours of business transactions and still ensured the privacy and security required by an Indian extended family. Although this particular design is prevalent elsewhere, as far away as the lower east side of Manhattan around the same period,⁵³ the architecture that suited the needs of the Indian community in commercial East Africa and women’s use of that built space converge to show that diasporic places transform community and social life.

Shahbanu: Memories of the family *Duka*

Since there is very little scholarly work about women in the early Indian East African immigrant context, life histories give us one window into the worlds of women in commercial households. Dana Seidenberg’s chapter provides important details about daily life. However, it does not reflect on or question the polarizing of men’s and women’s activities as Nita Kumar suggests we do when trying to understand women’s history and subjecthood. I see the life histories of women in Shahbanu’s family as significant alternatives to common perceptions about women as cloistered and invisible. We have a glimpse into the day-to-day life of an Ismaili woman in Tanzania who changes her structural position and who changes her concept of work through the idiosyncrasies of architecture and the predicaments of migration.

Although Shahbanu Rawji Goldberg has lived in the United States for over two decades, she continues to be deeply nostalgic for her East African home in Dar es Salaam. She returns regularly to “Dar” to visit friends and family; she laments that she has not

managed to take her own children to the place she considers *home*.⁵⁴ Because of Shahbanu's remarkable ability to recall the details of the past, I have been able to glimpse the life of a woman in a 1920s East Africa Indian business family whose legacy continued into the next generation.

Her maternal grandparents, the Visrams, come to East Africa in the late-nineteenth century on a *dhow*. Her grandmother died in 1916 when Shahbanu's mother was two years old. After his wife's death, Mr. Visram is a widower in his thirties with four children living in Dar es Salaam. He returns to India where his cousins and uncles arrange his remarriage to a woman twenty years his junior. Complicating the family dynamic is the fact that Shahbanu's mother and her step-grandmother mother are only ten years apart. The step-grandmother, the new Mrs. Visram, takes on the responsibilities of caring for her husband's children and becomes "grandmother" to Shahbanu and her siblings. Shahbanu remembers hearing about her grandmother's daily life as well as being witness to it when growing up in Tanzania. Household tasks remain under Mrs. Visram's domain, yet the presumption that immigrant women's familial role and spatial location are known, understood phenomena, definitively relegated to the home,⁵⁵ must be challenged. Furthermore, the recurring argument about marriage and motherhood encircling and strangling "Asian women" and the "home" as emblematic of the centuries-old, primary institution of the female world in India warrants rethinking.⁵⁶

While for merchant families in general, men's activities do not overlap into the home, women's often *cross over* into the business domain. The Visram's shop is what is called a "piece goods" shop, selling fabrics, mainly to other Indians and Africans, but also

to the British administrators of this newly acquired territory. As was typical of most shop-owning families, Shahbanu's grandfather conducts the day-to-day business of running the shop while her grandmother and their African servants are in the back, in the house, conducting the day-to-day business of running the household. Families usually have one or two African servants who help with cleaning and cooking in the home. Typically, stores open around six o'clock in the morning. After working for four to five hours, men retreat to the home in back for lunch while women look after the store. Women also step in for their husbands when the men attend to banking and to purchasing supplies in the larger markets or urban centers. In some cases, the women work side-by-side with men. Dana Seidenberg mentions children as young as six years old working as shop assistants.⁵⁷ There are many reports of how daughters help fathers by doing the accounts for the shops; and then years later, as wives they do the same for their husbands.⁵⁸

Born in 1908 in Gujarat, Shahbanu's father, Merali Rawji, is arranged to be married to Shahbanu's mother, Fatima Visram. Merali is 8 years old; Fatima, 2 year old. The Visrams are newly settled immigrants in Dar es Salaam and the Rawjis are established in Rawal, Gujarat. Merali, from a small, poor farming family, well knows how to work hard, but that work elicits limited results in rural impoverished Gujarat. Shahbanu remembers her father describing how, as a child, he worked in the fields all day and "normally only ate bread and pickle." He does not possess the business skills or entrepreneurial drive that leads many to East Africa, nevertheless, in 1926, Merali Rawji's father told him that it was time to go to Africa. The marching orders are to claim his wife and to use the help of relatives there to establish himself. His uncles and cousins earlier

have established businesses in Dar es Salaam, mostly retail stores, selling food and clothing. Merali Rawji is expected to work under his relatives and eventually start a business himself so that he could marry his fiancée and begin a new life in Dar es Salaam. When Rawji first arrives, he experiences many adjustment problems with both his work and family members. He first works with an uncle. After a full day of work, his aunt provides him with a meal. On the floor of their home or of their shop is where the young Merali sleeps. Shahbanu recalls her father telling a story about how his aunt tells him that he would never amount to anything. Apparently, he retorts by saying, “Oh, you wait and see. I am going to go to America one day.”⁵⁹ Shahbanu speculates that perhaps her great-aunt is fed up with the number of dependents coming from India to whom she and all other female relatives are tired of waiting on.⁶⁰ As with immigrant communities around the world and through time, there are spoken or unspoken expectations placed on settled family members to assist new family arrivals.

Merali Rawji eventually makes enough earnings to get married. Merali and Fatima are married in 1930 and then move away from the hectic urban competition of Dar es Salaam. Merali decides that, as a commercial center, Dar es Salaam is getting too busy and too many people are trying to establish themselves in business capacities. The Rawjis move to a small village called Kunduchi. Shahbanu believes that her father is the first Indian to establish himself there. He buys goods from other Indians, mostly Ismaili shopkeepers, in Dar es Salaam and sells them to Africans in Kunduchi. Rawji goes out on the fishing boats to catch fish, and sells them too, along with other small household items in his small shop. As time goes by, the population of Indians grows. Between the Indian

and African customers, Merali Rawji's small goods shop prospers! As profits increase, his inventory expands to include items such as dried beans, produce, rice, cigarettes, and matches. He also diversifies into the scrap metal business for a short time. In addition, he buys and sells gunnysacks.⁶¹ Over time the Rawjis have 11 children in total, 2 of whom die in infancy. Despite the large family, Fatima Rawji, like her own mother, would work in her husband's shop. Similarly, Fatima would wake up earlier than the rest of the family, take care of the children, work in the store, feed everybody lunch, and work in the store during the afternoons before dinner preparations.⁶²

As I suggest for merchant emigrants from India more generally, Seidenberg points out that Indian women's work in family businesses in East Africa has been invisible to statisticians and census-takers. Her interviews and my interviews begin the process of qualitatively filling those information gaps. For instance, it is clear that women of shop owning families take money when needed to buy food and other items for the home. Shahbanu jokes that then and now the women "control the till." Despite her amused tone, it is no joke and no small matter that the women are in charge of the distribution of some portion of the shop's earnings. In fact, at least outwardly, the till is the under the domain of the women whether they serve as attendants to customers, as accountants, and as household managers/consumers. In both urban and rural settings, women sort and sold goods, handle accounting matters, and learn trading. One literary account well-illustrates the multi-located nature of rural Indian women's daily life in Africa: "Shop-keeping during the day; domestic chores at night; the drunken husband somewhere in the bush. What a strange twist of fate!"⁶³ While the depiction does not present a desirable lot in life for

women, it does eliminate any question of idleness and serves to underscore the prevailing environment where women's workspace includes the *dukas*. Thus, the notion of women's domestication and the connotations associated with women being "home-bound" appear to be historically inaccurate. The evidence shows that, in the case of East Africa Indian women, *dukawallis*, the reconfiguration of life at home simultaneously restructures their responsibilities, without replacing them.

Although the evidence exposes women's roles in extra-domestic responsibilities, it is important to note that women are less involved, however, in selecting and ordering merchandise, calculating inventories, or general planning and distribution of goods. Furthermore, their daily household functions do not wane; restrictions on their lives are still numerous.⁶⁴ Seidenberg's research is the only source I found about the lives of South Asian women in East Africa during the early and middle 20th century. Her study emphasizes these restrictions and perpetuates the argument that women are disempowered by their continued domestication in East Africa.⁶⁵ Here I would argue that she falls into the traps that Nita Kumar warns against: trying to fit women into a masculinist model and, worse yet, stripping Indian women of cultural markers to make them "modern" and Western. Participation in and consciousness about large-scale political struggles, doing away with conservative and "constrictive" Indian attire, subscribing to liberal individualism, and giving up the rigorous repressive controls of Hindu and Muslim religious practices are proposed as means for Indian women to come out, as it were.⁶⁶ Seidenberg disapproves of a "gendered ideology that sought the complete domestication of women's lives" and she suggests that the security of domestic life produced in women an

“aggressive agoraphobia.”⁶⁷ I find Seidenberg’s suggestion of agoraphobia deeply problematic and unsettling. The implications of psychological phobia derived from supposed domestic confinement are unsettling for western and non-western feminist theorists who view the home as part of markets, labor, and production. Seidenberg concedes that her assertion has never been documented, and therefore I find it even less useful in understanding Indian women’s work in East Africa. While I am not at all convinced by parts of her argument, her study nevertheless provides important examples of women’s work in family business.

Over a decade *before* Mrs. Visram works in her husband’s piece-goods shop in Dar es Salaam, another Ismaili woman, Rajbai, owns her own shop called “Moti Beads” in the Indian bazaar in 1911 Nairobi. Along with Rajbai of Moti Beads, other women who operate small stone mills, for milling lentils, behind the shops in the Indian bazaar appear in Seidenberg’s work.⁶⁸ Among the examples in my own research is an Ismaili woman in Kilwa who, along with her husband, manage a *duka* in German East Africa. More interesting however, is the story of her sister who was not a *dukawalli*, but rather an astute businesswoman. She rents the verandah of her home to local tailors. Indeed, it is quite creative to collect rent from several properties, including one’s own verandah!⁶⁹ These examples do not wholly overturn scholarly studies about Indian activities in East Africa, but women like Mrs. Visram and Rajbai do make it clear that previous studies were not asking the kinds of questions that would elicit information about merchant women’s work.

Women’s social activities also overlap quite neatly with the commercial activities to which many of them are so intimately connected. Certainly, at a level of community

contacts and commercial ventures, business and extended kin are never far apart from one another. But, even at a more local and day-to-day level, the world of commerce is the mantle on which much else rested. When it is all said and done, Indian subcontinental people settle in East Africa for commercial enterprise primarily. As in other immigrant settings, social and cultural institutions are created after the fact. With that in mind, it is not surprising to know that along the streets of colonial Dar es Salaam, Nairobi, Mombasa, or Kampala en route to the temple or the mosque, women meet friends and neighbors and catch up on local news. They practice Swahili with African customers. They chat with other Indians about who has arrived most recently and from where in the Indian subcontinent. Shahbanu remembers hearing that, for these women of her grandmother's and mother's generation, such encounters serve as their very own social network. I find noteworthy her recollection that "*Invariably*, the topic of goods would come up [emphasis mine]."⁷⁰ The topics of discussion focus on what are the newest items in the stores, when are they expected to arrive, what is in low supply, and the like. As in contemporary markets around the world, the spending habits of these women influence the supply and demand of these goods. In East Africa, the first several decades of this century witness a highly active trading world in a growing capitalist global market. Goods are not just necessities; they are desirable commodities. Women help to set the taste and create the market. These details are absent in studies about the economies of early colonial East Africa in which Indians, and Indian women, are vital.

Finally, it important to point out that the women I spoke with described a "male-dominated society" from the beginning of Indian migration to East Africa today. I have

not intended to underplay the patriarchal structures and inequalities under which Mrs. Visram and Mrs. Rawji in particular, and Gujarati women in East Africa more generally, live their lives. But women themselves delineate quite clearly that what males dominated is extra-domestic. What happens in the store is not quite occurring in a domestic or extra-domestic space, and it is certainly up for grabs. Women run it; men run it. I have been suggesting that through the adjoining configuration of home and store, through their interaction with customers, both African and Indian ones, women's activities make a significant shift from an otherwise defined one – like the one in Gujarat. The shift is significant because, since there is no evidence to the contrary, it opens up the possibility for a more collaborative relationship within business families, especially in their overseas incarnations, than may have been assumed by scholars of migration, family business, and gender history. Gujarati immigrant women in 1920s urban East Africa may have been more like Jewish immigrant women in lower Manhattan after all.

Not only did women transverse into commercial spaces and commercial space transverse into domestic, Hindu women additionally move beyond perceived prohibitions on mobility; they move out of a restricted territorial existence, and worked around confining textual tenets for the sake of their families' economic prosperity.⁷¹ In doing so, they join their Ismaili counterparts in an existence characterized by their status as émigrés and as merchants, hinging on the fluidity between storefronts and home fronts. While Ismaili women certainly are more visible in shops than Hindu women, as a result of the Aga Khan's position regarding matters of *purdah* (covering/veiling) and other Islamic

practices, Gujarati Hindu women's interactions with non-Hindus, especially for Brahman women dealing with non-Brahmans, are almost revolutionary.

This fluidity is possible precisely due to the act of migration. Displacement from Gujarat as home demands that women were *entrusted* with the care of matters of greatest importance, the livelihood of the family. Trust is the linchpin to women's roles in running the shops. When the husbands are away, wives are the only ones who are trustworthy enough to run the store. Easy access to domestic servants, scarcity of idle or available male family members, and architectural arrangements enable Gujarati women to leave their families "behind," just literally *behind* them in the domestic dwelling, and run the shop. Unlike their female migrant counterparts who settle in areas such as Mauritius or the Caribbean in the mid-to-late nineteenth century under their husbands' terms of labor and who often labor themselves on plantations,⁷² settled East Africa Indian women are mostly wives of merchants, artisans, and clerical workers. Their experiences are far from representative of the types of possibilities available to all Indian immigrant women in British colonies. Despite popular and scholarly aligning of work-and-home with public-and-private spaces discussed earlier, this study provides evidence for the case of Gujarati women in East Africa who participate in retail activities and experience cultural contacts that influence communal and economic life, ones seen in the province of men. Whereas common understandings do not explore the details of women's work in commercial households and, thus, incorrectly relegate spheres of activity, the evidence here presents one possible way to conceptualize an alternate historical reality.

The Nation at Home

I conclude by considering how women's participation in retail activities and their social networks in this immigrant environment still are constrained by the Indian nationalist ideologies under whose rubric they fell, even an ocean away. Women's roles in running the store and meeting customers via the physical positioning of their home and workplace does not mean that they are freed from serving the family's physical, cultural, linguistic, and religious needs. The creation of an overseas cultural life, and of a nationalized identity, is possible because of women's use of the home. If we support the argument that nationalism in late-nineteenth century India situates women in the "inner domain of sovereignty," the *ghar*,⁷³ and thereby represents women and their role in the home as culture-keepers, critical to the success of political contests of the *bahir*, then East Africa Indians certainly fulfill the charge to "protect, preserve, and strengthen the inner core of the national culture, its spiritual essence."⁷⁴ Homes both reproduce and recreate cultural life. To that end, the activities within and out of the home environment, those under the control of women, such as influence over food, language, ritual, and child rearing are all part of the daily tasks. Accordingly, women would seem to be critical to the project of cultural survival and the creation of a national identity through daily life at home, overseas.

Similarly, if we follow the argument that the act of separating *ghar* and *bahir* and separating gendered social roles, do not reject altogether the lure of modernity, but rather accommodate modernity to the nationalist project,⁷⁵ then East Africa Indians are exemplary nationalists by embracing modernity in one sphere and maintaining tradition in

the other. Devout Hindus are willing at the onset to negotiate scriptural prohibitions on traveling and conducting business overseas. Once in East Africa, Hindus and Muslims alike take advantage of fulfilling the British administration's needs in government service and seize the opportunity to establish commercial ventures that benefit the British, Africans, and Indians. In this way, Indians exploit the material cultural world of the colonizers to their own end without forsaking the "inner sanctum" of home, their very identity, their "essence."⁷⁶ The home works so well, in fact, that it functions as the keystone for a prosperous business. Settled, established Gujarati women welcome extended family members and help them resettle. Resettlement includes seeing to basic needs of food and shelter, as well to spiritual needs of prayer, ritual, and conversation. While new male immigrants are being trained to work for their more established male relatives, new female immigrants are being trained by the wives in how to manage the household and other affairs in this foreign land. The wives of business owners take over the role and responsibility of helping new arrivals achieve, as one woman put it, "the success at home was the business's success."⁷⁷ Thus, it appears that in colonial East Africa thrives a growing community of immigrants who realize the Indian nationalist project, a project that was in high gear in India.⁷⁸

Although this study, or any work about East Africa Indians for that matter, far from completes the history of Indian women in East Africa, I provide examples of lives, struggles, and activities to complement a history of families who leave Gujarat and settle in areas of East Africa during a growing nationalist era in India. Although physical displacement from India does not alter immigrants' entanglements with the political

ideologies of nationalism, immigration transforms the possibilities for women, however limitedly. Theirs remains a predicament that is defined by a framework established by men, and whose history will remain relegated, however inaccurately, to being seen as ‘contributive.’⁷⁹ As Partha Chatterjee suggests, I hope that by continuing to work outside of the “conventional archive” this study begins to see women as something else.

ENDNOTES

¹ Gujarat is a coastal region in western colonial India. Following the 1956 Linguistic Reorganization of States, Gujarat became as a state within the postcolonial Indian nation in 1960.

² They are mostly from the Ismaili community (Khoja Muslims from present-day Gujarat) and some from *bania* Hindu communities. *Bania* is a subcaste designation. Caste, however, figures little in my work as I follow the work of scholars, such as anthropologist David Rudner, who argue that caste and commerce work together through kin networks and various formal and information alliances. In other words, I will not make an argument based on popular assumptions about *banias* as “merchant caste.”

³ Nita Kumar (ed.) (1994) *Women as Subjects: South Asian Histories*, (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia), p. 4.

⁴ *ibid.*

⁵ *ibid.*, p. 6.

⁶ One exception is Dana Seidenberg, “The Forgotten Poineers: Asian Women” in Seidenberg (1996) *Mercantile Adventurers: The World of East African Asians, 1750-1985*, (New Delhi: New Age International).

⁷ Kumar, p. 10.

⁸ Wendy Doniger O’Flaherty (1980) *Women, Androgynes, and Other Mythical Beasts*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press); Ann Grodzins Gold, “Gender, Violence and Power: Rajasthani Stories of Shakti” in Nita Kumar (1994), *Women as Subjects*.

⁹ William Sax, “Gender and Politics in Garhwal” in Nita Kumar (1994) *Woman as Subjects*.

¹⁰ Ashish Nandy (1980) *At the Edge of Psychology: Essays in Politics and Culture*, (Delhi: Oxford University Press).

¹¹ Sudhir Kakar (1978) *The Inner World: A Psycho-analytic Study of Childhood and Society in India* (Delhi: Oxford University Press); Manisha Roy, “The Concepts of ‘Femininity’ and ‘Liberation’ in the Context of Changing Sex Roles: Women in Modern India and America” in Dana Raphael (ed.) (1975) *Being Female: Reproduction, Power and Change*, (The Hague: Mouton).

¹² Kumar, p. 12.

¹³ For more on the general history of such dichotomies, and critiques thereof, see Michelle Zimbalist Rosaldo and Louise Lamphere (eds.) (1974) *Woman, Culture, and Society*, (Stanford: Stanford University Press).

¹⁴ For a South Asian example, see Patricia Jeffery, Roger Jeffery (1989, c1988) *Labour Pains and Labour Power: Women and Childbearing in India*, (London; Atlantic Highlands, N.J.: Andrew Lyon USA; Zed Books).

¹⁵ Partha Chatterjee (1993) *The Nation and its Fragments: Colonial and Postcolonial Histories*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press), p.120.

¹⁶ *Dukawalla* means one who runs, owns, or is associated with a store. *Dukawalli* is the feminized version of the word, implying a female “one”. *Dukan*: Indo-Persian: store; *Duka*: Swahili: store.

¹⁷ Shahbanu Goldberg, interview, 25 June 1995.

¹⁸ For more on Ismaili community history, see Farhad Daftary (1998) *A Short History of the Ismailis: Traditions of a Muslim Community*, (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press).

¹⁹ I do not mean to suggest that the act of veiling is not progressive, rather that the Aga Khan is known as a pro-western thinking, liberal Muslim leader in part and *precisely* due to his tenets on “the veil”.

²⁰ David Rudner (1994) *Caste and Capitalism in Colonial India: The Nattukotai Chettiars*, (Berkeley: University of California Press). For his discussion on overseas expansion, see parts of “The Colonial Expansion”, Chapter 4, pp. 67-88; for his discussion on trust and kinship, see “Marriage Alliance”, Chapter 8, pp. 159-188.

²¹ Anne Hardgrove (2004) “Chapter Five – Social Reform and the Women’s Question in Marwari Public Life” and “Chapter Six – Sati Worship and Marwari Public Identity” in *Community as Public Culture in Modern India: The Marwaris in Calcutta* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press).

²² Hardgrove, “Chapter Two-Mapping Community in Rajasthan and Calcutta.” A most influential thesis on migration, the work of imagination, and the “production of locality” is found in Arjun Appadurai (1996) *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press).

²³ Susan Glenn (1990) *Daughters of the Shtetl: Life and Labor in the Immigrant Generation*, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press).

²⁴ *ibid.*, p. 208

²⁵ *ibid.*

²⁶ “The New Woman”, <http://www.library.csi.cuny.edu/dept/history/lavender/386/newwoman.html>, May 2001.

²⁷ *ibid.*

²⁸ *ibid.*

²⁹ Glenn, *Daughters of the Shtetl*, pp. 14-5.

³⁰ *ibid.*, p. 15

³¹ *ibid.*, p. 14

³² Geraldine Forbes (1996) *Women in Modern India*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), p. 4.

³³ For example, see: Samita Sen (1999) *Women and Labour in Late Colonial India: The Bengal Jute Industry*, (Cambridge, New York: Cambridge University Press; Leela Fernandes (1997) *Producing Workers: The Politics of Gender, Class, and Culture in the Calcutta Jute Mills*, Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press); and Normal Banners (1985) *Women Workers in the Unorganized Sector: The Calcutta Experience*, (Hyderabad: Sang Books).

³⁴ Important articles that appeared in a Special Issue titled “Survival, Politics and Work: Indian Women, 1880-1980” in *Indian Economic and Social History Review*, 20, 1, (1983) include: Radha Kumar, “Family and Factory: Women in the Bombay Cotton Textile Industry, 1919-1939,” pp. 81-110; and Mukul Mukherjee, “Impact of Modernization on Women’s Occupations: A Case Study of the Rice Husking Industry in Bengal,” pp. 27-45.

³⁵ Forbes, pp. 167-8.

³⁶ Kumkum Sangari and Sudesh Vaid (eds.) (1989) *Recasting Women* (New Delhi: Kali for Women); J. Krishnamurthy (ed.) (1989) *Women in Colonial India: Essays on Survival, Work, and the State* (Delhi; New York: Oxford University Press); Nita Kumar (ed.) (1994) *Women as Subjects*; Jasodhara Bagchi (ed.) (1995) *Indian Women, Myth and Reality*, (Hyderabad: Sangam Books); Bharati Ray (ed.) (1995) *From the Seams of History: Essays on Indian Women*, (Delhi; New York: Oxford University Press).

³⁷ Other areas where women have been singled out for their work are handicrafts, paid domestic service, and more recently, self-started enterprises (e.g. Gujarat's Self-Employed Women's Association). Still, I contend that agricultural work and factory work has been the focus of most scholars' interest in women's work in South Asia.

³⁸ See Introduction.

³⁹ Abdul Sheriff (ed.) (1995) *The History of Conservation of Zanzibar Stone Town*, (London: James Currey Ltd.), pp. 12-13.

⁴⁰ *ibid.*, p. 14.

⁴¹ Sheriff points out that while such separating of women is "not exclusive to Muslim society", there is an explicit religious connotation to the *harem*.

⁴² Sheriff, p. 14. Sheriff cites UN Centre for Human Settlement (UNCHS), *The Stone Town of Zanzibar* (Washington, 1983), pp. 7-9, and A. Juma (1987) *The Omani Affinities of the Nineteenth-Century Houses on the East African Coast*, MA thesis, University of Cambridge, pp. 24-7.

⁴³ In Sheriff (1995) *Zanzibar Stone Town*. Quoted from WSW Ruschenberger (1838) *Narrative of a Voyage Round the World*, (London: Bentley), p. 42; and, J. Christie (1876) *Cholera Epidemics in East Africa*, (London: Macmillan, 1876), p. 338.

⁴⁴ Sheriff., p 19.

⁴⁵ This term has general caste references, but had been used misguidedly by administrators and scholars to circumscribe all Hindu business people in East Africa. I emphasize that this is not my labeling, but I am willing to acknowledge that this is the term used to label the same sets of individuals and families whom I suggest were part of larger kin networks.

⁴⁶ See larger study for extensive discussion on *kala pani* (black water).

⁴⁷ Sheriff (1995), pp. 19-20 taken from Christie (1876), pp.336-8.

⁴⁸ Godfrey Anyumba (1995) *Kisumu Town: History of the Built Form, Planning and Environment: 1890-1990*, (The Hague: Delft University Press), pp. 102-6.

⁴⁹ *ibid.* p. 140.

⁵⁰ WTW Morgan (ed.) (1967) *Nairobi: City and Region*, (Nairobi: Oxford University Press), pp.100-2.

⁵¹ It is noteworthy that Goan houses tended to be primary residential. Anyumba (1995), p. 148. When I refer to “Indian,” I refer to other communities besides the Goans.

⁵² Anyumba, pp. 142-8.

⁵³ See discussion earlier in this chapter about Jewish immigrant women in early 20th century New York City, in Susan Glenn, *Daughters of the Shtetl* (1990).

⁵⁴ Shahbanu Goldberg, interview, June 27, 1995.

⁵⁵ Dana Seidenberg, “The Forgotten Pioneers: Asian Women” in Dana Seidenberg (1996) *Mercantile Adventurers: The World of East African Asians, 1750-1985*, (New Delhi: New Age International).

⁵⁶ *ibid.*

⁵⁷ *ibid.*, p. 100.

⁵⁸ Shahbanu, interview, June 1995; Santokben Mehta, interview, Bombay, August 1996.

⁵⁹ Shahbanu did eventually bring her father to the United States in the 1980s. She commented that it was unfortunate that he was too ill and too old to fully comprehend that he had managed. He would have enjoyed fulfilling the promise he had made to his disgruntled aunt.

⁶⁰ Shahbanu Goldberg, interview, 25 June 1995.

⁶¹ The literary significance of the “gunny sack” is described in MG Vassanji’s historical novel, *The Gunny Sack* (1989) about four generations of Tanzanian Indians. It turns out that Shahbanu’s family members are long-time friends with the Vassanji family. Vassanji was educated in Dar es Salaam before moving to the United States for higher education. Shahbanu mentioned that her own family’s history is recorded in Vassanji’s novel which has served as a repository of collective memory and oral history of East Africa Indians.

⁶² *ibid.*

⁶³ MG Visram (1990) *Allidina Visram: The Trail Blazer*, (Mombasa), p. 101, in Seidenberg (1996) p. 100.

⁶⁴ Material on patriarchy and the gendered division of labor in South Asia is vast. Some important studies include: Kumkum Sangari and Sudesh Vaid (eds.) (1989); and Bina Agarwal (ed.) (1988) *Structures of*

Patriarchy: State, Community, and Household in Modernising Asia, (New Delhi: Kali for Women) and Bina Agarwal (1994) *A Field of One's Own: Gender and Land Rights in South Asia*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press).

⁶⁵ Seidenberg's *Mercantile Adventurers* is the only work that I have come across that addresses the activities of Indian women in East Africa in any direct manner.

⁶⁶ Seidenberg, p. 115.

⁶⁷ *ibid.*

⁶⁸ *ibid.*, pg. 100. Seidenberg's interview with Amritlal Raishi Shah, Nairobi, 7 September 1992.

⁶⁹ Jabeen Yusufali, personal correspondence, 18 November 1998.

⁷⁰ Shahbanu Goldberg, interview, 4 February 1997.

⁷¹ Examples of Hindu families, and women in particular, who crossed the "*kala pani*" are mentioned in my larger study.

⁷² Marina Carter (1995) *Servants, Sirdars, and Settlers: Indians in Mauritius, 1834-1874*; Madhavi Kale (1998) *Fragments of Empire: Capital, Slavery, and Indian Indentured Labor Migration in the British Caribbean*.

⁷³ Partha Chatterjee (1993) *The Nation and its Fragments: Colonial and Postcolonial Histories*, p. 117.

⁷⁴ *ibid.*, p. 121.

⁷⁵ *ibid.*

⁷⁶ Again, I refer to Chatterjee's argument about the "women's question" in the success of nationalism.

⁷⁷ Santokben Mehta, interview, 1996.

⁷⁸ For that matter, these immigrants lived amidst a growing African nationalist movement that, at least at this early period, did not exclude or demonize the Indian community.

⁷⁹ Chatterjee presents the idea that "by working from the conventional archives of political history, women appear in the history of nationalism only in a 'contributive' role" (*The Nation and its Fragments*, p. 137). He borrows the term from Kumari Jayawardena (1986) *Feminism and Nationalism in the Third World* (New Delhi: Zed Books), pp. 260-1.