



mysearch
for meaning
MUTHALNAIDOO

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formeaning
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Contents

What I Gained from Apartheid 2016	6
Poems 2017	13
Future Images of Drama and the Performing Arts 1982	30
Faith – an Atheist’s View 2016	49

What I gained from Apartheid

2016

I was born in 1935, when South Africa was still an independent state within the British Empire. When I was thirteen, the South African Government introduced the policy of apartheid, which, in my opinion, was simply a more rigidly structured version of the colonial policy that had obtained until 1948. Both colonialism and apartheid were based on the principle of separate development. In 1994, when I was fifty-eight, I voted for the first time – for a government that would represent all the people of South Africa. I have voted twice since, but never again. My vote represents the power I give to government and I cannot go on mandating corruption.

I am not sorry that I spent fifty-eight years of my life in a racially segregated society in which I belonged to a despised minority group. As a matter of fact – and this will surprise you – I am very glad that I did. Living in such a society gave me the greatest gift of my life. It set me on the path to making my own understanding of existence. Living under racism, you were constantly being reminded that you were not an acceptable part of the system, that you were an outsider and what was true for those superior to you, was not true for you.

So I was made conscious of the system. Since there were different conditions for different races, I became aware of systems within the system. Though, as a child, I conformed to the dictates of various systems, I was being conditioned to regard them as superimposed structures, and I developed double vision; by that I mean I became a participant-observer of my circumstances.

And I began to repudiate strict control of my life. As a child, I flouted family conventions. I was disobedient and a petty thief. I stole money that was left lying around. When I was six, I started school. All my teachers were white – legitimate representatives of the system. If they were kind, they attained saintly stature in our eyes.

My sister, two years younger, and I, were also sent to Tamil School. We lived in Pretoria in the Transvaal Province, a former Boer

Republic. The family had moved to the Asiatic Bazaar in Marabastad, Pretoria when I was two. As my parents were from Durban and Pietermaritzburg in Natal, former British colony, they did not speak Afrikaans. Our family spoke English. In the Asiatic Bazaar, a ghetto for people of Indian descent, we lived among people who spoke Indian languages, Afrikaans and English. We did not speak Afrikaans or an Indian language. So we were different even from people of the same race and ethnicity, Tamil-speaking Indians. We were aliens in the community and at school.

Furthermore, my sister and I had bobbed hair and often wore shorts or slacks – shocking for the 1940s. My mother was ‘modern,’ not strictly conventional. One Tamil school teacher took exception to our dress. He would put us in line with boys since we were dressed like boys.

When I was about ten, our neighbour across the road, the officiating priest at the little Tamil temple, a tin shanty in the Tamil School grounds, gave me the job of cleaning the little temple and the lamps and trays used during prayers at the Sunday service. That was woman’s work and as he had sons and no daughters, the job was given to me. But I was a petty thief with no respect for systems. The rituals of the religion meant nothing to me. As I did not understand them, I could not develop reverence for them. I was an outsider not a believer. So when I went to clean the temple, I would steal a few of the coins that worshippers put in the tray of ashes. Ashes are used to mark the forehead with a horizontal stripe – the indication of a worshipper of Lord Shiva. I did not understand religious rituals and the idea of faith baffled me; I could not respect what I did not understand so I could never immerse myself in religious mysteries.

But I was not a revolutionary – simply a non-conformist. I performed duties assigned to me mechanically without respect for them and to exploit them.

In 1948 when the new political system, Apartheid, was promulgated, our family returned to Durban; perhaps my father believed it would be less oppressive in an English-speaking environment. So, at twelve, I was once more in a foreign environment, and my status as outsider was further consolidated.

My father's brothers, MD Naidoo and MJ Naidoo, frequent visitors to our home, were revolutionaries, actively involved in the struggle against apartheid. Uncle MD introduced me to the theory of evolution and to communism. Though I did not really understand either, I felt that they justified my view of faith as irrational.

As a young adult, I became marginally involved with Uncle MJ in his political activities. And that is when I discovered faith. I believed in the revolution; I believed in democracy. And my belief was confirmed when I became a primary school teacher in 1956. The principal of the primary school, Mrs Pauline Morel, who was Jewish, was actively involved in the anti-apartheid struggle. She was a close friend of Alan Paton and belonged to his Liberal Party. She was also passionate about theatre and as I loved acting, I became involved in her theatre ventures. She had many friends amongst the upper class Indians in the community, had organised them into a theatre group and put on several of Rabindranath Tagore's plays.

I was a hanger-on of this group and was given tiny roles in the plays – usually of old women or servants. In this group, I became aware again of difference. Though I was of Indian descent, I was not of the same class or ethnicity as the Indian elites.

Then I met Ronnie Govender – at that time a young would-be playwright, now an established one. As he repudiated the class system, he set up a different theatre group. I joined him in his venture. It was Ronnie's desire to present indigenous works about people living under oppression.

While we were waiting for Ronnie's plays, we put on different shows, well-known plays and our own original short plays and revues. Amongst our performances was Arthur Miller's *All My Sons*. When I applied to the American Embassy for permission to do the play, the American Cultural Attaché became aware of our interest in American plays – I had also directed Clifford Odets' *Golden Boy*. It was our attempt to escape the stranglehold that British drama had on South African theatre.

The Cultural Attaché offered me the opportunity to study in the US.

In 1965, I was awarded a Fulbright Scholarship to study theatre and drama at Indiana University. And in the States, I was in a new system – a working democracy. But it was the time when Black people in the US were asserting their right to liberty, fraternity and equality. And as I believed in democracy, I thought all that was needed was the extension of full human rights to Black people. Even when I discovered Mary Daly and her exposé of women's oppression, I still believed in democracy.

So when I returned to South Africa in 1976, my theatre ventures became part of the fringe theatre movement that had developed in black communities. It was not a means to earn a living. Theatre groups came together after work to create their plays and performances. We were outside the system and our plays were condemnations of the system. And all our efforts invited strict police surveillance and harassment.

I earned my living as a school teacher and as an opponent of the system, was transferred or fired a few times. Eventually, in 1984, I was at Woodmead High School in Johannesburg, a non-racial school set up in defiance of apartheid by Steyn Krige in 1970 – and I was home. At Woodmead, I was in the Department of Integrated

Studies under Chris de Villiers, Head of Department. Chris had created a department in which learning was a democratic process. Students made decisions about what they learned and how they learned. And in this non-racial atmosphere, my faith in democracy remained strong.

It was here that I met Tom Swart who came to study the methods that Chris had instituted. And in 1988, when Tom was appointed Vice- Rector of Giyani College of Education in the Gazankulu Homeland for Tsonga-speaking people, he invited me to join the staff. Tom set up an institution that was completely democratic. Everyone, including students, janitorial staff and gardeners were brought into the management of the college. And for the first time I was experiencing real democracy -- my faith totally justified.

Tom introduced me to Alvin Toffler's works and I learned from Toffler's Wave Theory how technology influences the ways in which we conduct our lives and how standardization gives us an illusion of equality and fair play. Tom also lent me George Woodcock's *The Anarchist Reader* which sees government in terms of the maxim "power corrupts" and tries to find different ways of organising society.

In the 1990s, the political struggle in South Africa was over and in 1994, I voted for democracy. But the changes in our country were cosmetic. I saw poverty and its concomitant, crime, increase. And corruption at the highest levels made me understand fully what is meant by 'power corrupts'. I came to realise that democracy is simply an ideal. It can never be a political reality.

Democratic government is based on a capitalistic concept. We, the individuals of a society, bank our power in government when we vote, thus giving it absolute power. If you have watched Clint Eastwood's film *Absolute Power*, or Michael Dobbs's *House of Cards* or read John Grisham's and Richard North Patterson's novels, you know what that means.

With the assistance of Carl Sagan, in his series *Cosmos*, I came to realise that faith is a human construct that gives meaning and stability to our existence; that human systems are our attempts to abolish fear of the mystery of our existence. And I saw that we are in constant search of stability to gain control of our ever-changing circumstances. Apartheid, based on the need of the Afrikaner people for security, was a rigid structure and its system of discrimination which alienated black people, had made it possible for me to gain such an understanding. Now I see that faith and the constant struggle for stability and security are our ways of coping with a precarious existence in vast ever-changing circumstances. And I understand that all the systems we create are flawed because the universe is not a closed system.

Our civilizations are particles in waves. As particles we cannot perceive the wave, the expanding universe, and we spend all our lives attempting to fix ourselves in time and place. The more we strive for fixity, the more oppressive we make our circumstances.

Milan Kundera's *Immortality*, spelt it out very clearly for me. We live in the metaphor.

Poems

2017

Absolutes

definition
man's invention
to gain control
stepping stone
in life's river
rushing forever
to infinity
in an ocean
of possibilities
finite man
builder of dams
creating stability
to control fluidity
for a little
significance
of existence

God

ultimate Absolute
defence against
the unknowable
incomprehensible

Guardian
of civilization
defence metaphoric
protection symbolic
against
the hell
of uncertainty

Paternity allegoric
of humanity
babes in the woods

Blind Faith

reverence
of death
in a fantasy
of life hereafter
with surrogate Father
Being – metaphoric
anthropomorphic
symbolic

allocation of creation
to the supernatural
abdication
of human
responsibility
negation
of earthly reality

negation
of the will
to power
of man
creator
self-defining
human being

Society

banding together
against fear
insurance
expedient
for survival

civilization –
capitalization
of human potential
creation of absolutes
protection resolute
against ambiguity
inconsistency
the karmic condition
of human existence
the mystery
that gave birth
to life on earth

Government

human expedient
to control
human frailty
to regulate
human inconsistency
to constrain
individual expression –
for protection
of society

mandated authority
no guarantee
of freedom
from
corruption
in
administration

Fraternity

justice
blindfold
with scales
balancing out
distinctions
to procure
universalized
generalized
man
of no race
no culture
no individuality
shorn of difference
to secure tolerance

Equality

individuality

negated

standardized

categorized

stereotyped

numbered

formalized

documented

lined up

dry cleaned

for dispensation

of democracy

Liberty
release
from
oppression
of
poverty
from
tyranny
of
discrimination
a dream
of
opportunity
in a just
community
spread
your wings
and fly --
Oh Icarus!

Commodities

liberty
equality
fraternity
democracy
post revolution
commodities
not opportunities
not means
to individual ends
no striving
for uniqueness
simply queuing up
for handouts
demands
for equal treatment
mindless conformity
to anonymity

Human Faith

down the ages
men of vision
not prophets
human agents
wise men
proclaim
the Duty of all
on earth
from birth –
Not
preparation
for death
Not
a funeral march –

LIFE
the will
to create

Being

day of birth
on this earth
atom
from
the big bang
explosion into life
eons before
a miracle
to flame
to sparkle
a star
in the cosmic night
bright
with living light

Übermensch

love
compassion
in the will
to power
lift man
the creator
beyond
good and evil
evolution
into
perfection
übermensch

Miracles

like Jesus
raising Lazarus
Krishna
lifting Govardhana
you a Doctor
with power
in hand and mind
lift clouds
dark shrouds
of night
to let in light

I see again
and find
a Real miracle
of Human kind

Love

a gift
freely given
not trade
not exchange
no obligation
no anticipation
of reciprocation
simply expression
of deep affection
not requiring
reciprocity
giving
is receiving
the essence
of happiness

Octogenarian

at eighty
though sprightly
in other eyes
the walking dead
subjected to
body searches
for
signs of decay

cough, sneeze
and they freeze –
see behind you
the scythe
the grim reaper
hooded skeleton –
and are ready
to push you
into
oblivion

Desist!
Resist!
REND
premature shroud
Be proud
and live, live, live
LIVE!
to the very end!

Future Images of Drama and the Performing Arts

Paper presented at
the University of Zululand
15. 09.1982

Thank you for inviting me to speak at this conference. I consider it a great honour.

To speak of “Future Images in Drama and the Performing Arts”, I realise that I would have to take a huge imaginative leap out of the present and into a totally new society. Professor Vilakazi sent me some questions to consider, but I am not sure that I have answered them though that is what I set out to do. Once I began thinking about the questions, I realised that I would have to take a very careful look at the present in order to find a direction for the future.

I have begun my paper with a consideration of culture in South Africa. My reason for this is that in the Performing Arts, we deal chiefly with human images because playwrights and choreographers present their ideas mainly through living human beings. So it is necessary to understand the culture that gives rise to these images.

Next, I consider the limitations that our culture imposes upon us and suggest ways we could try to overcome these limitations.

Finally, I turn to a consideration of dance and drama.

I want to thank Professor Vilakazi for sending me some excerpts from the writings of R Bundy and NC Manganyi to guide me in the direction I am to take in speaking on ‘Future Images of Drama and the Performing Arts.’ I would like to pursue some of the ideas contained in the excerpts and the following quotation from Bundy, which relates the past to the future, is where I would like to begin.

Bundy writes:

“Images of the future have their roots in the shared memories

of a culture. The images are born and redefined in the light of specific interpretations of the past.”

Culture

What I want to deal with specifically from this quotation are the references to ‘shared memories of a culture’ and ‘specific interpretations of the past.’ Notice that Bundy does not simply speak of the past but of ‘specific interpretations’ of the past. If we look at South African history books, we find that they are filled with the bravery and fortitude of the Trekkers and the enterprising gallantry of the British. These are specific interpretations that have led to control of South Africa by the descendants of the Trekkers and the British. In this interpretation of the past, Black people are shown to be defeated time and again and defeat has become the condition of our lives. We still fight even now, but with the history of defeat at the backs of our minds, our fighting lacks conviction and we ultimately succumb. Consequently, Black people are a vote-less majority, subject to stringent and restrictive laws. This specific interpretation of the past reduces Black people to dependents and subjects them to paternalism. It is obviously not an interpretation that we must continue to accept.

This specific view of the past coerced us into accepting the institution of apartheid. It is very important for us to understand the extent to which we accept apartheid. If we do not, we will not be able to change things. We will continue to demand changes from those in whose interests such change cannot be. In demanding, we demonstrate that we are a subject people who cannot determine our own destiny; that we want self-determination as a gift from others. This, to my mind, is the biggest handout for which we are asking; and it is absurd. How can self-determination be granted to us? It is a determination that comes from the self. We are the only ones who can grant it to ourselves. What we have to do is to start realising that we

must act, that we do not need permission to conduct our lives as independent human beings.

Cultural Difference

This brings me now to a consideration of the other phrase from the quotation by Bundy, 'shared memories of a culture.' I am going to look at culture in the way that sociologists do and that is, as a way of life that includes customs and institutions into which the individual is socialised. I am not looking at the arts as culture. For me, the arts are an expression of our culture, of the way in which we conduct our lives, the values we espouse, and our attitudes.

So what is our culture in South Africa? Do we have 'shared memories of a culture'? How can that be when we are socialised into believing that we do not share a common culture; that we are all different. Nevertheless, I believe that all of us living in this country do share a common culture. It is true that when we first met, we were all different. There was an African way of life, a European way of life and an Indian way of life. Each group still maintains its own tribal customs but these are simply vestiges of past cultures. We also have a common culture in South Africa, a common, overriding culture.

Our Common Culture

Our common culture, as I see it, is based on the belief that some people are superior and others, inferior. The people who believe that they are superior have power, status and wealth. They control the lives of the people believed to be inferior. The subject people live under conditions of oppression, poverty and humiliation. In order for the 'superior' group to maintain its position of power, it must remain aloof, it must preserve its air of ignorance about conditions surrounding the

lives of those considered inferior. Such a situation breeds an atmosphere of fear and hatred. The 'superior' group fears the loss of power and wealth, while the 'inferior' groups fear brute force and hate oppression. In prehistoric times, when men came together to form societies, they did so for the protection of all their members. But our society functions to protect only the most powerful element. It is, in effect, a contradiction of the notion of society.

And contradictions abound in our culture. Although Black people are treated as inferior, as different, they are made to conform to the values and way of life of the superior group. The white way of life is presented to us as the 'norm' and black ways, as deviations from the 'norm.' Black people, therefore, feel the necessity to bring their way of life into line with the norm and in effect, are turned into reflections of the superior group. They have adopted the dress, language, customs and religion of the white group. Yet black people are forced to believe that they are different because provisions for them are separate and inferior. So though we are all pursuing a way of life that is similar, we are socialised into believing that we are different. The effect of such a belief is to make black people all the more eager to wipe out differences between themselves and the superior group. They neglect and sometimes even repudiate their old ways of life.

At the same time as they are trying to erase differences between themselves and the White group, Blacks spend a good deal of time looking for differences amongst themselves – not only ethnic differences, but tribal and individual differences as well. Some of us try to find differences amongst ourselves so that we can push others away from the 'norm' as we bring ourselves closer to it. So we indulge in a good deal of infighting about petty issues while big issues remain unresolved.

Now we can look at these attempts to achieve the 'norm' both negatively and positively. Such attempts have had the effect of unifying us and giving us a common culture but at the same time in accepting this 'norm' we have accepted inferior status for ourselves. That is because we can never achieve the 'norm'; black ways of life can only approximate to a white way of life since black people can never be white people. Thus we suffer endless frustration, humiliation and crises of identity.

Perhaps the worst effect of trying to achieve the 'norm' is the sense of hopelessness with which it fills us. We begin to believe that we are trapped; that there is nothing we can do; that we are, in effect, victims. Some of us say, 'Well, that's that, so let's make the best of it.' We may become opportunists, allying ourselves with the ruling class in their oppression of the black majority; or we may become apathetic, leading mechanical existences, steering clear of problems and pretending that all is well. But there are those who wage active campaigns against oppression.

Contradictions and Confusion

The culture into which we are socialised is a very confusing one. Not only because it demands conformity on the one hand while reinforcing difference on the other, but also because our way of life creates a divorce between our words and our actions. We are socialised into a culture which teaches us we are inferior and we accept inferior status but not one of us believes that we are inferior; or that our living conditions, education, conditions of work and the positions that we aspire to should be inferior. We criticise and even strike out against such things – yet we live by them. So we are haunted all the time by double standards, by a sense of hypocrisy. We must conform in order to survive but the conditions of our survival are abhorrent to us.

Furthermore, we have been taught Christian principles of love and brotherhood yet our whole way of life negates these teachings. We live in separate areas and learn to fear and hate those living in other areas. The ruling class, which preaches these principles of love and brotherhood, practices them only within the confines of its own community and expects us to do the same. They have reduced the Christian religion and every other religion, to a ghettoised value system.

Religion has become a set of social gestures applicable only within narrow ethnic limits. Therefore, appeals that Blacks make to Whites based on Christian principles either fall on deaf ears or are regarded as militancy.

Culture or Cultural Heritage?

So confusion abounds in our society. The worst confusion of all, I believe, is what we understand by the term culture. When we use the term, we do not use it to refer to our way of life, we use it rather to refer to our cultural heritage.

Let me illustrate what I mean with reference to the 'Indian' community. Most 'Indians' no longer speak an Indian language and language is, according to sociologists, the most important means through which cultural values, concepts and attitudes are transmitted from one generation to another. If we no longer speak an Indian language that means that the cultural values, concepts and attitudes that we now possess, are not Indian. Since most of us speak English, the values etc. that we now have are chiefly Western. Despite the fact that our way of life in South Africa does not require knowledge of Indian languages, attempts are now being made to introduce

our languages in schools so that we will not lose our cultural identity. This is absurd. The cultural identity that derived from an Indian language and culture has been lost for some considerable time now.

“Indian” Culture

Let us now look at what is meant by the term culture in reference to the ‘Indian’ community. It means unrelated items such as the sari, curry and rice, Indian music and dance and religion. As far as I am concerned, the only items on that list that are still part of our way of life are curry and rice and religious rituals. Since we have shared our curry and rice with every other group, it has become part of a South African culture and is no longer exclusively Indian. As far as Indian music and dance are concerned, people have to go to India to study these so how can we think of these arts as part of our present culture. The only thing left then is religion and even that is losing its hold.

These items that have come to represent an ‘Indian’ culture, are only aspects of a cultural heritage, they must not be confused with our present culture. They are not a natural part of our lives today. They are exotic because they are extraneous to the way of life to which we have adapted in South Africa. They are, in my opinion, a manifestation of syncretism.

The way of life, the culture of the ‘Indian’ in this society, is the way of life of all South Africans. It is the way of life based on the superiority/ inferiority credo.

What I have tried to stress with my little excursion into the ‘Indian’ community is that our cultural heritage is not our culture. Why then do we parade our traditions of the past as our present culture? I believe it is because we have accepted

the idea of difference. Our present culture is a common culture and it is only by reference to past cultural traditions that we can reinforce difference and endorse separation.

I am not saying that we should reject our cultural backgrounds but we should not allow past traditions to blind us to our present mode of life. I do believe that we do a disservice to our past cultural traditions in trying to preserve them in their original forms. Our present way of life cannot support them with conviction, so they are doomed to decay and death unless we change and adapt them to express our present way of life. If we could do that we would perhaps develop an ethos which generates creativity and leads to a flowering of the arts in this artistically impoverished society. We would perhaps develop new forms in which African, Western and Asian elements are harmoniously integrated to give us a new sense of identity, a new history and the impulse to move forward imaginatively and optimistically into the future. As long as we cling mechanically to past traditions, we will still be racists, unable to think imaginatively about the present and the future.

Racial Blindness

It is not only the Black population that clings to the past and denies present reality; the White population does so as well. Theirs is a highly imitative way of life. They imitate a European, and now even an American way of life. I draw this conclusion from what I see of their work in theatre and from the fact that they try to live a life of exclusivity in which African influences play little or no part.

We are all blind to our own culture because we insist on looking at the word 'culture' in its narrow sense, that is, as synonymous with the arts. As long as we remain blind to our culture, that is, our way of life, we can never give genuine expression to it through the arts.

Now why do we cling to cultural traditions that are not really a reflection of our present reality? For the dominant group, I see it as a form of escapism as well as a way of emphasising difference. For the subject groups, it is a way of keeping us tied to inimical identities that prevent us from becoming a South African people.

Fragmentation

The pictures I have drawn thus far of our culture are pictures of disparities: disparities between our act of conforming and our belief in difference; between what we believe is our culture and what actually is our culture; between what we do and what we say. Now the individuals who emerge from such a culture must exhibit the confusion in it. We come out of it, fragmented beings, uncertain of ourselves, and our capacity to make choices and decisions is weak. We are filled with a sense of powerlessness because we cannot make good our words with our actions. As a result many of us drift along, victims of our own and other people's whims and fancies.

The only way we can function in this society is if one is a racist; the whole society is set up to support the racist. But even the racist is in a trap because the society demands the greatest conformity from him and he becomes a dehumanised being. The moment a racist tries to break out of the mould, he finds himself a victim as well. He too discovers that he no longer has the ability to act, and worse he is regarded as a hypocrite because he retains, at the same time as he repudiates, the privileges of this society.

This is not an inspiring picture of our culture, and I have drawn it chiefly for myself because I need to have a clear view of our present culture before I can speculate about the future. Since the future is built upon the present, what we must try to do is to discover the foundations that we are laying for the years ahead. These foundations are hidden from our view because of the

garbage we have laid over them. We have to begin by clearing away the garbage.

There is a great deal that we have to reject and we must begin by rejecting fragmentation both at the individual and societal levels. This is not easy because our present society is based upon the belief in irreconcilable difference. It is a trap from which we must free ourselves. The effort required of us, though tremendous, is not superhuman. We need the kind of courage and faith of the early Christian martyrs who were thrown to the lions because their beliefs ran counter to the tenets of the Roman Empire.

Unity in Diversity

If we are trying to create images for the future we must begin by discarding the idea of cultural difference. Instead we must begin to see our culture as rich and varied, a fusion of elements from all our past traditions. We must create for ourselves a new cultural norm, one that is inclusive, not exclusive. If we can do this, we will begin to be South Africans and we will be proud of asserting a South African identity. If we free ourselves from the fragmentation of personality that prejudice imposes upon us, we will stop being victims and become self-determining human beings.

We will realise that the changes that we want will never come from others; that they must come from within us. We will stop thinking of ourselves as a powerless people. If we discard the idea that we are victims right now, we can be self-determined human beings right now. And we should not put it off any longer. Suffering, humiliation, sacrifice are not new to us. We have endured them a long time and achieved little. Why go on being victims? Let us, right now, be self-determined human beings. Like Lady Macbeth, I say: I see now the future in the

instant.

We must be like her and bring the future into now, into the present. I know that patience is a virtue and that in Lady Macbeth's case she would have benefited by being patient, but our trouble is that we have waited too long. I am tired of hearing people say, 'I may not see change in my lifetime.' My grandfather and father must have said the same thing. Well I have no children, so as far as I am concerned change must come now, in my lifetime and I must make it happen. What I am saying to you is that we must individually take the initiative to make change happen. We cannot sit around waiting for the charismatic leader to appear. We have to act now and put into motion the processes that will lead to the achievement of our ambitions.

And we can begin by educating ourselves. By that I do not mean accumulating degrees. I mean that we must take a good look at ourselves so that we can understand the meaning of our lives. I am a Hindu by birth and the religion tells me that my entire life must be a journey towards enlightenment. That means that I cannot simply accept the routine into which my life has fallen. I must understand why that routine is necessary and if I find that the routine is simply a performance of perfunctory actions which merely simulate living, then I must abandon it and find that which gives real meaning to my existence. If I cannot make an immediate change, I must be alive to opportunities for change. I cannot simply accept that I have no choice. I must be a person who makes choices and decides my own future. In other words, I must take control of my destiny and not wait for any external agency to set my course for me.

The first thing I must do, is recognise that all the social processes of this society inculcate difference, foster fragmentation of

personality and attempt to keep me firmly concentrated on past cultural traditions. I have been brought up to accept a confused and dehumanised role. What I have to do is free myself from this trap. I have to go through a process of unlearning everything I have learned to accept about myself as different and inferior. I ought to be aware that if I fit easily into the society as it is, I am giving my complete co-operation to the processes which dehumanise me.

I must learn to see myself as a whole human being, not one in whom cultures are at war with one another. If I have been socialised into a western way of life and I still retain the vestiges of an eastern way of life, I must accept that these two ways of life have become one in my life, that they are not in conflict with one another; that I need not be ashamed of having succumbed to the one or of belonging to the other. I must recognise that both ways of life have fused in me to give me a new identity. I must recognise that I am a new cultural identity and as such I represent the future. For this symposium, Professor Vilakazi asks us to consider whether a 'synthesis and reconciliation of the various cultural and political strands that exist within the society' is possible. I say with regard to culture that it is not only possible but it has already happened.

Just look at us. In ourselves we represent a fusion of cultures – Western-African-Indian. It is only because we think of ourselves in terms of past cultural traditions that we do not see that a fusion of cultures has already taken place. As I see it then, the future is here, in the instant. All that we have to do is recognise that it is.

What I am arguing for, in this rather laborious fashion, is a new cultural consciousness on our parts, and it is this new consciousness that must pervade our arts. I quite agree with NC Manganyi who says:

“Literature and art do not, like poor journalism, tell people what they know so well in the ordinary circumstances of their lives. Any great South African literature, while recognising this anguish, should help us to move beyond it. It must provide a vision beyond our cultural and political crisis.”

If we have concentrated too much on anguish, it is because we have had a negative view of ourselves. Once we assert a positive view, nothing will stop us from celebrating.

I know that the steps I propose may seem idealistic and unpractical given the realities of the circumstances of our existence, but since we are talking of the arts, I believe that everything I advocate is possible.

The Arts

People involved in the arts have skills and talents which are not channelled through industry and government institutions so they have a measure of independence denied to people in other fields. Furthermore, people in the arts can fly ‘on the viewless wings of poesy’, art, music, drama and dance because there are no pass laws to hold our imaginations back. We do not have to shackle ourselves to the unpleasant realities of the present, we have the freedom to fly off into the future for a foretaste of a new and dynamic society. By sharing our endeavours in our various artistic fields with spectators and audience, we can provide others with a glimpse into the future.

And this brings me, after my long digression, to my topic for today, ‘Future Images of Drama and the Performing Arts.’ I will confine myself to drama and dance. I am going to apply what I have already said about our culture and the way in which we should orientate ourselves to the future to these two art forms.

In so doing, I shall at the same time be summing up the main ideas that I have presented in this paper.

Dance

As I know nothing about dance, I shall deal with it first and very briefly. As I have explained, in order for us to walk tall into the future, we have to embrace a new cultural consciousness that must inform all our arts, if we are to create images and bring to life truly South African art forms. I look at traditional forms of dance and I see that they lack the vibrant spirit that once informed them. Dance in South Africa has not developed into an art form as it has in countries like Nigeria, Ghana, Senegal, India, Europe and America. Our dance as an art form is yet to be.

That it is the most underdeveloped of our arts, is quite remarkable considering that there is such a rich and varied tradition available to us. We persist in pursuing the forms of our cultural past at the expense of developing vitally new forms that are an expression of our times. Our lack of imagination is made most apparent in our neglect of dance. If we had imaginative choreographers, they would become euphoric at the opportunities there are for creating a great South African art of the dance.

It is because we are not whole human beings that we fail to recognise the riches in our midst. If our cultural traditions were not in conflict, we would not be blind to our opportunities.

In order to create an art of the dance, we have to recognise that we, as members of this society, embody in our own persons, a marriage of cultures.

That should free us from the prejudice which prevents the

development of a South African art of the dance. What the different traditional forms need is cross fertilisation from one another.

In America, Katherine Dunham and Martha Graham both introduced new techniques of dance after studying different forms of African dance.

Katherine Dunham, being a black American, created balletic forms, whose strongly African themes and styles were contained within Western time structures and disciplines. Martha Graham developed new methods of modern dance which incorporated the African orientation to the ground and greater flexibility of movement but maintained Western themes and styles.

They went abroad to find ways of revitalising the art of the dance in their country, but we, in the midst of a wealth of traditional dance forms, lack the initiative to use what we have. Instead we try to fossilize past traditions and in so doing display the sterility of our thinking.

Theatre

There is a great deal of theatre activity in our country but very little is indigenous. In fact, the term indigenous when applied to theatre, carries connotations of inferiority because original work in this field comes, in the main, from the Black communities. What I find extraordinary is that original work is treated as exotic and is not given a place within the mainstream of theatre in this country.

Of course, it is not really extraordinary, it simply demonstrates our cultural preoccupation with difference, and with the 'norm' that is Western and exclusive.

In theatre, just as in the dance, we will not be able to create images of the future until we have freed ourselves from the stultifying attitudes into which we have been socialised.

Theatre is said to hold the mirror up to nature – it reflects life as well as reflects upon life. Of course, all the arts do this but plays are presented through the living human being who is seen in human situations so theatre seems to be more directly connected with living experience than the other more abstract arts. Though theatre does provide audiences with situations with which they can identify, a play is not an exact representation of life. One of the chief differences between life and the reflection of life is in the element of time. In a play, time is compressed to bring events stretching over a lifetime into a short period of a couple of hours. As a result only those events pertinent to the action are included in the play. Contracting time in this way makes it possible to create plays of great impact. People involved in the theatre, therefore, have at their disposal a very powerful means of communication.

But in the theatre we are always treading a delicate balance. We present a very contrived form of life on the stage, yet it must be plausible. We want our audiences to identify with the life on the stage, but we do not want them to become vicariously involved and treat the theatre as a form of escapism.

So we cannot allow them to forget about present realities. But we cannot be wholly limited to the present either because audiences do not want a faithful reproduction of their own experiences. They are looking for something beyond themselves, something that enlightens. Since audiences look to us for new visions, we must be careful that we do not turn our theatres into schools for propaganda.

In theatre, because we communicate directly with an audience,

we have to be very careful about how we present our images for the future. We have the greatest need to free ourselves from the attitudes and values into which we have been socialised. In the theatre world, we believe ourselves to be free of prejudice yet our practices fall in line with the dictates of our culture. In other words, we work in separate areas, in separate groups and we write plays that we limit to our own groups in the mistaken belief that other people are different and our plays cannot have any meaning for them.

As theatre people we should be the last people to fall victim to the idea of difference and separateness because the field in which we work, presents in every facet the idea of wholeness, of harmonious co-operation.

Firstly, the art of the theatre is a blend of all the arts. Music, dance, art and literature are unified into a new form, drama, and are so integrated that it is impossible to isolate them and view them as separate elements.

Then, in working on a production, one works with other human beings, craftsmen, technicians, actors, directors etc., who are all united in working towards a common goal. Though some of the work may seem tedious, all those involved in a production have before them a vision of the finished product which inspires them and they understand and take pride in their contribution.

Next, the artefact that is created has to be sold to the public. So theatre also represents a marriage between art and business. A performance is like any product that has to be marketed; it has to be brought to the notice of the public to encourage people to support it.

Finally, there is the union of the people who have created the

performance with those who have come to see it. In the theatre, the actors and audience interact with each other as they explore together the human experience that is being portrayed.

To be involved in theatre, therefore, is to become involved in a form and processes which keep constantly before our eyes the ideas of wholeness, of co-operation, of reaching out beyond ourselves.

Our work in theatre should be a way of healing ourselves of the fragmentation that we experience in our daily lives, but unfortunately we bring fragmented perceptions to our work and cannot avail ourselves of the healing properties inherent in a theatre performance.

We see that it is easier to work with people in our own separate areas because we can get in touch easily and transport is not a problem. So we tend to take the line of least resistance.

We have to break down this kind of insulation. We must stop allowing the situation to get the better of us. If we are to create images for the future, we have to start working together now. We really can make the most valuable contribution to a future society by showing people working together on our stages. That would be enough to challenge the assumptions we have about differences between people.

In showing people working together on our stages, we must project whole human beings, people who are in control of their actions because they know who they are. Since the prevailing ethos in our society is one of fear and hatred, we must show compassionate human beings overcoming fear and hatred.

We must begin to portray a society in which human beings are not the victims of the warring cultures in their beings, but people in

whom various cultural strands blend harmoniously together. And we must uphold the models who exhibit this in our society. We all know people who have, in their individual capacities, overcome the stresses of this situation and remained whole human beings.

We know people who fight courageously against oppression. We must portray *them* on stage rather than the victims who cannot give hope and direction because they cannot act, only suffer and complain.

We can learn a lesson from the Afrikaners in this regard. In Afrikaans literature, the Afrikaners are shown to be a people who endure the most dreadful hardships but they never give up. They are shown to be people who have the courage and fortitude to overcome great misfortune. They do not portray themselves as helpless victims and their arts have inspired them to a supreme position of power in the land.

The views I have expressed today are based on a future image of South Africa as a society in which people do not despise one another for things as accidental as race. Laws made to ensure justice for all and culture that is a unifying factor, will lead to the flowering of the arts.

Fortunately, processes are in motion to make this possible.

Faith:An
Atheist'sView

2016

Faith

Real experience of faith is at the human level, in daily commerce, in the trust that is required of us to maintain the integrity of community – as we see in something as mundane as obeying traffic rules. But we generally associate the word faith with religion – belief in the metaphysical – God, angels, demons, spirits – metaphorical reflections of human virtue and human vice.

Belief in the supernatural reinforces the need for trust in daily life. And religious rituals, like social traditions, requiring strict conformity, are a means of maintaining community.

Those who understand have no need of metaphoric re-enforcement of trust through ritual and tradition. They understand trust in real terms; they know it is essential that human beings keep faith with one another in order to be human and humane; in order to survive with dignity; in order to progress. Ubuntu – a person is a person through other persons – posits the idea of mutual respect – and for the most part that is what lies at the basis of community.

Ironically, religious faith, reflecting human limitation, repudiates mutual respect except within its own cultural confines. Its insistence on conformity to a partisan set of religious norms and values that arise from a particular culture, confines faith within cultural ghettos and gives prominence to difference rather than the commonality of being human. Each religious enclave avoids engagement with the beliefs and practices of every other – there is such fear of contamination. Such paranoia casts doubt on professions of religious faith.

If one's faith is firm why fear contamination? Fierce repudiation of other configurations of faith, points to the subconscious uncertainty of professions of one's own faith. And the so-called faithful, being at the root uncertain, are really faithless. Their God simply becomes an icon of their culture; not the creator of all humanity. And religion,

instead of reinforcing the trust necessary for human existence, often vitiates it and threatens human survival in the world.

Atheism

After my cousin sent me dates of religious rituals, I informed her that I was an atheist, have been all my life. She wrote back, “I am surprised, but I respect your choice.” When someone says they respect your choice, it generally means a repudiation of that choice, end of discussion; we cannot enter into any kind of consideration of the ‘choice’ – pointing again to the fear of contamination that emanates from subconscious doubt. So I was unable to explain that atheism is not a choice; it is my understanding of existence. To think of atheism in terms of choice is to relegate it to a kind of religion.

The expression of respect for my so-called ‘choice’ is not genuine respect. Real respect would mean a willingness to discuss, explore how our views differ and why they differ. But for believers in general, faith has to be absolute – there can be no questioning – questioning indicates doubt, an abdication of faith. Believers live in fear of uncovering doubt beneath their ‘faith.’

As my faith is in the human condition, it is not a reflection of hope and fear; it is based in reality.

As I am ever ready to subject my understanding to questioning, in the hope of gaining greater insight into the human condition, I make an attempt to open discussion.

I inform my cousin that atheists are people who have examined religious beliefs, understand people’s need for them, but accept the scientific view that existence is a mystery. Pursuing a closed subject, however, I am being insensitive. So there is no response and I proceed alone to clarify my thinking.

The mystery of our existence in an expanding universe is disturbing to humans who are finite in infinity; we have beginnings and ends; the universe, apparently not. Being finite, we make sense of life through the finite, through definition and definition is a declaration of mortality. But we long to be one with the universe – we long for everlasting life. Limited, however, by an understanding that is dependent on the finite, what we long for is not really to be infinite but to be infinitely finite, to perpetuate human life forever. So we created the metaphor of the supernatural – heaven; defined it in anthropomorphic terms to contain it, give it stability, dispel uncertainty and ensure unchanging everlasting life. The metaphor works for the majority.

An atheist, however, does not accept the metaphor; she accepts the reality of arbitrary existence; she sees that it is human beings who create the order of their existence, who ordain their destiny through their creativity.

The first major human innovation was the establishment of community. Humans began to live in community even before they became fully human.

Like other animals, they lived in herds, troops, colonies, to protect themselves against predators.

Once they felt fairly safe, they began to turn their troops into communities, into matrices for the creation of more complex existence on earth. And the growing complexity of human existence is the human response to the randomness of life in an expanding universe.

The mystery of the appearance of life on earth poses a continuous challenge to define existence. Without the uncertainty, the mystery, there would be no incentive to explore, to define the unknown. The

mystery turns human life into an eternal adventure and stimulates endless creativity. The arbitrariness of existence bequeaths on us total freedom to explore and create.

Mirror of Perfection

Exploring, defining and building became our modus operandi. Begun as a means to secure and stabilize existence on earth, it developed into the search for control of all the elements – air, earth, water – and in present times the exploration of space both in fact and fiction. As a result of the order we have imposed on our existence, we now live in communities in which we take security and stability for granted. But community remains volatile – because human beings are volatile, subject both to instinct and reason.

Consequently, a more powerful means, more powerful than a human institution, had to be found to protect us from predators within the community. So we devised an incorruptible system of justice in the abstract, outside the human sphere – a Platonic ideal – God – Mirror of Perfection.

Supernatural existence, being mystical, is a powerful inducement for maintaining stability, security and morality. We fear inordinately that which we cannot see so we create icons to give God a friendly presence and the Devil an evil one. M. Night Shyamalan's film, *The Village*, depicts the human propensity to create fictions based on superstitious fear to keep community intact.

We created the supernatural to protect ourselves from ourselves. Its power derives from its being external to the human condition and human weakness. We endowed upon this external power the ability to grant eternal life – heaven or hell in the hereafter – as reward or punishment for upholding or destroying the integrity of community. And the belief was inculcated that we are all inexorably forging our way to one of these destinations.

Faith, as defined by religion, is belief in the attainability of perfection and eternal life **in the hereafter**. It makes the search for truth in the world redundant. Human attempts to define existence through empirical means, such as Darwin's evidence of evolution, are still repudiated by some. For the believer, life fits into a preordained pattern and human existence is not the product of evolution. It is divinely conceived. God is the Father. When we die, we become spirits and are united with God (or Satan) in metaphysical existence.

Heaven and hell based on human duality, body and mind, led to the conception of dichotomized good and evil. Good was associated with soul; evil with body. In Heaven, the place of goodness, spiritual beings free of bodies, are not contaminated by carnal desires. Our depictions of deities and angels in human form, however, contradict this – reflecting our inability to conceive of intelligent life except in anthropomorphic terms.

Inhabitants of heaven, being pure spirit, represent perfection i.e. order, consistency, stability, certainty, singularity of purpose and goodwill. Hell is the opposite; it is the place for the wicked who remain victims of lust. It is, however, difficult to understand how the wicked, who also lose their bodies in death, are able to feel the physical pain of the torture that they must undergo in hell.

The human creation of Heaven and Hell redirected the fear of death into the fear of committing crimes.

The Violence of Faith

Divine life is a metaphor, a poetic invention, a symbol, a mirror of human perfection; it is not empirical fact. As such it requires constant interpretation by saviours, prophets, popes, priests, sango-mas, shamans, psychics, fortune-tellers.

We devised the metaphor of the supernatural world with its promise

of eternal life for a pragmatic purpose – to ensure survival on earth. But the metaphor has taken on a life of its own and every community has created its own gods or god and heaven and hell.

A symbol, being an abstraction, cannot be proved or disproved. It requires blind faith; it cannot be questioned. Questioning, therefore, becomes sacrilege, a repudiation of faith. Any challenge, even the slightest, such as the challenge to symbolic items – bread and wine, icons, hijab – is construed as sacrilege and leads to violent reaction – ostracism, excommunication, division, fatwa, holy war. This bellicose disposition of the fanatical believer arises from his inability to give concrete evidence of the supernatural; so he has to knock you over the head to convince you or he has to annihilate you. The metaphor is thus turned into a fetish protected by superstitious fear.

For the believer, perfection as it is envisioned in Heaven, is a beacon for good behaviour. For the atheist, perfection, envisioned as an abstract ideal, is a beacon for continuous human exploration to advance life on earth.

The atheist's faith is in reason and human endeavour; she, believes in the search for perfection in real circumstances, even though it is a never-ending search – perfection being unattainable.

But that is what makes progress possible. The search for perfection leads to continuous change and enhancement of life as we gain more knowledge, more understanding. Human beings, therefore, are on a perpetual voyage of discovery, a life-long adventure, in pursuit of the expanding meaning of existence in an expanding universe.

For each of us, the adventure lasts only as long as our individual lives. Death brings it to an end. There is nothing more. So atheists know that they must make the most of the time they have on earth. Life, being limited, is very precious; it makes sense not to waste it.

[In two Hollywood films, *The City of Angels* and *Meet Joe Black*, the traditional religious view is reversed. The films present angels who choose to return to physical life on earth and not remain in spiritual stultification. As they are Hollywood films, of course, the adventure of life on earth means sex – but then sex does symbolise human creativity.]

Reality

Belief in the metaphor means viewing life through the metaphysical mirror and taking its reflection for reality. The atheist abandons the reflection in favour of reality. She looks squarely at human existence and finds the meaning of life in human endeavour.

To “love thy neighbour as thy self” read as a metaphor is to ensure life in the hereafter; but in reality it expresses a pragmatic need to work together to build community – the catalyst for the development and progress of the individuals who comprise it. The metaphor, the metaphysical source of control, places ultimate accountability for human acts outside the human sphere.

So instead of examining the nature of human actions in terms of their impact on human society, they are translated into metaphysical terms of good and evil and deflect understanding from the human condition. Acts of destruction and violation seen as acts against God are sacrilege. For the believer, they are execrable and punishable by death.

For the atheist, however, God is an abstraction for community, so all crimes are crimes against humanity. Community is the source of our being and identity; crime, therefore, is not simply an attack on another, it is an attack on the condition of being. As such, it is also self-destructive, para-suicidal. We created community for our survival so the responsibility of preserving community is ours; we are accountable to ourselves not to a metaphorical being.

The only reality in which we operate, is in the world that we occupy. We have theories about how it came about but we have no absolute proof of its origin or purpose. Against this uncertainty, we have furnished our world with all kinds of institutions, religious, social, political, economic, artistic, scientific, technological, to give us a sense of stability. Our establishment of stability, the very bricks and mortar of the home we have created, is based entirely on human endeavour.

But human nature being what it is, despite theism, despite atheism, we have given rise to societies in which the powerful prey upon the powerless. Neither the metaphor nor rational understanding has been able to eradicate harmful exploitation. Human beings are imperfect, so the striving for moral perfection, both theistic and atheistic, remains in the domain of the metaphor. For theists it is attainable in heaven; for atheists it is an unattainable ideal towards which we strive in order to maintain our humanity.

Faith in human endeavour

When John F Kennedy promised a man on the moon by the end of the 1960s, he was expressing his faith in human endeavour. All our understanding of existence in the universe has come about through human endeavour, through all philosophers, artists, scientists, technologists, who search for ways of overcoming ignorance; ways of extending the boundaries of human understanding and human functioning.

They work within the human construction of systems searching, always searching, for new and better ways of understanding and organising our lives. They have superlative powers of observation that allow them to look at systems, restructure them and configure new meanings that lead us into more advanced understandings and ways of living. Because they are always challenging accepted conventions and shaking us out of traditional understandings, they

are often seen as upstarts until we eventually begin to understand what they offer us.

It is their ability to discover the shortcomings of the ways in which we organize our lives and to find solutions that allow us to continue to advance.

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Jigsaw

while others
scuttle about
creating
the pieces
of finite
being
I sit
sorting out
the puzzle
of my life
to find
the meaning
of my finiteness
against endless
infinity