

MOTHER OVERJOYED AT  
DETAINEE'S RELEASE

S. Tume 21670 BY MARGARET SMITH

COOLSHED BLAZE: 5 IN COURT

Four men tortured,  
defence alleges

ALLEGATIONS WERE MADE at the Johannesburg Magistrate's Court

An effort to  
permit to  
isolation

GROUP AREAS ACT  
AFFECTS  
SPORTS

TICKY BARNES  
LET YOUR SON  
ALWIE SHOW  
YOU THE WAY

DAILY MAIL, Friday, April 2, 1962

Three get jail for  
aiding escapee Lee

Rand Daily Mail, 14 December, 1969

THE RED ACT TRIAL

★ FROM PAGE 8

'Practically forced'  
woman tells judge

tsihande Nkhu, one of the  
accused, accompanied her.

Winnie gave her a small

said nothing, but had not told  
her to take it off.

She said her sister did ...

THE ASSASSIN

MOTHER OVERJOYED AT  
DETAINEE'S RELEASE

S. Tume 21670 BY MARGARET SMITH

COOLSHED BLAZE: 5 IN COURT

Four men tortured,

Fatima Adam | Ameen Cajee | Lalloo Chiba | Magan Narsee Chhiba | Yusuf Isaacs  
Narendra Jasmath | Abdulhay Jassat | Ahmed Kathrada | Wolfie Kodesh | Mac Maharaj  
Wilton Mkwai | Kista Moonsamy | Indres Naidoo | Shirish Nanabhai | Faker Salie  
Reggie Vandeyar | Solly Vania | Bobby Vassen | Tommy Vassen



# Men of Dynamite:

Pen Portraits of MK Pioneers

*Rashid Seedat and Razia Saleh (Editors)*

First published by the Ahmed Kathrada Foundation in 2009

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First edition  
December 2009

ISBN 978-0-620-45874-0

Design and layout by Cut 2 Black (Pty) Ltd  
23 Jan Smuts Avenue, Johannesburg, South Africa 2193  
Tel : +27 11 482 3580 | Fax : +27 11 482 1019 | [www.cut2black.co.za](http://www.cut2black.co.za)

Printed by Shereno Printers  
10 Atlas Rd, Dunswart, Boksburg  
Tel : +27 11 894 4150 | Fax : +27 11 894 4153



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# Abbreviations

ANC	African National Congress
ANCYL	African National Congress Youth League
CODESA	Convention for a Democratic South Africa
CPSA	Communist Party of South Africa – was banned in 1950 and was secretly re-established in 1953 as the South African Communist Party (SACP)
GDR	German Democratic Republic (was also known as East Germany)
MK	Umkhonto we Sizwe (Spear of the Nation), military wing of the ANC
MP	Member of Parliament
NIC	Natal Indian Congress
NP	National Party
RSA	Republic of South Africa
SA	South Africa
SACP	South African Communist Party
SACTU	South African Congress of Trade Unions
SAIC	South African Indian Congress (not long after the Congress became dormant, the same abbreviation would unfortunately be used for the South African Indian Council, which was a statutory body created during the apartheid years to supposedly represent the views of the Indian community); the Transvaal Anti-SAIC Committee was established in early 1981 to oppose the South African Indian Council elections that were to be held in November 1981
TIC	Transvaal Indian Congress
TIYC	Transvaal Indian Youth Congress
TRC	Truth and Reconciliation Commission
UDF	United Democratic Front
YCL	Young Communist League

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## **Dedication**

This book is dedicated to the "Men of Dynamite" and their families. They will always be remembered as individuals who bore the trials and tribulations of exile, imprisonment, banning, torture and hardship with great courage and determination.

# Message

Men of Dynamite is an important contribution to the growing body of work on the history of the struggle in South Africa. The main area it illuminates is the contribution of members of the Indian community to Umkhonto we Sizwe (MK), the military wing of the African National Congress (ANC) in the Johannesburg area in the early years of its existence.

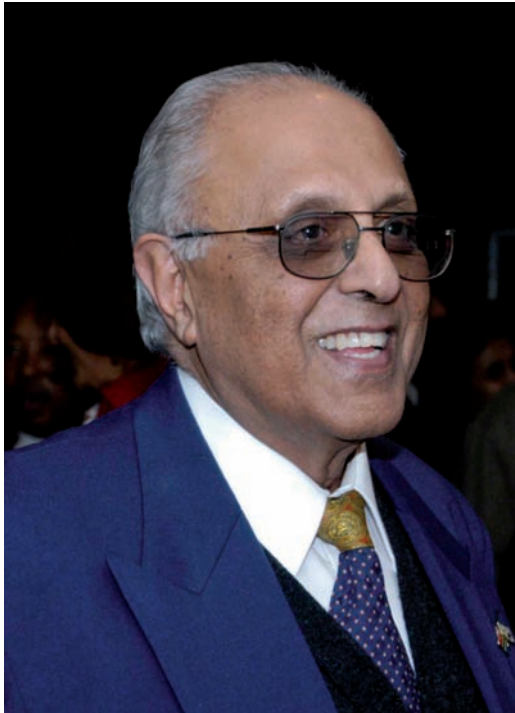
The Ahmed Kathrada Foundation is happy to be the publisher of this book for several reasons. Firstly, it is consistent with our mandate of disseminating the history of resistance in South Africa. Secondly, it demonstrates non-racialism in practice during the darkest days of apartheid, which is also a remit of the foundation. Thirdly, the book will be launched on 12 December 2009, to coincide with the twentieth anniversary of the deaths of the young MK cadres Prakash Napier and Yusuf Akhalwaya. In so doing, we are able to connect the experiences of the first and last generations of MK fighters. Finally, this book is a fitting tribute to Comrade Kathy who celebrates his 80th birthday this year as well as the numerous heroes who are profiled here.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank all those people who spent many hours working on and researching the book to give us an attractive and interesting read.

Cyril Ramaphosa  
Chairperson of the Board of Trustees  
Ahmed Kathrada Foundation  
December 2009



# Preface



The initiators of this project, the researchers, the contributors, the editors, and the Foundation have to be congratulated for the publication of this book. Because of the restrictive apartheid laws and practices, MK units were made up largely of men and women who lived in particular group areas. It is therefore not designed to be a history of MK; but rather an attempt to record albeit briefly, the actions, experiences, the discipline and above all the courage of a relatively small number of MK units.

While not in any way lessening the contributions of any of the comrades, I wish to single out one particular unit, as well as several individuals.

Reggie, Shirish and Indres are friends and comrades who I knew and worked with for many years before their arrest. Theirs was the first MK unit to be arrested, and the very first unit to be sent to Robben Island. The three comrades served their ten-year sentences at a time when conditions on Robben Island were at their worst. Hard labour, insults, humiliation, assaults were the order of the day. In fact Indres was punished with four lashes. In spite of all the hardship and suffering, they emerged with their heads held high, proud, undefeated, loyal and determined.

I was under house arrest at the time of their arrest, and I can still recall the anguished phone calls from their families, asking me to do something. The very worst experience was when Ama Naidoo phoned to say that Indres had been brought home under escort, while still bleeding from a gunshot wound! I never felt so shocked, frightened and helpless, because my house-arrest order prohibited me from leaving the flat at the stroke of 7. I rushed out to the lawyers, who immediately went into action. Alas, although clearly in contravention of the law, the police brazenly refused to allow them access. Because the lawyers were thwarted in their efforts for good reason, we then turned to the one-and-only Babla. I always regarded him as my young brother. Loved by all. All he requested were toiletries and clean underwear, plus some cash, and off he went to Marshall Square. He returned later after seeing not only the three, but also Laloo Chiba and Abdulhay Jassat. A typical example of what Babla managed to accomplish against seeming odds. The lawyers were now in possession of the information they needed.

Just one more incident about Babla – partly amusing but very tragic. The Picasso Club was a group of about six members of the Transvaal Indian Youth Congress, specialising in slogan

painting on walls, and putting up posters. One very cold night, after having completed the task of putting up posters, there was one poster left. Babla dared us to put it on the wall of Grays Building, the Security Police headquarters. Mission accomplished, and as we were on the way home, the police gave chase and caught up with us. Luckily we were let off with a warning, and we went smilingly home. But by no stretch of imagination could we foresee what was to come.

It was on a Saturday of September 1964. We had been on Robben Island for barely three months. We had already been locked up in our single cells when Walter returned from his first six-monthly visit from Ma Sisulu. All of us eagerly waited for him to give us some news from home. But Ma Sisulu brought news that none of us ever wanted to hear. Babla had been killed and thrown out of the windows of the seventh-floor building by the sadistic murderer, Swanepoel. THE WINDOWS OF THE SAME GRAYS BUILDING WHERE BABLA HAD PUT ON THE LAST POSTER!! There was dead silence as we collectively tried to contemplate the enormity of the tragedy. My brother and comrade Babla was dead! Dear Babla, loved by all who knew him. We were never going to hear his gruff and cheerful voice again! Forty-five years have gone by, we will never forget him. However, we pay tribute to his widow Rookie who bravely and unceasingly kept his memory alive, and in doing so she became and remained a more determined political activist.

There is Laloo Chiba, Mr L, as I call him; my dear friend, comrade, brother. There is not space enough to write about him. Kind, caring, generous and modest to a fault, brave, loyal and dedicated. Much can be written about each of these adjectives, but none can do sufficient justice to describe him. Salt of the earth.

Then Prakash and Yusuf. During the weeks after our release, they were among the comrades who had been assigned to stand guard outside my late brother's house, where I was staying. They were generally in the midnight-to-morning shift. My late sister-in-law Ayeshabai was a very caring and generous lady. Every morning she would insist on Prakash and Yusuf to come in and have some breakfast. Much to my regret I can't remember Yusuf ever accepting her invitation. Therefore I never really came to know him as well as I would have liked to. But Prakash frequently joined us, and it was my good fortune to know him better. Now, Ayeshabai was not comfortable with English or Afrikaans; and Prakash did not know Gujarati. But I marvelled at the way the two of them could converse morning after morning, with Ayeshabai using a mixture of Afrikaans, English and Gujarati. They seemed to enjoy talking to each other.

In December 1989, Shan and I were in Cape Town, staying at our friend Eddie Daniels's place. One morning Shan was called to the phone. After he joined me he was completely and unusually silent. It took him some time to tell me of the tragic death of Yusuf and Prakash!! Naturally it came to us as a great shock. It was only that morning that I learnt for the first time that the two comrades were trained MK operatives. And it was only much later that I learnt more about them. When looking back now I realize and appreciate their calibre. They were hard working, utterly dedicated, modest, highly disciplined and courageous. They were true examples of activists. The more I learnt about them, the greater is our respect, and greater is our loss.

For me, this Preface would be incomplete without saying something about Ameen Cajee and Shan. Like the others mentioned, they two are exceptional cadres. We only came

to know about Shan a few years ago at a meeting of the Lenz ANC Branch. There, not only did we get confirmation of his MK membership, but also we learnt a great deal about his activities, and the activities of other MK units under his command.

As with Mr L, there is not space enough to do justice to Shan and Ameen. Ameen was a soldier's soldier. Extremely courageous and dedicated he was not one to dabble much with theory. He was par excellence a practical man. I owe a great deal to him. He stayed at 13 Kholvad House for many years. When I was placed under house arrest, I was not allowed to have any visitors. Not even my mother was allowed. In fact I last saw her towards the end of 1962, when I broke my house arrest order by quickly going down to the car to meet her.

At that time Ameen was working in Wolmaranstad, and I really needed someone to share the flat. The idea was he would be allowed to have visitors, and in case of a police raid, he could claim my visitors as his. It took one phone call from me, and Ameen was on the train to Johannesburg, and to Flat 13.

A few months later, one day in about March/April 1962, I was given an order from the leadership to go underground in about four hours time! I was to leave the flat that I had occupied since 1947, all the furniture, my car etc. I confided in Ameen, and left everything to him. He gladly accepted the position. But, true to his word, he insisted on keeping it under my name. Even the phone. In many of the letters and messages I received in prison from him, he reiterated that the flat belonged to me.

So much so that on the day of our release Ameen came and told me that he had alternate accommodation, and I should move back into Flat 13. But not before his daughter and my godchild, Djamila would allow me. After a couple of weeks she said I could move in. And what did I find? Djamila had the entire flat re-furnished! Such friendship and loyalty is not easy to find.

How many people know that Ameen, at great risk, put his little dry-cleaning shop at the disposal of comrades to have their meetings. These include David Webster, Neil Aggett and others. Fortunately Comrade Winnie Mandela is still alive to bear testimony to this part of Ameen's contribution.

There is so much more that can be said about MK cadres, and about those who played a participatory role in MK activities.

My concluding wish is that someone, or some institution would initiate a project to record and publicise the role of martyrs who lost their lives in the struggle. Men and women like Yusuf and Prakash, Ruth Slovo, Dulcie September, Vuyisile Mini, Solomon Mahlangu, Caleb Mayekiso, Steve Biko, Jeanette Schoon and her little daughter Katryn, Professor David Webster, Ahmed Timol, Looksmart Ngudle, Neil Aggett, Babla, Rick Turner, Imam Haroon, John Harris and many others. We dare not allow their ultimate sacrifice to go unrecorded.

**Ahmed Kathrada**  
**28 November 2009**

# Introduction

Men of Dynamite tells the story of the band of mainly young Indian men who lived in the vicinity of Fordsburg, Fietas and surrounding areas that were drawn into the armed struggle in the early 1960s. They were amongst the earliest and most resolute recruits to this new mode of resistance. Some were drawn into underground and sabotage units of the South African Communist Party (SACP) and shortly thereafter into Umkhonto we Sizwe (MK) when it was launched on 16 December 1961.

They were active in carrying out many acts of sabotage in the early days of the armed struggle and many paid dearly for their involvement. The phenomenon begged some key questions: Who were these individuals? What was the context? What motivated them? What roles did they play? What were the risks, costs and sacrifices? The answers to these questions are diverse and interesting and provide one of the main motivations for writing this book.

The other motivation for this book is more direct and personal. It emanates from hearing the many stories, recollections and reminiscences of veterans of the liberation movement drawn from the Johannesburg Indian community.

From the early 1980s, many of us heard Isu Chiba, Reggie Vandeyar and Shirish Nanabhai relating their experiences as MK cadres and as prisoners on Robben Island. stalwarts such as Ameen Cajee and Dr Essop Jassat also spoke about their own involvement, which went back to the 1930s and 1940s respectively. Prema Naidoo and other members of his family uniquely straddled the generations and provided a lot of the “infill”, especially of the repressive 1970s period. The release of Ahmed Kathrada and other Rivonia trialists in 1989 and the return of exiles after 1990 – including Indres Naidoo, Abdulhay Jassat, Mosie Moolla and others – provided a new and rich source of history. As the political conditions eased into the 1990s, and with the advent of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC), more and interesting new facts came to light in these ongoing and often unstructured conversations.



*Men of dynamite collective with Kista Moonsammy, Adulhay Jassat, Reggie Vandeyar and Shirish Nanabhai, Johannesburg, October 2009*

The reminiscences accumulated into multiple storylines of community mobilisation, organisation and action; police harassment, banning, detention, torture and arrest; social interaction, community engagement and family life; acts of bravery and feelings of trepidation; the turn to armed struggle; and life in exile or prolonged periods of imprisonment and banning.

Some of these stories have been told. Ahmed Kathrada has been the most prolific and has produced no less than four books, including his *Memoirs*, over the past 20 years. Mac Maharaj collaborated with Pdraig O'Malley on *Shades of Difference: Mac Maharaj and the Struggle for South Africa*. Indres Naidoo's book *Island in Chains: Ten years on Robben Island by Prisoner 885/63* mainly covers his experiences on the Island.

There are, of course, an infinite number of narratives. But the story of the network of mainly young Indian men from Johannesburg and surrounding areas in sabotage units in the early 1960s has not been recorded sufficiently. The individual stories of the main protagonists (except Ahmed "Kathy" Kathrada and Mac Maharaj) – Fatima "Fati" Adam, Ameen "Doha" Cajee, Laloo "Isu" Chiba, Magan Narsee Chhiba, Yusuf Isaacs (also known as Yusuf Asvat), Narendra "Nanoo" Jasmath, Abdulhay Jassat, Wolfie Kodesh, Kista Moonsammy, Wilton Mkwai, Indres Naidoo, Shirish Nanabhai, Faker Salie, Reggie Vandeyar, Solly Vania, Bobby Vassen and Tommy Vassen – have hardly been heard in the public domain. These individuals did not act in isolation. People like Dr Essop Jassat, Ahmed Essop "Quarter" Khota, Peter Moonsammy (also known as Peter Joseph), Moosa "Mosie" Moola and Suliman "Babla" Saloojee were an integral part of their legal, social and political support networks.

We are profoundly aware that memories fade as time marches on and that many of our protagonists are in their late sixties or seventies. So it is critical that the stories be recorded and told while most remain in moderate to good health. Men of Dynamite has thus been written to record these remarkable stories and to honour the lives of individuals who have made an inestimable contribution to the struggle against apartheid. This we hope will inspire others to undertake similar initiatives to record the lives of all our heroes and heroines so that we ensure that their stories live forever and eternally secure a legacy for them and their families.

From the outset, this was a collaborative effort. Indeed, without the hard work and effort of a number of key players, this project would not have got off the ground.

The Ahmed Kathrada Foundation – including “Kathy” himself – not only endorsed the idea of this book, it readily accepted the idea as part of its programme to celebrate Comrade Kathy’s 80th birthday. This was critical because it gave us a tight deadline, provided an institutional home and brought its considerable support to get the book to print.

Lesley Hudson of Cut 2 Black Media was an early and passionate supporter of the project. Her company, which she jointly owns with Faizel Cook, generously provided intellectual, copywriting, administrative, logistical and design support. Taryn Mackay and Lerato Motale Makgobatlou, in particular, assisted in conducting many of the interviews and writing several pen portraits. The creativity of the design team – Robyn Jeevanantham, Fikile Ntshumayelo, Sarel Mokheithi and Chesway Slabbert – left us with an aesthetically pleasing product.

Prema Naidoo and Shabir Ballim were indispensable members of the team who were always willing to help in anyway they could: providing transport, interviewing, writing, editing, jogging memories and filling in the gaps. In the background, Kamala Naidoo fully supported her itinerant husband.

Shaheda Seedat-Patel of the Ahmed Kathrada Foundation hosted a number of the interviews; and provided logistical support. Shan Balton, the foundation’s CEO, was instrumental in making the project happen at all levels.

Our profound gratitude is due to Isu Chiba who was one of the main sources of our inspiration and central to the conceptualisation and implementation of the project. Yusuf Isaacs, Abdulhay Jassat, Mac Maharaj, Kista Moonsamy, Indres Naidoo, Shirish Nanabhai, Faker Salie, Reggie Vandeyar, Bobby Vassen and Tommy Vassen provided intellectual and political guidance, graciously made their time available for interviews, dredged up pictures and memorabilia, and in some instances, wrote up their own profiles.

The support of the families of Ameen Cajee, Magan Narsee Chhiba and Nanoo Jasmath was critical for the project; in particular, Djamilla Cajee and Iqbal Cajee, Mrs Jaimati Narsee Chhiba and Gabriele “Gabi” Blankenburg. We also thank Nafissa and Khalik Mayet, Roshnee Moonsammy and Hassen Lorgat and Mrs Rookie Vally for assistance on Quarter Khota, Peter Moonsammy and Babla Saloojee respectively. Dr Essop Jassat made himself available for an interview at short notice. Mosie Moolla very ably contributed to his own story.

We thank the families of our participants for enthusiastically contributing their treasured personal photographs. Mrs Ramnie Dinat parted with some valuable family pictures and memorabilia. Linda Chernis from Museum Africa, Graham Goddard from Mayibuye Centre, Bongsi Maswanganyi, from Bailey’s African History Archive and Lucia Raadschelder from the Nelson Mandela Foundation also provided some of the stunning photographs that are displayed in the book. Kadir Saloojee and Yunus Chamda kindly allowed us use of their personal photographs.

At short notice, we were able to mobilise Yunus Momoniat to assist in editing the book. Omar Badsha, the CEO South African History Online, made many valuable suggestions that we have incorporated, as had Eric Itzkin of the City of Johannesburg. Lael Bethlehem and Tasneem Carrim and Fazila Malherbe for kindly checking the manuscript for errors. Thank you to Maya Sooka for her Hindi translations.

We also thank members of our own family – especially Fazela Mahomed for taking care of Zain and Nazneen during deadline – for their unstinting support.

A disclaimer is essential here. This book is not a definitive account of the individuals and events that are profiled here. It heavily relies on the memories of individuals, and while care had been taken to check the stories, it was not within the scope of this project to fully corroborate every recollection. This is a popular account and it is likely that with comprehensive research, others may well come to very different interpretations and conclusions that we have come to. However, the final responsibility for errors and omissions, remains our own.

**Rashid Seedat and Razia Saleh**  
Johannesburg  
December 2009