

THAMBI NAIDOO AND HIS FAMILY

**Four Generations in the Heroic Struggle for Freedom
in South Africa**

E. S. REDDY

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[This is a revised and somewhat condensed version of a pamphlet which was published on the eve of the visit of Mrs. Ama Naidoo and Ms. Shanti Naidoo to India in October 1988 on the invitation of the Government of India.]

PRESIDENT REPUBLIC OF INDIA

FOREWORD

The very first biography of Mahatma Gandhi was published in 1909, when he was still an Attorney in Durban, South Africa.

The author of *M.K. Gandhi: An Indian Patriot in South Africa* was a British-born priest, the Rev. Joseph Doke. Among the many remarkable things about his subject that captivated Doke was Gandhiji's ability to weld together the different sectors of Indian society. Doke narrates, in the book, a tell-tale episode of the Passive Resistance Movement in South Africa:

When "the old offender," Mr. Thambi Naidoo, the Tamil leader, was sent to prison for the third time, to do 'hard labour' for a fortnight, Mr. Gandhi suggested that we should visit the sick wife together. I assented gladly. On our way, we were joined by the Moulvie and the Imam of the Mosque, together with a Jewish gentleman. It was a curious assembly, which gathered to comfort the little Hindu woman in her home - two Mohammedans, a Hindu, a Jew, and a Christian. And there she stood, her eldest boy supporting her, and the tears trickling between her fingers. She was within a few days of the sufferings of motherhood. After we had bent together in prayer, the Moulvie spoke a few words of comfort in Urdu and we each followed, saying what we could in our own way to give her cheer. It was one of the many glimpses, which we have lately had of that divine love, which mocks at boundaries of creed and limits of race or colour. It was a vision of Mr. Gandhi's ideal.

Written seven decades after Doke's biography of the Mahatma, this little booklet by Mr. E.S. Reddy brings up the story of Thambi Naidoo and his remarkable family to contemporary times. And as any reader of these pages will discover, Mr. Reddy has done so with sensitivity and, in the process, has served a most useful purpose. He has enabled us to see that *all* members of the Naidoo family through *three generations* of it have not only continued the family's struggle begun by Thambi Naidoo but have done so in circumstances of continuously escalating hardship.

As the Pretoria regime hardens with each passing day, the canvas of the struggle in South Africa widens. Black and 'Coloured' today face not just the injustices, which Gandhiji and Thambi Naidoo were witness to, but an escalation of vicious instruments of oppression. Police brutalities break all records. Teargas, bullets crowd the sky. The old, the infirm, women and even children are not being spared. Jails overflow; comment is suppressed. And yet, the spirit of freedom lives on. It cannot be silenced or imprisoned. Mr. Reddy has rendered a most

noble service to contemporary historiography by bringing to life the moving saga of three generations of this family, which has willingly faced trials and torture and the anguish of prolonged separation from near and dear ones and has steadfastly refused to give up its commitment to human liberty. It has demonstrated the solidarity of the Indian community with the cause of the people of South Africa. The Naidoo family has offered its unconcealed support to Nelson and Winnie Mandela and to the cadres fighting for freedom. In doing so, it has shown a valuable example of the unity, which the movement needs.

The need for unity and determination on the part of *all* the people of South Africa has never been greater than it is today. Nor has it ever been so important for us in India to understand the daily, hourly torment of our brethren there. While the struggle for our own independence culminated in success forty years ago, the struggle in South Africa, which was umbilically connected to ours, is still on. It becomes our duty to attune our thoughts to that epic crusade.

As bravery, in its third and fourth generations, resolutely meets oppression in its third and fourth generations in South Africa, let us respond to the challenge, spontaneously and unreservedly. Let us resolve to work for the millennium, which in Doke's words "mocks at boundaries of creed and limits of race and colour." We can derive strength and confidence from the unforgettable lines of the poet:

*Freedom's battle once begun,
Bequeathed from bleeding sire to son,
Though baffled oft, is ever won.*

New Delhi,
January 25, 1988

R. VENKATARAMAN

**DEDICATED
TO
AMA NAIDOO**

Thambi Naidoo and his wife Veeramal played a heroic role in the *Satyagraha* movement led by Gandhiji in South Africa from 1906 to 1914. Their son, Narainswamy, returned to South Africa after “apprenticeship” under Gandhiji in the Indian national movement in the 1930s. He and his wife, Manonmoney (Ama), were in the front ranks of the militant struggles of the Indian community for the next two decades and helped build an alliance with the African majority for liberation from racist tyranny. Their five children, inspired by their example, joined the resistance and suffered persecution and torture as the racist Pretoria regime became ever more brutal.

Shanti, the eldest was imprisoned for over a year without access to the family or lawyers and interrogated for five days and nights without sleep. Indres, the eldest son, was brought home by the police, bleeding from a bullet wound, for a search of the flat, and then spent ten years in prison. Murthie, the next, was twice detained *incommunicado* and has been under restrictions for two decades. Ramnie was knocked down by the police, when she was only nine, for distributing leaflets. Prema, the youngest son, was tortured and imprisoned for over a year in 1982-83 and detained again in 1985; he is now in hiding.

Again and again, Ama had to suffer the anguish of a mother. But she has remained an inspiration and source of strength, proclaiming that with the spirit imbued from their parents, the children could be nothing else. She has kept her faith that she will live to see the day when all South Africans will live as one family.

THE NAIDOO FAMILY

Thambi Naidoo and Veeramal

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Narainswamy (Naran) and Manonmoney (Amma)

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Shantivathie -Indres- Mithrasagran- Padmavathie – Premanathan
(Murthie) (Mrs. Ramnie
Dinat)

THE LEGACY OF GANDHIJI

In the middle of the last century, the White settlers in South Africa appealed to the Government of India to allow the importation of labour from India to develop the sugar, coffee and cotton plantations in Natal. Workers were recruited, especially from Tamil Nadu, under five-year indenture contracts, with promises of security and land at the end of the term. The first boatload of Indian workers and artisans arrived in Durban in November, 1860.

Working under harsh conditions, they built the economy of Natal and the coast was turned into one of the most prosperous parts of South Africa. They not only worked on the plantations, but helped develop railways and coal mines; and some moved on to the Transvaal.

After the completion of indenture, some workers went into market gardening and produced a great variety of vegetables and fruit. Indian traders and accountants, mainly from Gujarat, followed the Indian workers.

By the 1880's, the White settlers found that Indians had become strong competitors in agriculture and trade. They began moves to harass, humiliate and expel the "free" Indians.

Mahatma Gandhi arrived in South Africa in 1893 and soon became involved in assisting the Indians to defend their rights and their honour.

Numerous appeals and petitions, deputations to local authorities and to the Imperial Government in London failed to stop the harassment and betrayal of promises. In 1906, when the provincial government of the Transvaal passed an ordinance for the registration of Indians, with humiliating restrictions on them, Gandhiji decided that there was no choice but to defy the law. He helped organise the Indians - speaking many languages and professing several faiths - to launch non-violent resistance (*Satyagraha*) for their rights and for the honour of India.

Thousands of Indians went to jail and suffered violence, in the long struggle from 1906 to 1914, when a compromise settlement - the Smuts-Gandhi agreement - was reached. Gandhiji returned to India as a *Mahatma*.

The struggle in South Africa had to be resumed by the next generation as the racist regime did not end the harassment and humiliation of the Indians. In the course of time, the Indian community joined with the indigenous African people in a common struggle for the elimination of racial discrimination and for the building up of a non-racial, democratic society.

Colleagues of Mahatma Gandhi in the first *Satyagraha* and their children and grandchildren have played a significant role in the freedom movement of South Africa. Among them the remarkable family of Thambi Naidoo....

THAMBI NAIDOO

The first *satyagrahi* in the movement of 1906-14 and a most loyal and courageous colleague of Gandhiji was Govindasamy Krishnasamy Thambi Naidoo. Apart from defying the law and going to jail many times, he made a crucial contribution in securing mass participation in the *satyagraha*.

When the *satyagraha* started in earnest in July 1907 with the picketing of registration offices, Thambi Naidoo was the chief picket. He was the first to get arrested, and served 14 days' imprisonment. On December 28th that year he was charged with Gandhiji for refusing to register and ordered to leave the Transvaal. On January 10th, 1908, he was sentenced to jail with Gandhiji for disobeying the order.

In February 1908, after the Smuts-Gandhi agreement, Gandhiji was severely assaulted by a Pathan who felt that the agreement was a betrayal. Thambi Naidoo went to his rescue and was also assaulted.

In 1913, when Gandhiji invited women to join the *Satyagraha*, Veeramal, his wife, was the first to volunteer, although she was in an advanced state of pregnancy. Thambi Naidoo led the first batch of women from Johannesburg to Natal, and marched throughout Natal organising strikes without any rest and often without food. He was a tremendous help to Gandhiji.

For, Gandhiji had gone to South Africa as a lawyer for well-to-do Gujarati merchants and entered public life at their request. They lent him great support when he organised petitions and appeals to the authorities, but when he decided on defiance of law, only a few of these merchants (notably Parsee Rustomjee, Ahmed Cachalia and Ebrahim Asvat) followed him.

Thambi Naidoo, a cartage contractor belonging to the much larger Tamil community, helped bring hawkers, small tradesmen and other poorer sections of the community into the struggle. When the struggle was extended to the whole of South Africa in 1913, he and his colleagues helped persuade thousands of coal miners and plantation workers to go on strike and join the *Satyagraha*. This mass participation obliged General Smuts to seek a settlement.

As the *Satyagraha* dragged on, Thambi Naidoo spent a total of fourteen terms in jail. At one time, seventeen members of his family were in prison.

Thambi Naidoo was born in Mauritius where his parents had migrated from Madras Presidency. He went to South Africa and settled in Kimberley in 1889 when he was 14 years old, and moved to the Transvaal three years later.

He formed the Transvaal Indian Congress with H.O. Ally in 1893. He was one of the few Indians who saw President Kruger of the South African Republic to present a petition in regard to Law 3 of 1885 which restricted Indians to segregated locations. He led a deputation to the Johannesburg Town Council when he was only 19.

He joined Gandhiji, when the latter moved to Johannesburg after the Anglo-Boer War, in resisting anti-Indian measures. At the mass meeting of Indians in 1906, he seconded the resolution deciding to defy the Asiatic Ordinance and go to jail if necessary.

Gandhiji described him as "lion-like" and wrote of him:

"He was an ordinary trader. He had practically received no scholastic education whatever. But a wide experience had been his schoolmaster. He spoke and wrote English very well, although his grammar was not perhaps free from faults. In the same way he has acquired a knowledge of Tamil. He understood and spoke Hindustani fairly well and he had some knowledge of Telugu too, though he did not know the alphabets of these languages... He had a very keen intelligence and could grasp new subjects very quickly. His ever-ready wit was astonishing. He had never seen India. Yet his love for the homeland knew no bounds. Patriotism ran through his very veins. His firmness was pictured on his face. He was very strongly built and he possessed tireless energy. He shone equally whether he had to take the chair at meetings and lead them or whether he had to do porter's work. He would not be ashamed of carrying a load on the public roads... Night and day were the same to him when he set to work. And none was more ready than he to sacrifice his all for the sake of the community... the name of Thambi Naidoo must ever remain as one of the front rank in the history of *Satyagraha* in South Africa."¹

"He has an incomparable spirit. What need is there to write in praise of him? This struggle has produced few *Satyagrahis* who can be his equals."²

"Another person who can match Mr. Naidoo in self-sacrifice is unlikely to be found even in India."³

Gandhiji wrote about him in a letter to Gopal Krishna Gokhale on December 6,

¹ *Satyagraha in South Africa*

² *Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi*, Volume 10, page 267

³ *Ibid.*, Volume 11, page 107

1909:

"But perhaps the bravest and the staunchest of all (Indians in gaol) is the indomitable Thambi Naidoo. I do not know any Indian who knows the spirit of the struggle so well as he does... He has sacrificed himself entirely, and has sent me a defiant message, saying that, even though I may yield and accept anything less than Lord Ampthill's amendment, he alone will offer resistance and die in the Transvaal gaols."⁴

When he died, *Indian Opinion* wrote in an obituary on November 3, 1933:

"With a sturdy physique and brawny arms, he fathered many a weakling and made life in gaol easier for him. Thambi Naidoo was always there to finish his own task as well as to help those who lagged behind to finish theirs. During his leisure time he would be reading religious books or singing hymns and keeping gay those who had a tendency of being morose having never suffered gaol life. It was indeed a sorry time for those inside prison when Thambi Naidoo was released. But he was never out long. He required no rest. One heard of Thambi Naidoo's release and within a day or two news flashed once again that he was arrested."

After Gandhiji left South Africa in 1914, Thambi Naidoo continued to lead the Indian community for some time. He was President of the Tamil Benefit Society from 1912. Soon after the end of the *Satyagraha*, he joined the successful appeal to the courts against segregation in tramways and fought for the removal of the colour bar in the municipal market.

He was again active in the political arena in the last years of his life as the authorities proceeded to enact new discriminatory measures against Indians. Elected President of Transvaal Indian Congress in 1932, he strongly opposed the Transvaal Asiatic Land Tenure Act and the Licences (Control) Ordinance, which added to the disabilities of the Indians, and exhorted the community to resist. He persuaded the TIC to decide in principle on passive resistance, and offered himself and his family to go to jail for the cause. He condemned the decision of the leaders of the South African Indian Congress to join the Colonisation Enquiry Committee, set up by the regime to find ways to induce Indians to emigrate to distant lands; from his sick bed, and against doctor's advice, he went to a Conference called by the SAIC on this issue in August that year and fought to the end.

Following Gandhiji's example in India, he led the fight, early in 1933, for the removal of untouchability at Melrose Hindu Temple.

He passed away on October 31, 1933, and was buried in the Indian Cemetery, Brixton.

⁴ *Ibid.*, Volume 10, page 97

His descendants have made, and continue to make, a great contribution to the struggle for freedom in South Africa.

THE "FOUR PEARLS" OF GANDHIJI

At a farewell banquet to Gandhiji in Johannesburg on July 14, 1914, after the speeches and toasts, Thambi Naidoo approached Gandhiji with his four sons and announced: "On behalf of myself and my wife, I have the honour to present these four boys to the service of India."

The four boys - Bala, Bharathasarathy, Narainswamy, Puckrey - had lived in the Tolstoy Farm and Phoenix Settlement and had been taught by Gandhiji, as their parents were in and out of jail. They came to be known as "the four pearls" of Gandhiji. Thambi Naidoo and his wife had gone through the ceremony of adoption before the farewell meeting and gave their children to Gandhiji and Kasturba.

Gandhiji arranged for them to be taken to India and sent them to Poet Rabindranath Tagore for further education at Santiniketan. Fakiri died in Gandhiji's *Ashram* in Ahmedabad in 1916. The other children returned to South Africa before their father died. The following is about Narainswamy and his family who were to play an exceptional role in the freedom struggle.

NARAINSWAMY

Narainswamy ("Naran" or "Roy"), born around 1901, returned to South Africa when his father passed away, deeply influenced by the Indian national movement. By that time a new generation of Indians, born in South Africa, had grown up and looked for resistance against the racist regime in cooperation with the African majority.

Naran identified himself with this militant tendency.

He organised Indian workers and became chairman of the Witwatersrand Bakers' Union. He joined Dr. Yusuf Dadoo in forming the Nationalist Group in the Transvaal Indian Congress to replace its compromising leadership and develop cooperation with the Africans. He helped form the Non-European United Front in 1939 to promote a united struggle. He led the first group of resisters in the limited passive resistance campaign organised by the Nationalist Group in 1941.

Narainswamy played a prominent role in the postwar years when the Indian community led the nation in organising mass resistance. With deep commitment

to militant mass action against racism, he said in 1946:

"I have always maintained that the Indian people of South Africa cannot improve their lot until they come out in open defiance of the whole policy of segregation which is aimed at keeping the entire non-European peoples under subjugation. The days of going to Government officials with hat in hand and begging for minor concessions is over."⁵

He was elected Vice-Chairman of the Transvaal Passive Resistance Council which led the Indian passive resistance struggle of 1946-48, and served two terms in prison. He organised assistance to the African mineworkers when the government crushed their strike in August 1946 with brutal violence. He risked his life in 1949, during the Zulu-Indian riots fanned by the racist authorities in Durban, touring the riot areas to bring peace. He was one of the organisers of the May Day strike and the National Day of Protest in 1950. He helped plan the multi-racial Defiance Campaign of 1952 in which he served two jail sentences. As chief welfare officer of the campaign, he organised assistance to the families of thousands of people who courted imprisonment.

He was for several years Vice-President of the Transvaal Indian Congress and Chairman of the Transvaal Peace Council.

He passed away on November 14, 1953, at the age of 53, giving the salute of the freedom movement. The Transvaal Indian Congress said in its tribute that he was "a soldier and a general, a leader and a follower. Of worldly goods, he had none...(But) his hospitality was known throughout South Africa. No stranger who was stranded was unwelcome in his home."

Indeed, Veeramal, mother of Naran, had been known for her generous hospitality. That was a trait inherited by Naran - and possessed equally by his wife, Mononmoney.

MONONMONEY ("AMA")

Mononmoney was with Naran in the struggle and was imprisoned once in the Indian Passive Resistance Movement in 1947 and twice during the Defiance Campaign. She became known as "Ama" (mother) not only to her children but to thousands of people in the freedom movement.

Ama and Naran had scant means as Naran spent his life promoting freedom rather than in amassing wealth, and they could not provide college education to their children. But Ama's hospitality - there were always visitors from the freedom movement - was proverbial. The family home on Rocky Street in Doornfontein came to be called "People's House."

⁵ *Passive Resister*, Johannesburg, September 30, 1946

All the five children - Shantivathie, Indres, Mithrasagram (Murthie), Padmavathie (Ramnie) and Premanathan - joined the freedom movement and, as repression increased, they began to suffer vengeful persecution - detention, solitary confinement and torture. It was said that if any mother was to be honoured for heartache during the freedom struggle, she would deserve the gold medal. But despite her agony, she always remained a source of inspiration and strength to her children.

Now in poor health and living with relatives in Pretoria, Ama is still committed to the struggle. When the Transvaal Indian Congress was revived in 1983, she was elected Vice-President. She has kept her faith that she will live to see the day when all South Africans will live as one family.

SHANTIVATHIE

Shantivathie (Shanti) was born in 1935. In her childhood, she was active in the Transvaal Indian Youth Congress and then in the multi-racial South African Federation of Women which was established in 1954.

After the death of her father, she worked as a clerk in the office of the Congress of Democrats, an organisation of whites allied to the African and Indian Congresses, until it was banned in 1962. She then went to work in the office of the South African Congress of Trade Unions, but was obliged to give up that job in December 1963 when she was subjected to restrictions under a five-year banning order. She then managed to find a job in a bookstore.

Shanti was arrested on February 29, 1965, on the charge of contravening the banning orders. She had gone to court to attend the trial of the late Bram Fischer, a great Afrikaner jurist and supporter of the freedom movement. Bhana Mohamed, an Indian who had been banned, greeted her and she held her finger to her lips to warn him that she was also banned. For that she was charged with "communicating with a banned person," but was acquitted.

On another occasion, when she fell ill and was taken to a hospital, the Security Police went to her bedside and threatened her for not reporting her "change of address" as required by the banning orders.

She hoped that the restrictions would be over in December 1968 but, instead, she was served with more stringent orders for another five years.

She then decided to leave for Britain, where her younger sister had gone as an exile, in the hope of finding a job and leading a more normal life. She applied for an exit permit but that was refused.

Then, on June 19, 1969, she was detained with no access to her family or to a lawyer. The family made representations to the authorities that she would leave the country immediately if she was released, but in vain.

Shanti was brought to the court on December 21, 1969, to give evidence in the trial of Mrs. Winnie Mandela and 21 others who were charged with furthering the aims of the African National Congress. That was the first time the family could see her since she was jailed six months earlier and learn that she had been imprisoned under a law which allows the police to detain anyone who can be a potential witness in a case.

Shanti told the court that she did not wish to give evidence, despite a warning by the judge that he would have to jail her unless she had "just" reasons for not giving evidence. She said:

"I have two friends among the accused. I don't want to give evidence because I will not be able to live with my conscience if I do."

She referred to Mrs. Winnie Mandela and Mrs. Joyce Sikakane.

Under questioning by her counsel, she said that she had been kept in solitary confinement and made to sleep on the floor. She was denied even the minimum of 30 minutes a day for exercise to which prisoners are entitled.

"I was forced to stand for five days and nights, while they fired questions at me. I lost all sense of time. I only knew it had been five days when they took me back to the cell and the wardress told me what day it was. I also began to lose hold on reality towards the end of the interrogation. I had terrifying hallucinations, like nightmares, in which the questions became all mixed up with broken dreams. I didn't know what was happening..."

One would have thought that any judge with human feelings would have been moved and at least tried to protect the frail woman from torture. But in South Africa, judges who have to enforce inhuman laws lose much of their humanity.

Mr. Justice Bekker ruled against Shanti and declared:

"It is obviously unpleasant to be called upon to give evidence against friends. Your excuse is a moral one but, in my opinion, is not a just one."

He sentenced her to two months' imprisonment and warned her that she would be sentenced again if she continued to refuse to give evidence.

On February 16, 1970, the Attorney-General stopped the prosecution of Winnie Mandela and others for lack of evidence. There was now no need for evidence by Shanti, and her mother made an urgent application to the court for her

release. The police, however, told the court that they were now detaining Shanti under the "Terrorism Act" and that the court could not order her release. Shanti was not released until June, after 371 days in prison.

But her ordeal was not over.

She again applied for an exit permit to leave South Africa and was happy to receive it from the Minister of the Interior in March 1971. But, since she was restricted to the magisterial district of Johannesburg, she needed permission from the Minister of Justice to go to the airport on the outskirts of the city. She applied for permission but was refused.

To quote Anthony Holiday in the *Rand Daily Mail* on March 16, 1971:

"So it is back to square one.

"So Shanti Naidoo goes on with her work in a city bookshop and waits for what will happen next.

"She reports to the police every Monday between 7 a.m. and 7 p.m. She is careful not to attend social gatherings and not to speak to any of her old friends who may be banned. She may not publish her feelings in writing, nor communicate them to any newspaper.

"But the look in her eyes says clearly enough: 'I am not afraid.'"

She could not attend the wedding of her younger brother or the funeral of a close relative. She could not talk to her closest friends or go on a holiday. She could not go to Robben Island prison to see her brother, Indres, who had been jailed for ten years.

She applied to the Supreme Court in Pretoria to be allowed to leave the country but it ruled against her. She appealed to the Appellate Division of the Supreme Court: it also ruled against her in December 1971 and ordered her to pay the costs of the hearing.

Finally, in September 1972, after international pressure and the intercession of Mrs. Helen Suzman, a liberal member of Parliament, she was given permission to leave South Africa. She was also allowed, for the first time, to visit Indres in prison.

Relatives and friends hurriedly collected money for the fares and the court costs so that she could leave immediately. More than two hundred people of all racial origins went to the airport to bid her farewell and sang "We Shall Overcome." She had to say good-bye to one person at a time because of the banning order.

She now lives in London and works for the International Defence and Aid Fund for Southern Africa.

INDRES

Indres - who worked as a clerk and became the main support of the family after the death of Naran - was also active in the Transvaal Indian Youth Congress.

On the night of April 17, 1963, he was caught with two other Indians - Reggie Vandeyar and Shirish Nanabhai - after they blew up a railway toolshed and tried to dynamite a signal relay case.

Indres and his friends were among the first to be caught in the Transvaal while committing sabotage as members of *Umkhonto we Sizwe* ("Spear of the Nation"), the military wing of the African National Congress: they had been betrayed by a spy. They were also among the first victims of police specially trained in brutal and sophisticated torture of freedom fighters.⁶

Indres was shot in the shoulder before capture and kicked when he fell on the floor. He was then taken to his home for a search, with his shirt saturated with blood. He was beaten and tortured during the next few days. The following is an extract from his account:

"I felt a punch, and before I realised what was happening all the police had made a ring around me and were kicking and pushing me, saying 'Now we're playing rugby' - one policeman would dive full length on to me, hitting me on the side, then another would come up and kick me as though I was the ball...

"The next thing, I felt a wet cold canvas bag being put over my head... they started squeezing a knot and choking me. I gasped for air, and every time I breathed in, the canvas hit me in the face. I was choking, my nostrils and mouth were blocked by the wet canvas; the harder I tried to get air into my lungs, the tighter the bag clamped over me, cutting off the air, preventing my lungs from working..

"'Coolie, today you're going to die. Laughter. 'We've got the bastards.'

"I was struggling, thrashing around, almost unconscious.

⁶ During the trial the police testified that Major W.H. Brits, Lt. T.J. Swanepoel and a Lt. van Wyk had been observing the location for three nights.

In subsequent years, these three security policemen appeared in numerous political trials. They were notorious for brutally torturing prisoners, many to death.

"Laughter and talking among themselves. The bag was released and I swallowed air desperately, but then the canvas slapped back into my mouth and once more I started to choke, my body in a total panic.

"'Coolie, you're going to talk.' More laughter.

"I kicked my legs and arms as hard as I could, feeling my head go dizzy. The bag opened. I was finished. I could hardly stand...

"They pushed me into a chair, and I found my shoes being taken off and two policemen holding my hands behind the back of the chair.. One of the group started hitting me on the soles of my feet with a rubber baton and a terrible pain shot up my leg...

"Next I felt all sorts of wires being attached to me... My arms were stretched out at my sides and I was held down from behind, and then I saw the main lead running to a dry cell battery... as they attached the lead to the battery I felt a dreadful shock pass into my body...

"Again the shock travelled through my whole body, convulsing every particle of me, going on and on for ever, absolute pain from top to toe."

When Indres and his friends were eventually brought to trial, they told the court that they had agreed to commit sabotage "as a form of protest against oppression and Government policy", after months of persuasion by a Gamat Jardine and on the assurance that there was to be no damage to life.

The only person who could have tipped off the police, Gamat Jardine, disappeared after the event. An enterprising newspaperman found him in Cape Town a month later but he was never arrested.

Indres and his colleagues were sentenced to ten years` imprisonment. As they left the dock, they smiled and waved to relatives and friends and gave the clenched fist salute. About two hundred people waited outside the court in a demonstration of solidarity and shouted freedom slogans.

Before release in May 1973, Indres was served with stringent banning orders. He was confined to his home each day from dusk to dawn and on weekends and holidays. He could not even "communicate" with his brother, Murthie, who was also under restrictions.

When Indres married soon after release, he needed special permission to enter the Magistrate's Court for the wedding and to be with three witnesses. He was allowed, as a special favour, to go to Cape Town for a brief honeymoon.

He managed to find a job with Frank and Hirsch, South African distributors for

the Polaroid Corporation of America, and rose to a senior position as chief storeman for the company. But in 1976, the company asked its black employees to take a lie detector test: Indres refused, considering that an affront to dignity, and was fired. He escaped from South Africa in January 1977 to work for the African National Congress abroad.

The Polaroid Corporation had undertaken, because of public pressure in the United States, not to sell its products to the military and repressive agencies in South Africa. It claimed that its agent, Frank and Hirsch, was following liberal employment policies and assisting blacks.

Indres now produced proof that Frank and Hirsch was secretly supplying Polaroid products to the South African regime. There were strong protests in the United States and Polaroid was obliged to close its operations in South Africa.

Indres is now deputy representative of the African National Congress in Berlin, German Democratic Republic.⁷

MURTHIE

Murthie, who worked as a clerk, was detained without charges for several weeks in 1964. He was detained again in 1965.

In 1967, he was "listed" as a Communist. Because of the listing, he could not join organisations and could not be quoted in the press.

He is employed in a mine near Johannesburg.

RAMNIE

Ramnie worked in the Transvaal Indian Youth Congress since her childhood. At the age of nine, while distributing Congress leaflets, she was knocked down and stepped on by a constable.

Her husband, Issy Dinat, was detained on December 9, 1964, and held for three weeks. He was detained again in 1966 and called to give evidence at the trial of Bram Fischer. Ramnie, then pregnant, queued up daily at the court for the hearing, sometimes to be turned away as the seats for the non-whites in the gallery were all taken, many by the police.

Issy spent four months in detention and escaped from South Africa soon after release.

⁷ Indres returned to South Africa in 1990.

Ramnie decided to leave South Africa in February 1967, with her two small children, to join her husband in London. But her passport was withdrawn two days before she was due to leave. After hurried approaches to the authorities, she obtained an "exit permit" - which prohibits her from returning to South Africa - and left as planned.

PREMA

Prema, the youngest son, is a welder.

From the late 1960s, when all political activity seemed to have been suppressed by massive repression and terror, he has been active in the movement. He was a member of the Human Rights Committee, established at that time to focus attention on political prisoners and assist their families, together with Miss Sheila Weinberg, whose family had suffered persecution, and Mohamed Timol, whose brother, Ahmed, had been tortured to death in prison.

He was assistant secretary of the Transvaal anti-SAIC Council (TASC) which, in 1981, led the very successful boycott of elections to the South African Indian Council, a puppet body set up by the regime.

Prema was detained on November 21, 1981, and subjected to beatings and torture. He was brought to court after several months and sentenced on April 1, 1982, to three years' imprisonment (two years suspended) on the charge of harbouring an escaped convict.⁸ He gave the salute of the freedom movement as the sentence was passed and his wife, Kamala, told the press she was proud of her husband.

Prema was detained again when a State of Emergency was declared in 1985.

THEIR STRUGGLE IS OURS

This is the story of a family which has been in the forefront of the struggle for freedom for three generations.

A fourth generation is taking up the banner.

When Prema and others were detained in 1981, the South African Press published a photograph of his ten-year-old son, Kuben, holding up a banner outside the magistrate's court in Johannesburg calling for the release of all detainees. It

⁸ Stephen Lee, Timothy Jenkins and Alexandre Moumbaris - three white political prisoners - had managed to escape from the Pretoria maximum security prison in 1979. Prema was accused of finding a place for Stephen Lee to hide during his escape.

quoted him as proclaiming:

“I feel proud to be doing it for the struggle and I am not scared.”⁹

The struggle began in the first decade of this century as part of the awakening of India and our mass movement for dignity and honour. Its resurgence in 1946 was a contribution to the deliverance of India from alien rule, and it proceeded, with the blessings of Gandhiji and Jawaharlal Nehru, to become part of the liberation struggle of all the oppressed people of South Africa.

The story of the Naidoo family is a mirror of the development of the freedom movement in South Africa over the past 80 years - from a demand for elementary rights to militant action against all discrimination, from an isolated struggle of the small Indian community to the building of a United Democratic Front, from non-violent resistance to a combination of mass defiance and armed confrontation.

The South African freedom movement can be justly proud of this family. We, in India, too are entitled to be equally proud.

I have met Ama and three of her children, who were forced into exile, and have always been impressed with their modesty and with their faith. I am sure that the family would like it to be said that it is not exceptional. Many other Indian families have sacrificed and thousands of African families have suffered even more in the long and difficult struggle.

We in India should learn more about the epic struggle in South Africa and the numerous heroes and heroines it has produced. Our kith and kin had been engaged in this struggle since the days of Gandhiji and it has produced many freedom fighters. We cannot be mere spectators or be just friends. Their struggle is in many ways, our struggle, till the liberation of Southern Africa from White racist rule - and the abolition of apartheid.

Postscript

Ama and Shanthie were invited by the Government of India in October 1988 to participate in the observance of Gandhiji's birthday and tour the country. They were received by the President, R. Venkataraman, and Prime Minister, Rajiv Gandhi, as well as many public figures. Wherever they went - Delhi, Calcutta, Madras and Ahmedabad - they received an enthusiastic welcome from the people.

Shanti, Indres and Ramnie returned to South Africa after the ANC was unbanned in 1990. After the democratic elections of 1994, Indres served a term as a Senator and a member of the Gauteng (State) Assembly. Prema was Councillor of the Southern Metropolitan Local Council, Johannesburg.

⁹ Kuben was detained in October 1988, shortly before the municipal elections which were boycotted by the people. He was held for two weeks and assaulted in prison.

