DURBAN DIALOGUES DISSECTED

An Analysis of Ashwin Singh's Plays

Edited by Felicity Hand

List of Abbreviations

The following abbreviations are used throughout the text for quotations from Ashwin Singh's plays.

H	<i>To House</i>
SS	<i>Spice 'n' Stuff</i>
Sh	<i>Shooting</i>
RL	<i>Reoca Light</i>
D	<i>Duped</i>
BBB	<i>Beyond the Big Bangs</i>
Sw	<i>Swing</i>
IG	<i>Into the Grey</i>

Note on Terminology

We have chosen not to unify the authors' use of the term *black* so readers are encouraged to think beyond straightforward definitions. Each author uses the term in his or her own way and spells it with either a capital B or a small letter b. Likewise, authors have opted for capital or lower case letters for other ethnicities, such as white or coloured, in accordance with their specific purpose.

'The Cartography of Struggle' in South African Theatre, with Particular Reference to *Reoca Light* by Ashwin Singh

Betty Govinden

Literature as a Mirror to Society

If literature holds up a mirror to society, nowhere is this truer than in South Africa. South African literature, from colonial times, and especially through the apartheid era, has shown up the society to itself. The watershed events of South African history after 1948, when the National Party came into power - the Sharpeville Massacre in 1961, the Soweto Riots in 1976, and Steve Biko's assassination in 1977, to name a few - all served, especially, to influence the output of literary writings in different genres, and also determine the direction of the writings.

South African theatre has particularly played this critically reflective role in the context of our history. The key plays in South African theatre have all zeroed in on living under apartheid - Fugard's *Blood Knot* (1961) and *Boesman and Lena* (1969), *Woza Albert* (1983) by Mbongeni Ngema, Percy Mtwa and Barney Simon, and Fugard, John Kani and Winston Ntshona's *Sizwe Bansi is Dead* (1972), to quote a few well-known examples.

Key Plays in Indian South African Theatre

Indian South African writing in general, and drama in particular, has also highlighted life and living in South Africa, with particular attention to the specificities of separate living, culture, language, histories, in their relationships in the broader society. An intrinsic part of Black writing and the arts in general, it has aimed at inclusivity, featuring various configurations of relationships among racial groups, and exploring a variety of themes pertinent to apartheid living.

In his excellent critical study of drama in India and the Indian diaspora, Neilesh Bose (2009) has examined a cross-section of plays across continents. Important plays in the tradition of Indian South African theatre, noted by Bose, are *The Lahnee's Pleasure* (1972), by Ronnie Govender [a play about racial and class discrimination, and white privilege], *Working Class Hero* (1970s), by Kessie Govender, where we see the intersection of class and race, and Kriben Pillay's *Waiting for Muruga* (1990), which also depicts similar themes. Bose astutely highlights a variety of aesthetic, ideological and political considerations that the plays dramatise.

There are also many plays, since the mid-1960's, by Black Consciousness playwrights such as Sam Moodley, Strini Moodley, Saths Cooper, Asha Moodley, Benjy Francis, and Mafika Gwala, which have had a major impact on the way South African society has been portrayed and its politics contested (see Moodley, 2018).

"Indian" in South Africa

Plays in South Africa invariably mirror a land "burdened by race", to use the title of Mohamed Adhikari's book on coloured identities in Southern Africa (2009). The racialisation of people in South Africa, and the demarcation of "population groups" is a long and convoluted story. apartheid legislation designated four groups – Whites, Africans, Coloureds and Indians - but the vexed anomalies of such a racial classification have been all too evident over the years. For example, there has been much contestation over the question of "Indian" identity in South Africa, and of Coloured, for that matter. Shireen Hassim has pointed out that one common way of looking at Indians and Coloureds "is to place them in an in-between space" (Hassim, 2019:9). However, as she argues, looking at the work of someone like Fatima Meer, Indians in South Africa, as with other Black groups, were not necessarily dogged by feelings of liminality (Hassim, 2019:10).

Plays in South Africa depict the pervasive racialised attitudes and behaviours on a broad spectrum, from the conservative to the radical. While apartheid tended to homogenise groups and emphasise difference, many of the plays are impelled by a robust political will to overcome apartheid, and strong impulses to focus on the goals of common citizenship.

Theatre – as a Political Space for Critical Exchange

In his analysis of Gibson Kente's plays, Rolf Solberg, the Norwegian critic, well-versed in South African Black theatre, argues that it is important to remember that Black Consciousness had its beginnings in intellectual circles, among students and academics, and that it took some time for strategies and modes of expression to catch on in the streets. He states that, consequently, and referring in particular to Matsemala Manaka's plays, "township audiences were not sufficiently attuned to the argumentative, highly politicised mode of Black Consciousness theatre" (Solberg, 2011: 53).

Kente, for his part, is criticised for his leading characters coming across as a little "moralistic, theatrically 'indigestible', inclined to sermonise" (Solberg, 2011:25), and somewhat "cerebral". I do not agree with this point of view and have found, from my personal experience, being a regular theatre-goer for decades, that

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South African plays, in a variety of forms and shapes, have generated a healthy debate across the social spectrum. And the audiences, particularly attuned to a history of mass gatherings and political speeches, warm to the “speeches” that generally tend to be an important part of the texture of our plays.

In South Africa, generally speaking, going to the theatre is not a casual outing, to pass the time, or to search for entertainment. It is an act of protest and of solidarity - a political act, an intellectual exercise. Plays tacitly open up, as with cultural studies in general, “a discourse about publics and new intellectual spaces” (see Nuttall & Michael, 2000:14). As far as plays go, in particular, South Africans place great value on seeing portrayals on stage of the realities of living in South Africa – our histories, dilemmas and challenges, hopes and fears, contradictions.

There is much prompting, by the plays themselves, to extend the analyses and critique, to engage in debate about the plays’ messages, and to perpetually re-focus the angle of vision presented on past and current political and social realities. This is true of most South African plays, and the plays of Indian South African writers are no exception. Decades ago, Black Consciousness activist, and former Robben Islander, Saths Cooper, produced *Antigone* in Durban, and literally suspended the play in mid-stream, to engage in a direct and open debate with the audience. The Greek play was also used by Athol Fugard, as a play-within-a play, in *The Island* (1973). In Cooper’s production, the spontaneous, unscripted exchange was part of the performance. Predictably, the discussion was steered towards a consideration of confrontation with the state – a key issue which the Sophocles play highlights – and there was ready participation from the audience, once they realised what was happening.

Do the plays change anything? They certainly increase the level of debate, and of self-reflection. There is usually much discussion and debate around the plays that are on the circuit, both in public and private spaces. I would argue that this certainly changes perceptions and opinions, and the reflections and critique of South African society generated by the plays influence how we think and how we live. Presciently, in Fugard’s play, *The Coat* (1977), a character says: “We want to use theatre. For what ... ? Some of us say to understand the world we live in, but we also boast a few idealists who think that theatre might have something to do with changing it” (Gray, 1990:53).

Post-apartheid Theatre

This tendency – of turning the gaze inwards - has continued into the post-apartheid era, as one of the most important aspects of living in South Africa is trying to understand our history, to deal with its enduring effects, particularly its racism and consequent inequities in our present lived contexts, in our striving to become a truly non-racial, democratic nation. Interestingly, South Africa is

described as “a recited society”, to use de Certeau’s (1984:186) words, and this has increased exponentially since 1994, with radio talk shows, Letters to the Editor, social media, book launches, and stand-up comedy, as well as informal conversations across dinner tables in South Africa, being among the familiar spaces in which the current society is dissected and contested relentlessly. Arjun Appadurai has commented on the role of social media, for one, on everyday social life and on the imagination itself (Appadurai 1996; In Nuttall & Michael 2000:15). Indeed, this very appearance of a post-apartheid pluralism shows how far we are from a shared utopia that was dreamed of during the dark days of apartheid (Nuttall & Michael, 2000:54). Part of the process of endemic scrutiny, as before, is through literary writing, and dramatic performance in the theatre, in the attempt to lay bare, in various configurations, the polemics of our context.

Ashwin Singh's Plays

This is where Durban playwright Ashwin Singh’s plays insert themselves, as they reflect South African realities, and generate discussion and reflection and debate on the past as well as the present. While we have had many retrospectives of plays since 1994, which have appeal for their recalling of the bad old days of apartheid now being received and pondered over in a different, changed moment, Singh’s plays are relatively new. They speak to our contemporary situation, in their scrutiny of South African society, at the same time that they recall the old histories. In this respect a good example in Singh’s oeuvre is the play *Reoca Light*.

Reoca Light - Background

Reoca Light, which has one person playing multiple roles, covers a wide spectrum of aspects and issues. It is set in Reoca, in Durban, described as “the People’s City”, and as sub-Saharan Africa’s largest port city (see Maylam and Edwards, 1996). Reoca sounds like a version of Avoca, an actual suburb in Durban, which was developed for Indians during the apartheid era when “Group Areas” legislation was in operation and where, incidentally, Singh himself lives. The townships in Durban – Lamontville, Cato Manor, Wentworth, Chatsworth, Umlazi, KwaMashu, Inanda, and Clermont – dotted around the city - are a defining part of the spatial planning of the apartheid past. Reoca is a fictional, imagined place, created by Singh, but it is an accurate representation of the structure, aesthetics, people and events of one of the Indian townships designed by the apartheid regime.

If Reoca was *territorialised* in a certain way during apartheid, with particular ethnic significations, it is now being *reterritorialised* in diverse ways, as Singh shows so adeptly, as the new collides with the old in the same physical space. Singh renders this social space as a microcosm of South Africa. Sean Field, Meyer and Swanson

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(2007: back cover) have drawn attention to the fact that cities are more than just “buildings and roads – they are also constructed through the popular imagination and spaces of representation”. And as John Clement Ball observes: “It has been said that a city is a text – one that can, like a novel or film, be read for its stories and histories, for the ideologies it reflects and the power relations it inscribes” (Ball, 1996: 9). This description, about London, is, arguably, apt here as well. The play, *Reoca Light*, is set against the background of Indian Indenture, and combines this history from over 150 years ago, to events in the past decades before 1994, and into the present time.

The play begins with Areendum Rastogi, centre stage, an indentured labourer in the canefields of Natal around the 1870s. His opening speech, to the faint strains of Indian music, alludes to the sparse, peasant fare of their lives, relations with his white employer to whom he and his wife, Pallavi, are indentured, and his ultimate dreams of creating a better life for himself by becoming a store owner. Merely ten years since the arrival of his fellow indentured Indians to Natal, Rastogi is quite categorical that returning to India is not an option: “We can’t go back to India, Biswas. This is our home” (RL 164).

Against this epigraph, Rastogi’s great, great grand-son, Sunil, a fourth-generation family member, is inside his father’s shop, at the present time, in conversation with a reporter, who has come in search of stories of the past. It is evident that Rastogi’s dream of owning his own store had been realised. The irony, of course, is that this position is now seen as being low on the social ladder by some of his contemporaries, and Sunil is taunted for this: “My father is an engineer. Your father is just a shopkeeper” (RL 169). However, there have been recent attacks on the shop, and the recounting of the incidents to the reporter gives Sunil a chance to remember, to recall the past from different angles. We are soon aware of the intersections of histories and experiences in this smorgasbord of apartheid and post-apartheid life.

Sunil tells the story behind the store and, along the way, of the three men who most influenced his life (RL 168). One is Themba Dlamini, an African gardener, with whom a young impressionable Sunil develops a close bond. Themba brings with him his rich world of ancient myths and legends, his distinctive cuisine, and his self-taught skills, such as playing cricket at a time when South African national sports teams excluded Blacks. One sees the joyful “intimacy of strangers”, to use the title of Judith Coullie’s book (2001). These are people juxtaposed in the same space, building community naturally and spontaneously beyond the artificial barriers of class and race, age and aspiration. This was after Themba was left homeless, having had an unfortunate experience in Reoca, where another couple, Mr and Mrs Singh, wrongly accused him of stealing.

The other persons with whom Sunil had a close connection are his Uncle Johnny and his Dad. And the stories he recounts around them show infidelities and

indiscretions; but worse than this, is the endurance of patterns of prejudice around religion, language differences and class, within groups, and now practised by some of the younger generation. Any resistance is met with disapproval: “You are interfering with the order of things, little man. This is the way of life in Reoca. A tradition and value system that spans generations” (RL 179).

And the rest of the play, through the storytelling, is an attempt to show the different challenges, vicissitudes, triumphs, betrayals, and acts of resilience of Rastogi’s descendants and their compatriots, locked in love and locked in combat, learning to live in the world of Reoca - an allotment that can be as restricting or as expansive as you deem it to be. Sunil had written many of these stories already – as memory of the past is valued - and they now gradually unfurl, prompted as he is by the news reporter. And as the play proceeds, we see one story nesting in an earlier story, as with a Russian doll. All in all, we see the connected and competing stories in a complex web of entanglement, as the play dramatizes many of the key issues of living in post-apartheid South Africa.

One Person - Multiple Roles

In *Reoca Light*, the whole play is performed by one person, taking on and switching to different roles. This has great dramatic effect, with the versatility of the actor coming to the fore, and the action and plot of the play being advanced by the story-telling and through inference. The discursive undertones of this technique are worth considering. After all, we are all performing identities, as Judith Butler (1990) has argued in relation to gender. Arguably, this dramatic device suggests the arbitrariness, fluidity and elasticity of identities; yet, ironically, rigid social arrangements and oppressive social engineering are built on assumptions of fixed identities, as they were in apartheid. Further, in my opinion, this feature of the play has the effect of extended and shared remembering, through story-telling, as the sole actor gets under the skin of a variety of persons and identities, inhabits different lives, and presents shared histories and vignettes from diverse, individual vantage points. Shantal Singh (2013:19) points out that “*Reoca Light* is perhaps Singh’s best tribute to the art of traditional story-telling.”

What does it mean to inhabit another body? What does it mean to cross barriers and recall the memories of others in a country that gave us separate histories, separate memories? It is instructive to understand different identities, especially in a country where identity was prescribed and fixed in a deterministic way, and all boundary crossings were forbidden by apartheid law. What we have, at the end, from one body - but different voices - are intricate, and competing interpretations and narrations of experiences, from diverse perspectives and vantage points; all part of the warp and weft of the same polyphonic history, that is refracted in *Reoca Light*.

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This dramatic device also has the effect of presenting a history from below, of portraying the ordinary, or subaltern voice, as Njabulo Ndebele has encouraged (1986), rather than the grand narratives of South African history. As Ndebele has observed: "[t]he history of Black South African Literature has largely been the history of the representation of spectacle... It is no wonder then, that the Black writer, sometimes a direct victim, sometimes a spectator, should have his imagination almost totally engaged by the spectacle before him" (1986:143).

In *Reoca Light*, Singh writes of the everyday and immediate, of what happens in the backyard of history. If there was a struggle, it was not the grand narrative of the Liberation Struggle as it is normally recounted. Support for it, of course, is given, if tangentially, surreptitiously, when, in the play, an activist is granted refuge from the apartheid police; but more than this, it is about the ordinary, everyday struggles to survive, to overcome daily indignities, and to defeat those who inflict them.

A Broad Discursive Landscape

It is clear that Singh's plays in general, and *Reoca Light* in particular, then, highlight some of the general discourses in South African cultural critique. Implicit in the play is a meshwork of discourses around entanglement, diaspora, memory, home and belonging, the politics of identity, among others. These are all, incidentally, quite familiar in critical discursive work in South Africa and beyond, and I consider a few here. I don't think that Singh himself is writing to any critical check-list. He is, I imagine, rather, working intuitively and rationally, from observation, experience and reflection; but it is quite instructive to see the connections and linkages here, and the way the same themes emerge in South African writings from different contexts and nodes of experiences.

Entanglement

Reoca, in *Reoca Light*, may be described, principally, as a crossroads, a place of interweaving, of entanglement. Sarah Nuttall states that, ironically, whether we acknowledge it or not, we are all – different race groups, different individuals – co-existing in a space of entanglement. She draws attention to the notion of "terrains of mutuality", and expounds on our historical, temporal, genetic and racial entanglement (Nuttall, 2009:6). This space of entanglement, prompts one to think of various possibilities in dealing with the realities of our divided history and the challenges towards reconciliation and integration. J. U. Jacobs, in his book, *Diaspora and Identity in South African Fiction* (2015), focussing on South African writers and critics, points out that entanglement is seen as a means by which "to draw into our analyses those sites in which what was once thought of as

separate – identities, spaces, histories – come together or find points of intersection in unexpected ways” (Nuttall, 2009:11; Jacobs, 2016:3). In *Reoca Light*, we see the characters in various configurations of entanglement, both enabling and disabling. Some, of course, are better able than others to invoke the possibilities for community, and to seek ways to reconcile differences wrought by history.

A Sense of History

For all the characters, in different ways, there is a sense of history, an inescapable sense of the past. Here, in this play, the background history is of Indian indenture and of apartheid. And it is important to see this as part of the South African grand narrative. The play starts with the assertion of roots in indentured history, of a past that is lived with and recounted daily, and this provides the backdrop of the play, framing the action as it does.

Joan Chittister, a Benedictine nun, based in the United States, says that the past is both strange and interesting. “... The past is never really past ... we live with it every minute of every day of our lives” (Chittister & Williams, 2011: Audio recording). And this is certainly true of the way indenture lives on in the psyche and memory of Indians in South Africa, as a compelling and inescapable residue. It is well-known now that traumatic historical events continue to have a lasting imprint, long after they have occurred, on those connected to them, and on their descendants. This is certainly true of slavery, indenture and the Holocaust, among other similar events. The spectre of the occurrence continues to constitute a “haunting capital”, to use the title of Hershini Bhana Young’s book (2006), This is evident quite starkly in the play, *Reoca Light*, where the history of indenture provides an essential backdrop, and is remembered and recounted, right up to the present time, compounded by other pressing contemporary vicissitudes that take centre stage.

Indentured labourers came to South Africa from 1860 to 1911, from the north and south of India. A total of 384 ships came from Madras and Calcutta, the main departure ports. In the 1870s and 1880s the Passenger Indians travelled from India, mainly from Gujarat, and sought business opportunities in the wake of the labourers’ arrival. Gandhi was a significant arrival during this time, and lived in South Africa for 21 years, leaving a lasting legacy of civil disobedience, which defined the political struggles against apartheid during the 20th Century. Avoca, which mirrors *Reoca* in the play, is not too far from the Phoenix Settlement, where Gandhi’s Ashram was established. It is a common feature of South African life to commemorate various national events, and the arrival of indentured Indians figures among them.

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Diaspora

Against the background of Indian indenture, and attempts to adapt to a strange environment, individual lives took different trajectories. Out of the experiences of migration, and relocation from a homeland, for example, Indian, African, Chinese, among others, at different points in history a particular discursive diaspora poetics has emerged. This poetics of dislocation and displacement, sometimes referred to as *the diasporic imaginary* (Mishra, 2007), is reflected in the literature and arts of diasporas. Indian Diaspora literature has emerged from the broad historical forces of indenture, but also from particular local realities, and this is particularly evident in South African literature and the arts. This literature has emerged spontaneously on the soil of the adopted homeland, generally focussing on local issues, rather than on writing back to the homeland. This is certainly true of Indian South African literature, in particular, as I argue in my book, *Sister Outsiders* (see Govinden 2008), where the issues of living under apartheid are of all-consuming concern.

Reoca Light is a good example here, as are the other plays mentioned above. Singh's writings, as with diasporic and immigrant writing everywhere, are invariably about the politics of home and of identity, of a sense of belonging, exacerbated in South Africa with its past segregation laws. But, interestingly, in *Reoca Light* there is another layer of diasporic, or dispersed, living – within post-apartheid South Africa itself. It is also an attempt to critique and transcend the rigid compartmentalised living of the apartheid era:

You know it's funny, my parents, like so many Indians, are moving to a formerly white suburb. But the other day, I saw a white couple moving into Reoca. And two black families moved here last year. Now this side is that side; our side is their side; their side is everybody's side. There are no boundaries. (RL 185)

A Time of Memory

Invariably, then, and as alluded to already, the present period becomes a time of memory, where the past is recounted, from different vantage points, to understand the present. Remembering the apartheid past, for example, shows the horrors of segregation: [Zaakir, an activist, tells Sunil in 1988] "One day you'll play chess with a grandmaster. And you won't play cricket behind your shop. Unless you want to. You will be playing cricket at The Wanderers" (RL 167).

The apartheid past, as depicted in the play, is also about the world of informers - "I don't know to this day who had ratted him out" (RL 167) - and of collaborators, like Pappa Singh, who supported the Tricameral Parliament (RL 168). As Hannah Arendt has observed, controversially, in *Eichmann in Jerusalem*, the Holocaust would not have been possible without the help of the Jewish councils

(see Gessen, 2018: 6). In *Reoca Light* we see the indignity encountered by domestic employees, their unfair dismissal, and the violation of their fundamental rights. There was the unconscionable dismissal of Themba by the Singhs, referred to earlier, with Themba immediately suspected of stealing. The racial prejudice of yesteryear is palpable.

Remembering also contributes to re-membering, of stitching together, and repairing. Ngugi states in *Re-membering Africa* (2009) that much of the struggle in Africa has been about overcoming destruction and dispossession and building anew. Indeed in *Reoca Light*, remembering leads to re-membering and restoration, through redemption, as hope is reaffirmed.

Place

All the impulses outlined so far are played out in a place, this being a defining feature of writing in South Africa in general, as mentioned earlier, and of *Reoca Light*, in particular. Writers are conscious of place as the theatre of living in South Africa, each with a similar and different value in our collective memory, our collective psyche, our history, both local or national. Place, in South African writing is indeed where a variety of cultures and histories are simultaneously affirmed and subverted, and identities made and unmade. Indeed, all the issues around freedom, identity, morality, difference are played out in Singh's play from different vantage points² in the single place called Reoca. Reoca, like so many places in apartheid South Africa, is both the place of difference, and also the place where affinities are sought or created. Similarly, the play, *At the Edge*, by Ronnie Govender (1996)³, depicts Cato Manor in its diversity, decades ago, while Durban's Casbah, its surface and its underbelly, comes alive in its "infinite variety", in the novel *The Lotus People*, by Aziz Hassim (2002). Through these places, and what they symbolise, and through writings on these places in South Africa, we have all lived in Reoca, or Cato Manor, or the Casbah - or Sophiatown or District Six, or Soweto for that matter - and we all identify with the reality of life in these places. Such identification, evoked by drama that is created from these spaces, becomes a political act.

Singh, through his various plays, maps out this "cartography of struggle"⁴, implicitly showing the relationality between place and struggle, and the variegated drama of living in South Africa, in all its hopes and possibilities, traversing this landscape both physically and emotionally and mentally, and identifying with it closely. Among his other plays, *Spice 'N Stuff* is set in Grey Street, a trading district

2 See Worden, 1995

3 The date corresponds to the publication of the collection of short stories *At the Edge and Other Cato Manor Stories*, 1996. Pretoria: Manx

4 See Alvarez. 2018

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in the city of Durban. *Duped* is set in the Airship Equity and the Durban CBD. *To House* is set in Oaklands, a middle-class suburb in the city of Durban and *Beyond the Big Bangs* in a middle-class suburb in Durban North.

The places in these plays have socio-historical significance; they are, in their different ways, part of the economy of injustice, as they denote segregated living, or are the site of apartheid atrocities, or global injustice. They are also the theatre of inter-group living, with all its tensions and striving and struggle for camaraderie and community. Singh, and the characters in his plays, are also rooted in these places - this is where they belong. This is who they are. Place defines them. This is where they find their identity. And it is an identity in a collective space, in apartheid's separate spaces, and in a longing to transcend the confines of these spaces.

This impassioned longing is evident in this excerpt from Antjie Krog's poem, "Country of Grief and Grace", in her collection, *Down to my Last Skin - Poems* (Krog, 2000)

*between you and me
how desperately
how it aches
how desperately it aches between you and me
how long does it take
for a voice
to reach another
in this country held bleeding between us...*

Space

Space, alongside place, is an important denominator in South African writings. Where, in a place, do things mainly happen? In South African Black writing these spaces may include hostels, yards, streets, shebeens, trade union halls - spaces that were directly linked to the realities of apartheid living (Sitas, 2015:82). These spaces, otherwise nondescript spaces, become spaces of consequence. In *Reoca Light*, the hut behind the shop is the unlikely space where so much of the drama takes place. The hut is where the family began informal trading, and they kept the hut even after they acquired the shop.

This hut began as their little shop, at the back of their home, where they sold their murkoos and sweets, to augment their income. All Sunil's great, great grandfather managed was a little stand:

He built a little stand and sold his food from there. Chappaties, mielie-meal roti, all kinds of fritters. He sold to his people. And to his oppressors. He never got the shop he wanted. But he carried on anyway. (RL185)

Sunil recalls that they once hid one of the liberation activists, Zaakir Ally, in the hut, and that he was there when the police raided the place. It was the space where he spent precious time with the activist, who became his friend, listening to his stories, or learning to play chess. Paradoxically, this very space, hidden from view, is the centre of much of the action. The hut was the place where Sunil enjoyed close camaraderie with Themba, sharing in his stories of his village. "The hut where I savoured my mother's murkoos, was now filled with the delicious smells of sausage and pap. And after supper Themba would tell me stories of his village" (RL171). This is something of the light of Reoca, in an otherwise dark world.

The hut is also the place for the secret rendezvous for star-crossed lovers, forbidden by prejudice from being together. But the hut becomes a forbidden space when, one day, Sunil discovers his father in the arms of Mrs Singh, from Reoca. Sunil is scandalised, and his father, repentant, wants to burn down the hut. But Sunil prevents this from happening: "Don't burn it. Let it stand. I'll always cherish the other things that happened in there. So much of my life story resides there" (RL 183). Indeed, our past is variegated and entangled, comprising the good and the bad.

Conclusion

Scene 8, which acts as the epilogue, of *Reoca Light* ends in the same spirit as the epigraph. A hundred and fifty years ago, it was hope that galvanised the newly-arrived. Now, in the present time, it is hope that is claimed, and hope that drives them on. Structurally and thematically, across the span of time and consequence, there is unity in the play. Areendum Rastogi is back, centre stage.

How can you say your life has meant nothing, Biswas? What is your legacy? I'll tell you what. A legacy of hope ... We must shout to the world – I, Areendum, with my wife Pallavi, and my friend Biswas, came to this unknown land. We were fooled by selfish, savage people. They tried to make us forget who we were. But we didn't forget. We survived. We grew. We dreamed. And we did something. This is our home. (RL 185-6)

Life has come full circle, and it is time for an intermission.

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