National Liberation, Non-Racialism and “Indianness”
the 1947 visit of Dadoo and Naicker to India

Goolam Vahed and Ashwin Desai

Introduction

This paper focuses on a trip that the leaders of the Transvaal Indian Congress (TIC) and the Natal Indian Congress (NIC), Yusuf Dadoo and Monty Naicker, made to India from March to May 1947. The trip is used as a lens through which to attempt to understand the relationship between the South African Indian Congresses and the Indian National Congress (INC), and the local issues that Dadoo was grappling with - Indo-African relations (race), national liberation (nationalism), and place of the Communist Party (class) in the struggle against white minority rule.

Background

The two Edinburgh trained medical doctors Yusuf Dadoo and Monty Naicker were central figures in the fight to wrest control of the Indian Congresses from moderate leaderships. These battles raged through the first half of the 1940s against the Kajee/Pather faction that held sway in Natal and the Nana/Valod group that dominated the Transvaal. In the Transvaal especially the faction fight within the Transvaal Indian Congress (TIC) took a particularly vicious form between Dadoo’s Nationalist Bloc and the Nana/Valod group. At a meeting on 4 June 1939 at Osrin’s Picture Palace a fight broke out between these groups. Manilal Gandhi who attended the meeting wrote that it ‘resembled a slaughter house, butcher knives being freely used in addition to bottles, heavy clubs, bicycle chains and knuckle-dusters’. In this confrontation Dayabhai Govindjee was to lose his life.

The name of Dadoo’s group is especially intriguing and one for which there is no ready answer. In Natal, those who opposed the conservative faction likewise styled themselves ‘the Nationalist Bloc’ within the NIC (and the Natal Indian Association (NIA) as the names changes frequently during this period). What did they mean by Nationalist Bloc? Was this a reference to the Indian nationalist struggle against British rule which was led by the Indian National Congress? Was it a reference to the local struggle for national (multiracial) liberation from white minority rule? Or was it deliberately ambiguous, so as to encapsulate both possibilities?
Dadoo was intensely aware of the Indian nationalist struggle and Gandhi and Nehru’s centrality to it. ‘At many meetings of the Nationalist Bloc, Indian nationalism was a rallying-point. A picture of Nehru…hung high alongside the flag of India’. This was reinforced in the late 1920s in London where Dadoo joined the London branch of the INC. At Edinburgh, where he studied medicine, Dadoo was active in politics as a member of the Independent Labour Party and the League against Imperialism. It was during these years that he was influenced by the rising star of the INC, Pandit Nehru as well as Marxists who were campaigning for a "united front" against fascism. His fellow South African at Edinburgh Dr. Goonam would recollect:

[Dadoo] did nothing. I had to take his class cards and put them in the class. He didn’t attend lectures [laughs]. How he ever got through, I don’t know because he was busy attending all the political meetings there … in the streets, in little halls…. He wanted to gather as much information [and] we all took from him. He was a very powerful speaker and a good, wholesome sort of individual. Quite a character in the sense that he enjoyed life and was so serious and went to rock bottom to the workers … and he was a good-looking man. Women were after him. He had time for that too [laughs].

“Nationalist Bloc” is also intriguing because by 1939 Dadoo’s communist leanings were pretty well known. Sushila Gandhi for example wrote to a friend in India: ‘Dr Dadoo…has strength of character and other good qualities and does not seek status. He is a Muslim but not a sectarian. He is a communist and is counted as one of Jawaharlalji’s (Nehru’s) followers…right now there are lots of people with red ties’. From the import of the letter one can discern the outlines of Dadoo’s politics that was to be a consistent thread throughout his life, a theme we return to at the end of his life. Even as a communist he paid homage to Gandhi as the anointed leader of the nationalist struggle and the Indian Congress and not the Communist Party of India. This approach prefigured his own subsequent attempt to suture the struggle for socialism and the struggle for national liberation by subsuming the fight for the former under the umbrella of the latter. The Dadoo-led Bloc sought to engage in passive resistance to ward off impending segregation measures through 1939. As the Nationalist Bloc gathered momentum, Gandhi intervened and asked for a postponement of the resistance because he believed that there was space for negotiations. Dadoo complied with the request for the postponement.
World War II saw people like Dadoo openly oppose support for the British led offensive against Nazi Germany. Dadoo like many communists, had to do a somersault, first opposing the war and then once the Soviet Union was attacked, calling for support for the Allied war effort. It would not be the last time that his political approach would be influenced by his relationship with the Soviet Union.

Immediately after the World War the 1946 Passive Resistance Campaign whatever its limitations, consolidated both Dadoo and Naicker’s leadership of the Indian Congresses. While both had studied together, were both medical doctors and had renewed bonds in the context of the fight for control of the Congresses, Naicker, unlike Dadoo, was not a member of the Communist Party. Naicker was a an avowed Gandhian even if the Mahatma might have flinched at this social life. This difference, while not in the immediate was to have impact on the future trajectories of their lives.

As indicated earlier infused into local struggles were the links with the Indian nationalist cause. This had a long history. The struggles of Indian South Africans had always been linked to the struggles for freedom in India. Indentured labourers had started arriving in 1860, carrying with them memories of the 1857 mutiny. During Gandhi’s stay in South Africa, the language of upholding India’s ‘dignity’ as a way to mobilise was paramount. Through the 1930s the link with India took place mainly in an official fashion through the office of the Indian Agent-General who had been appointed after a Round Table conference between the South African and Indian government in 1927. The link with Gandhi continued both through links with the leading figures in the Indian Congresses and through his son Manilal.

When Gandhi was observing a fast in 1943, there was a ‘solemn gathering’ at the City Hall where ‘Hindus, Muslims, Christians and Parsees offered prayers for the preservation of the life of the greatest living Indian - Mahatma Gandhi.’ Both the Nationalist Bloc of the NIC and CP held meetings in Durban to protest Gandhi’s arrest, as well as that of Nehru and Mawlana Azad, and a cable was sent to Winston Churchill demanding their release. Dr. Goonam chaired a meeting of women where speeches were given in Hindi, Tamil and Gujarati, and a resolution passed that the British Government was ‘offending womanhood by imprisoning Mrs. Gandhi, Mrs. Sarojini Naidu and other women.’

Important events on the Indian calendar were observed in Durban. The Indian Independence Day celebration was organised annually from 26 January 1942 by the Indian League of Durban. Portraits of Sarojini Naidu, Gandhi, Nehru and Mawlana Azad were hung on stage as the history of each was recounted, and the ‘playing of national songs added to the atmosphere of solemnity.’ Monty, Dr. Goonam and trade union leaders like H.A. Naidoo in addressing these gatherings, emphasized the link
with India. For Dr. Goonam ‘all Indians must observe this day. It is their duty.’ Indian independence was seen as ‘an historic step in the natural consciousness of the Indian and their kinship with the people of India.’

Pictures of Nehru and Gandhi adorned many an Indian home in South Africa. Many Muslims looked to Mawlana Kalam Azad for inspiration, while Subhash Chandra Bose was an icon for young activists. Mac Maharaj recalls in his memoirs:

> I read about Gandhi and Nehru a lot while I was still a high school student. At home there were four photographs – of Gandhi, Nehru, Mawlana Kalam Azad, and Subhash Chandra Bose. Nehru, Azad, and Bose were the lynchpins of the Indian Youth Congress. They were the young Turks. Bose argued for open warfare against Britain during the Second World War to achieve India’s independence. He went so far as to say he would form an alliance with Hitler and Japan if that would help the struggle. He disappeared over the Himalayas, purportedly on a flight to Germany to discuss a pact with Hitler. Bose was a hero to me. I saw Gandhi as a hero, but I was prepared at that age to favour Bose. I was still of the view that the enemy of my enemy is my friend.

When India achieved independence on 15 August 1947, Monty requested that ‘this happy occasion of our Motherland's march towards her cherished goal be celebrated in a fitting manner.’ The NIC appealed to all Indians to close their places of business, and asked religious bodies to hold ‘special services for the safety and progress of our Motherland.’ A meeting at Albert Park was attended by over 15,000 people; the flags of India and Pakistan were unfurled side by side, pictures of Gandhi, Nehru, Mawlana Azad, Muhammad Ali Jinnah, and Sarojini Naidu adorned the platform, and women stood on stage in saris in the national colours of India and Pakistan.

A combination of factors pushed the NIC and TIC into a substantial working relationship with the ANC. Several factors coalesced to make this possible. The most obvious was that the NIC and its counterpart in the Transvaal had wrested control from the conservative factions and broadened their leadership and support base. Much the same happened in the ANC where younger leaders like Walter Sisulu, Oliver Tambo, and Nelson Mandela came to the fore. Their professional middle class Indian counterparts included the likes of Monty, Dr. Goonam, I.C. Meer, Yusuf Dadoo, Abdulhay Jassat, Yusuf and Moulvi Cachalia, and J.N. Singh.

The membership of the ANC, NIC, and TIC also came to include industrial workers who had joined trade unions as the manufacturing sector expanded in South Africa during the early 1940s. The CPSA, until its
banning, played a crucial role in all these organisations. Additionally, small traders in the Transvaal were
directly threatened by apartheid and supported a widening of the struggle. All round then, there was ‘less
to be gained than before from isolating Indian struggles from those of other Blacks.’\(^{14}\) While the first
steps towards unity were tentative, and a degree of suspicion would remain among some in the ANC,
there is no denying that there was also genuine camaraderie.

This growing working relationship did not break the link with the Indian nationalist cause, although it
took on a different guise. As the British conceded ground in India, so did Indian South Africans call on
the Indian government to apply sanctions on South Africa, recall the High Commissioner from South
Africa, and raise the issue at the UN in order ‘to uphold the honour and dignity of Indians abroad.’\(^{15}\) The
Delhi government severed trade links with South Africa and withdrew High Commissioner Ramrao
Deshmukh,\(^{16}\) thus ending an epoch, as this office was a concrete link to India, and a continual reminder
that the status of Indians differed from that of Africans. Ironically, the strengthening of the links with
India by the Indian Congresses did not simply reinforce an ethnic exclusivity, but helped facilitate the
embracing of a broader alliance against apartheid. This was helped by Nehru was determined to locate
India among those countries involved in anti-colonialism struggles. He refused to deal with local
organisations proposing racial and ethnic exclusivity.

Nehru took office on 1 September 1946, and immediately made South Africa’s racial policies an important
concern at the UN, as well as opposing South Africa's request to annex South West Africa (Namibia). In
December 1946, February 1947 and again in April 1947, the NIC called for a Round Table Conference to
discuss the problems of Indians.\(^{17}\)

Partly in response to these developments Smuts wrote to Nehru on 18 June 1947 that that the NIC did not
represent the Indian masses: ‘Groups representing all classes of Indians are dissatisfied with the conduct
of the affairs by the Natal Congress, whose leadership is under an ideological influence of which they
disapprove and whose approach they consider harmful to Indian interests.’ Dadoo and Monty refuted this,
insisting that they represented the majority of Indians and ‘fully support the stand taken by Pandit
Nehru…We have implicit faith in both the Governments of India and Pakistan to champion our cause
vigorously and adopt firm measures to obtain justice for South African Indians.’\(^{18}\) They added that the
leaders Smuts was referring to comprised…

…a handful of discredited individuals who had formed the Natal Indian Organisation at a secret
meeting behind closed doors guarded by officers of the C.I.D. supplied by the Government. This
handful of disgruntled individuals danced to the tune of the Prime Minister and indulged in flirtations with him while delicate correspondence affecting the future of Indians was going on between the two Governments.\textsuperscript{19}

India reported to the General Assembly on 2 December 1947 that it had written to Smuts, who had declined the offer of a round table conference. In May 1949, the Assembly again passed a resolution calling on India, Pakistan and South Africa to enter into discussion at a round-table conference, but the Indian government’s letter to the National Party government on 4 July 1949\textsuperscript{20} was ignored.

**Mission to India**

Churchill’s words in 1935 that ‘a seditious Middle Temple lawyer, now posing as a fakir of a type well-known in the East, striding half-naked up the steps of the Viceregal Palace…there to negotiate and to parley on equal terms with the Representative of the King-Emperor,’\textsuperscript{21} point to the growing influence of Gandhi on the Indian nationalist struggle. Just more than decade later when the two old Edinburgh mates, Dadoo and Monty, visited India, in the midst of the passive resistance campaign in Natal, Gandhi was at the height of his influence, and Nehru was making his mark as an international leader. Their express purpose was to conduct a propaganda campaign in India which, aside from being the ‘mother country’, was also a significant part of international left wing discourse of national liberation. Dadoo and Monty issued a lengthy joint statement on the eve of their departure from Johannesburg on 11 March 1947, where they were given a rousing farewell at a packed Gandhi Hall:

> We are leaving the shores of South Africa at a critical and decisive phase in her history. The Smuts Government has shown a bankruptcy in leadership in dealing with the acute post-war problems…Instead of giving a strong lead on the decision of the United Nations, the Government is guilty of…fostering race antagonism. This antagonism has begun to express itself in the boycott of Indian traders and the open propaganda of our vulgarly fascist bodies…The historic joint meeting last Sunday between representatives of the ANC, the NIC and the TIC, and the Joint Declaration ensuing there from, have paved the way for greater and closer cooperation between the African and the Indian people…We appeal to all true democrats and men of goodwill in the European community to throw in their lot wholeheartedly on the side of progress. They can either…go forward in step with the world democratic forces to a greater and happier South Africa or allow the fascist forces to lead us into racial antagonism, a totalitarian regime and war. The battle for democracy is on! *Au Revoir.*
The ‘historic joint meeting’ was Dadoo and Monty’s joint declaration of co-operation in March 1947 with Dr. A.B. Xuma, pledging ‘the fullest co-operation between the African and Indian peoples.’ It was not simply a bolt out of the blue, but in large part a result of the lessons learnt from the passive resistance campaign, Dr. Xuma’s visit to the UN with H.A. Naidoo and Sorabjee Rustomjee, and Dadoo’s increasing links with the ANC through his membership of the CPSA and participation in the 1946 African mineworkers strike. The visit to India gave Dadoo access to political contacts and community leaders like Major Mohan Sing (Jodhpur), K.H.S. Tathore (Udaipur), Dr. Chandra (Calcutta), K.P. Peters (Andhra Pradesh), Krishna Ayer (Bombay), N. Vengopal (Madras), Hakim Mohammed Sehwani (Karachi), Dr. A.A. Khan (Karachi), N.Z. Faruqi (Jaipur), Dr. L.J.N. Madani (Jodhya), T. Sadasuvan (Bombay) P.B. Roy (Calcutta), and, of course, Gandhi and Nehru. While we have not been able to trace Dadoo’s perceptions or records of this trip, Monty kept a fairly detailed diary of their visit and an early snippet indicates the route to India and the full itinerary:

10 March: Vandayar. Films, Left for Johannesburg 11:00 am.


13 March: 10:00 am. Told of departure for Karachi at noon. 12:00 - Assam port; 2:30 pm - Left Cairo.

14 March: Arrived at 6:00 am. Met by Mayarant Sudhiva; Conference at 3:00 pm. Swami Kistavand M.L.A. and Chairman Provincial Congress with his executive visited us at 8:00 pm at hotel.

15 March: 8:30 am - Addressed Congress High School; 10:00 am – K. Punniah, editor of Sind Observer; 11:00 am - Invited to Legislative Assembly; 3:00 pm. Met C.H.V. Pathy [photographer / journalist for weekly journal Free India]; 6:00 pm - Drive with Mayor; Met Dr. Chockram – Sind Province C.C. President.
16 March: 7:30 am – Mayor Reception; 4:00 pm – met Congress workers; 8:00 pm – Dinner at R. Puna; Major Mahomed Aksee Sikwani.

17 March: 10:00 am - C.H.V. Pathy; 2:30 pm – Congress students; 4:00 pm – Shaikh Ghoolam; 8:30 pm – Ranchod Ward; Dinner – Dr. A.A. Khan.

18 March: Nanski; Mir Ahmed Talpier; Left for Karachi; Arrived 6:00 am. Met by Dr. Appadurai, S. Mehta; Pandit Rungaru; Dr. Lundra Sunderam. Guest of Lala Shankerahan.

19 March: 10:30 am – Addressed Jawaharlal Nehru at Assembly; Left for Lucknow at 2:00 pm. Arrived 4:00 pm. Met the Pundit Odaught at 6:00 pm; Left for Patna at 8:00 pm.


21 March: Met at Patna by P.M. Shri Singh. Congress President. Left Patna by rail to Delhi.

22 March: Arrived at 8:00 am at Constitution Social. Met Mr. Sunderam. Met various delegates, etc.

23 March: 4:30 pm. Asia Conference. Great gathering at Old Fort Purana Qila (500 years old).

27 March: Baldeo Sing; Bapu Rajendragosad.

28 March: Met South African students at Aligarh; Special film at 3:00 pm; 6:00 pm – Viceroy; 9:00 pm – Nehru At Home.

29 March: Scripts for broadcast.

Dadoo and Monty attended the All-Asia Conference from 23 March to 2 April 1947. The setting highlighted feelings of history-in-the-making: Purana Qila was ‘a large, somewhat rundown yet still
majestic stone structure built by Sher Shah Suri in the sixteenth century.’ The opening and closing sessions drew crowds in excess of 20,000, with Nehru giving the inaugural address and Gandhi the concluding talk. Though the conference had been initiated by India, Nehru told delegates that the idea ‘arose simultaneously in many minds and in many countries because there was a widespread awareness that the time had come for us, peoples of Asia, to meet together, to hold together, to advance together.’

There were 190 delegates and 45 observers from countries like Afghanistan, Indonesia, Arab League, Egypt, Iran, Korea, Indo-China, Malaya, Palestine, Soviet Republics, Georgia, Azerbaijan, Uzbekistan, Tibet, Mongolia, and Nepal. Most delegates represented the dominant liberation voice in their countries, and would make their mark on the world stage in the coming years. They discussed a host of issues and were unanimous that the first step to freedom was the ‘liquidation of imperial regimes’, followed by socialist economies free from foreign capital. There was optimism that freedom was on the horizon, which sentiment was voiced by Sarojini Naidu, ‘Fellow-Asians, my comrades and my kinsmen arise: Remember the end of darkness is over. Together, men and women, let us march towards the dawn!’ The conference was closed on 2 April 1947 by Gandhi who, in a stirring and passionate speech that would be one of his last, told the rousing crowd of the pernicious effects of European cultural imperialism and bankruptcy of European ideas:

You, friends, have not seen the real India and you are not meeting in conference in the midst of real India. Delhi, Bombay, Madras, Calcutta, Lahore - all these are big cities…If some of you see the Indian villages, you will not be fascinated by the sight. You will have to scratch below the dung heap. I do not pretend to say that they were places of paradise [but] today they are really dung heaps…I have travelled from one end of India to the other and I have seen the miserable specimens of humanity with the lustreless eyes. They are India…The first of the wise men was Zoroaster. He belonged to the East. He was followed by Buddha who belonged to the East - India. Who followed Buddha? Jesus, who came from the East. Before Jesus was Moses. And after Jesus came Mohamed. I omit my reference to Krishna and Rama and other lights. I do not call them lesser lights but they are less known. Is there a single person in the world to match these men of Asia?…What I want you to understand is the message of Asia. It is not to be learnt through the western spectacles or by imitating the atom bomb…In this age of democracy, in this age of awakening of the poorest of the poor, you can redeliver this message with the greatest emphasis…It is up to you to tell the world of its wickedness and sin - that is the heritage your teachers and my teachers have taught Asia.

This was Gandhi - a speech full of homilies that was part political economy, potted history, prophecy and
truth, that did not gel but was still able to capture the imagination of those committed to ending colonial rule.

3 April: Left for Jaipur.

5 April: Left for Jodhpur. [Met K.H.S. Rathore, Major Mohan Singh, Maharaja Kumar].

10 April: Left Jodhpur for Delhi.

11 April: Saw Sundry.

12 April: Saw Patel [this was probably a reference to Vallabhai Patel, the second in command of the first Indian of independent India].

13 April: Gandhi’s house.

14 April: Aligarh College. Tea Reception (Dadoo’s old college).

15 April: Met by leaders Reception of British India Association Central Committee.

16 April: Saw Dr. Chunilal Lahlavad. Press Conference.

17 April: Local committee. At Home at 6:30 pm.

18 April: Dinner at 7:30 pm. Ushee Chagler.

20 April: Tea Party at 9:30 at Taj by Imperial Citizenship Association [given the name it is a pity that Monty does not discuss what the import of this Association was. As it stands it seems that it is a hangover from Gandhi’s early position that he was struggling for equal rights within the British Empire].

21 April: Meeting 5:30 – Andhra Provincial Trade Union.

24 April: Legislative Assembly Council, Madras.
27 April: 8:30 pm. Wedding, Mrs. & Mr. T.V. Purushotam.

28 April: 6:50 am – Left for Barada from Sayan.

Dadoo and Monty returned to South Africa on 28 May 1947.

The importance of the Indian nationalist struggle in radicalising South Africans is highlighted by Dadoo and Monty’s meeting with Unus Meer, the son of A.I. Meer, leading official in the NIC who had also represented Indians at the UN. Unus was a young medical student at this time in Bombay (Mumbai) with Chota Motala and Omar Hassim, amongst others, who would be key figures in the NIC during the 1950s. In India these South African students took an active part in student politics. O.V. Jooma, for example, was General Secretary of the student body at Grant Medical College and participated in student uprisings against the British from 1942, and Ismail Meer, the brother of Fatima Meer, was joint secretary of the leftist Bombay Students Union. South African students were incredibly active in the political life of the country, among the many influential movements, with the Gandhians, Socialists and Communists the most powerful. South African students were caught in the swirl of this heady revolutionary atmosphere; Chota Motala, Omar Hassim, Ismail Meer, and Unus Meer were at Gowalia Tank, Bombay, when Gandhi moved the ‘Quit India’ Resolution in August 1942.

Unus Meer recalls the visit of Dadoo and Monty:

I was free and Dadoo called me because of the connection with the Meers. They knew us to be politically active. I landed up going with them to all their meetings, organizing some of the meetings, some of the people and sorting out problems. While they were there…they addressed a meeting of the Garni Kamdar Union which is the biggest and one of the oldest trade unions in India. Kamdar means workers’ union. They went on strike once for six months continuously…it was the one outstanding part of Indian trade union history, under the control of the Communist Party. Incidentally, the Indian press, while passive resistance was on, used to have continuous coverage on what was happening here. Everyday it made front page news, always Indian South African Indian news was prominent in the Indian press. While the passive resistance was on, I went to one of the large Leftist, anti-British papers, not pro-Congress. A fellow called Karanja was the editor. I spoke to Karanja and arranged for my father to send news regularly. So we [Dadoo and Monty] went to that paper…We went to the Home Minister of Bombay – Moraji Desai. We had a
long discussion there on the Congress. Then the CP of India headquarters was in Bombay. We were invited for lunch and we had a talk there with the top three people...P.C. Josh, a man called Dr. Adhikari and Randhiwe. Then we went to society in Bombay that had South African Indian relations. They used to look at foreign Indian problems and they have a nice library there. While in Bombay, Dadoo, because of his Aligarh background, knew a lot of Urdu and we arranged quite a lot of *mashiara* and *qaawwalis* and he enjoyed all that sort of thing.

When we landed at Madras station, on the platform there must have been about five to six thousand people with banners. Now both Dadoo and Monty did imbibe a bit and in India, they were very puritanical ... even the CP would not have anything to do with alcohol and the Congress too. They were very strict about how you dressed and how you behaved. So these people come into the compartment and asked me, ‘Where’s Dr Dadoo and Dr. Naicker?’ I said, ‘Wait, wait, sit here, and wait here.’ I rushed over there and found these two saying, ‘U-n-u-s...how you? Have one of these’, and so on, and jumping around. Then I said, “Look, there’s a serious...’ They said, ‘don’t worry, don’t worry,’ and looked outside. I never saw two people become so sober and so clear so quickly before. In Madras there were lots of, ministerial meetings. Naicker was interested in South Indian music and that was the season in Madras where they have a thing called *kacheri* (classical Tamil music). I used to accompany him quite a lot on those in the evening. We even went to see Tamil movies which I found most confusing sitting next to him and he’s explaining to me. In Madras, we met Sir Aliga Chettiar. He was a brilliant man who had a degree in law, engineering plus some literature and other things. He had a whole city named after him – Aliga Parnagar - just like you have Tatanagar after Tata’s. ... So, anyway, they were feted by the topmost people in India and feted...as if they were great heroes ... there’s no doubt about it.

They were supposed to go to Baroda for a meeting. Now, that was strange. They were still divided...Congress, Muslim League, Communist Party. So, the Congress people say, we will not have a joint meeting with the Muslim League, the Muslim League says we won’t have anything with the Congress and both won’t have anything to do with the communists. So Dadoo said, ‘look, you [Unus] better sort this out, go to Baroda, we are only spending a day, we’ll meet all three of them but please try to sort it out.’ So I went there. I stayed at the government guest house and I went first to the Congress people, then the Muslim League and the Communist Party. I said, ‘It doesn’t matter, we won’t argue...I am convening the meeting. Will you all come?’ So the meeting was organized in Baroda under my name.
The Indian public regarded them as great heroes. They knew about Dadoo and Naicker. In Madras, at the railway station there were about five thousand people. At the Bombay meeting there were forty to fifty thousand at the Parell Ground. They got on excellently. They were great buddies. Monty was a very sincere man, sincere in what he did. He was a man with high passion in what he believed in. He was a man who was prepared to make sacrifices. He was a very good leader...Dadoo was a great intellectual. He could talk on lots of things. I had a great time because they were very friendly, jovial people and politically I was in accord with them.

Shortly after his return, Monty, speaking on behalf of himself and Dadoo, told the 1947 conference of the NIC that every political party in India had pledged its full support:

We were inspired...by the fighting spirit of the masses who everywhere encouraged us to fight with increased vigour...India recognised that we in South Africa were not only fighting for our just rights but also to preserve the national honour and dignity of all Indians...A mighty India is arising and will allow no country to trifle with her sons and daughters in other countries.'28

The Asian Conference was a seminal moment for Dadoo and Monty, as the latter outlined in a lengthy appraisal:

The unqualified success of the Conference was the manifestation of the indomitable urge for freedom, culture, unity and strength. It was a challenge to dying and tottering imperialism...When any item on the agenda was discussed the delegates went straight to the root of the problem which, when unearthed in each case, was found to be imperialism. And they decided unanimously that as a prerequisite to progress this decaying root must be pulled out and hurled into the dust bin of history...We took the opportunity of meeting and discussing our problems and struggle with delegates...fresh from the trenches, the battle-scarred patriots...This is a reminder to us that Freedom must be won and cannot come as a gift.... During our short stay in our Motherland we travelled extensively from West to East and South to North...In our ears still ring their determined and passionate promise to give us all possible help in our unequal battle for fundamental rights. Our struggle is not merely a struggle for fundamental rights of the Indian minority in South Africa but a spearhead of the struggle of the oppressed people against the establishment of this Master plan...A year ago we took a solemn pledge to suffer for our freedom. Then we were alone. India was under the heel of imperialism. Today we are assembled to renew our pledge and we can do so with greater determination for we have India on the verge of complete freedom....29
Sentiments from India bore this out. Pillamani Venkateswartu, M.L.A., secretary of the Andhra Provincial Trade Congress, Bezwada, wrote to Dadoo and Monty on 26 April 1947 ‘to congratulate you, the valiant working class for waging relentless struggle for their elementary civic rights and for a minimum living wage…The Andhra working class is carefully following your struggles and they are with you in all these struggles.’ Sayed Miran Mahomed Shah, Speaker of the Sind Legislative Assembly, wrote on 17 March 1947 that ‘for a long time’ he had been ‘studying the situation in South Africa…and have always felt the pinch of the injustice that is done to our Indian brethren…I have not only sympathy with the South African Indians in their struggle for freedom, but exhort all those at the helm of affairs in India to thrown their weight on their side and make the South African Union feel the enormity of the inhuman treatment.’ Honorary Sri O.P. Ramsamy Reddy, Prime Minister of Madras, wrote to ‘My Indian brethren in South Africa’ on 25 April:

Your representatives, Drs. Dadoo and Naicker have met me and I have heard with much interest and poignancy an account of your problems and travails. Our country is on the threshold of freedom and I am sure it would help to solve your problems enormously. May I request you to forge common bonds of unity among yourselves as well as with our African Brethren and set a glorious example to the world. The eyes of India and the world are on you and you are setting a glorious example in by your supreme fight. We wish you Godspeed and Good Luck and a successful end to your fight for freedom and human rights.

The President and members of the Vanniakula Kshatriya Mahasangam, Madras, presented Dadoo and Monty with a plaque on 27 April 1947:

No nation ever became glorious without bitter struggle and sacrifice. You are holding the flag of India aloft by such means and we feel particularly gratified that one of their own members [Monty] aided by his colleague, is in the forefront of the battle for freedom. The fight you have put up against the Ghetto Act. The sacrifices you have made and the indignities you have suffered at the hands of an arrogant race, who have no intellectual pretensions to superiority over us, but pride themselves of having white skin forgetting that pigment is due only to climatic conditions, have made deep and indelible impressions upon our minds and we all passionately look forward to that day when pride would be humbled and humility, universal love and the feeling of brother-hood will triumph. Your names will go down in history as the great makers of nations and will always be
coupled when the South African questions are discussed with that great name of Mahatma Gandhi. The Poorest of us who have no Silver and gold to give you, give instead our hearts and tears and pray God that He will prosper and bless you.

The highlight of Monty’s visit was meeting Gandhi, the impact of which he explained in great detail on 16 September 1948 in a speech ‘What I Owe to Mahatma Gandhi:’

The time for personal contact with the great leader had now arrived. I decided to fly to Wardha with Dadoo, in order to receive more precise guidance in regard to future plans…To be with Mahatma Gandhi was like the vision of a dream. I was not going to meet a stranger. His teachings had become part and parcel of my life. His autobiography had been my Bible, and in my leisure time I have been reading it over and over again. Yet to meet one's hero in flesh and blood was to be such a noble experience…. When Dadoo and I arrived … we were ushered in his room. We had come to meet the Father of the Indian Nation, and the welcome we received was naturally that of a dear father to his affectionate children. We will never forget the warm smile which lighted upon both of us - the smile of the hero we had loved and admired for thirty years.

We gave him an account of the progress of the struggle, and were quite surprised to find that he had found time to keep in touch with the latest developments of our satyagraha movement…. Throughout, he kept on emphasising the central lesson of the satyagraha movement …that non-cooperation was not the weapon of those who found a shelter in a negative attitude of life; it was a positive action leading straight to success if the principles were not compromised. India recovered her freedom by clinging to the principles of non-violence. South African Indians, he said, would see the milky way if they followed the example of the mother country.

When we met for the second time, he was the guest of Dr. Syed Mahmud in Patna. Bapuji was eager to know the response we had met from the various leaders in India and he was glad to learn that everywhere we had received enthusiastic assistance. At dusk we parted. Before we separated Dadoo asked Bapu if we could attend his first prayer meeting. ‘Yes,’ he said, ‘if you can afford to be up at four.’ Bapu's doubt about our early rising was fully justified. We had a sound sleep and were only awakened by the hearty laugh of Gandhi when he saw us in our beds after he had finished not only the four o’clock prayer but his half an hour's walk.

The trip achieved the objectives that Dadoo and Naicker hoped for. Their leadership contested both inside
the Indian community and by the South African Prime Minister Jan Smuts, was endorsed by both Nehru and Gandhi. It was a major fillip not only because of the personal support they received but it was support for the style and type of politics that both sought to continue in South Africa. Crucial was the objective of seeking greater co-operation with the ANC.

Nehru’s support was crucial not only because he was respected but because where Gandhi was hesitant, Nehru was insistent that the Indian community link their struggles with that of the African majority.

Nehru said on 15 September 1946:

While India must necessarily aim at protecting the interests and honour of her nationals abroad...we do not seek any special privileges against the inhabitants of the countries concerned. This would apply specially to African countries where the inhabitants are relatively backward and have been exploited in the past by others, including to some extent even Indians. Our objective should be to help in the rapid progress of these African territories towards political and economic freedom.

Nehru was keen to ensure that Indians did not seek special privileges vis-à-vis the African majority, and in this his views were progressive. But his world view also reflected a modernising imperative that was impatient with tradition that was defined as ‘backward’. One must ask what he meant ‘by relatively backward’ and in relation to whom? Nehru, in his tenure as Prime Minister of India, defined progress as encouraging heavy industrialisation, and big projects like dams, which he called ‘temples of modern India.’ But while the moderniser Nehru’s views could easily translate into a kind of Eurocentricism, he was committed to the struggle against apartheid, and insisted that Indians join in an alliance with Africans. During the 1946 passive resistance campaign, Nehru emphasized that the struggle was …

… not merely an Indian issue. It concerns ultimately the Africans who have suffered so much by racial discrimination and suppression. Therefore, the Indians should help in every way and cooperate with the Africans. Indians should remember that they were the guests of the Africans… We do not want any Indians to go abroad to exploit the people of any other country. We want to build up one world where freedom is universal, and there is equality of opportunity between races and peoples.30
These arguments were progressive politically but contradictory. Would Indians be eternal ‘guests’ in South Africa? And did this mean that they could be asked to leave at any time? Contrary to Nehru’s limited horizon, Dadoo expressed a clear desire to be full and equal citizens in a free South Africa.

Nehru’s insistence though was important given Gandhi’s hesitance on this issue. In 1939 Gandhi told Rev. S.S. Thema of the ANC:

You will be pooling not strength but weaknesses. You will best help one another by each standing on his own legs. The two cases are different. The Indians are a microscopic minority. They can never be a “menace” to the White population. You on the other hand, are the sons of the soil who are being robbed of your inheritance. You are bound to resist that. Yours is a far bigger issue. It ought not to be mixed up with that of the Indian. This does not preclude the establishment of the friendliest relations between the two races. The Indians can cooperate with you in a number of ways. They can help you by always acting on the square towards you. They may not put themselves in opposition to your legitimate aspirations, or run you down as “savages” while exalting themselves as “cultured” people in order to secure concessions for themselves at your expense.31

This came at a time when Dadoo and people like H.A. Naidoo were members of the Non-European United Front (NEUF) formed in 1938. The NEUF sought to unite all the “non-european” peoples into a single organisation.

Dadoo and Monty also secured the continuing support of the Indian government to raise the South African issue in international platforms. The UN was seen as important and India’s insistence on putting the South African government’s policy of discrimination on the agenda raised both the local struggles on the international stage but also put first Smuts and then the apartheid government on the back-foot.

In securing this kind of support Dadoo, unlike Monty who was not a communist, had to make important compromises. He kept some distance from the Communists in India and refrained from any critical eye on the Indian National Congress. The adherence to Gandhi’s vision at the time also meant that Dadoo and Monty failed to recognize the contending forces within Indian nationalism, its class basis, the struggles of subalterns outside the gaze of the dominant anti-colonial politics, and also the debates on non-violence itself as a strategy of resistance.32 The working classes had their own heroes and leaders who argued, in various ways, that Congress was planning to compromise with the British, and advocated violent mass
uprisings based around a well organized CP.

Another important figure was Dr. Bhimrao Ramji (B.R.) Ambedkar (1891-1956), who was born into an untouchable family and spent a lifetime fighting against social discrimination in the form of the caste system. He fought to have a say in the drafting of India’s constitution and remains a figure of inspiration to Dalits.33 There is no mention of him in Monty’s diaries though he was at the height of his influence during this period and Dadoo like Naicker limited his comments to admiration for Gandhi and Nehru and the INC.

It would be expected of Monty, given he was not a communist, but an ardent follower of non-violent resistance and a confessed admirer of Gandhi, that he would stick close to the leaders of the Indian Congress. How then does one explain Dadoo’s shying away from the Communist Party of India of which many South African students in India supported and his genuflection to Nehru and Gandhi?

Part of this lay in Dadoo’s understanding of the national question and more profoundly the race issue.

In the struggle to win hegemony within the Indian Congresses, Gandhi’s support was crucial. Gandhi’s work for the Indian nationalist cause had given him continuing if not increased stature in the local Indian community. When Gandhi asked for a postponement of passive resistance in 1939, Dadoo probably chaffed at the bit. He had staked a lot on the campaign and had galvanised a wide array of support. Six thousand attended a meeting on 9 July 1939. Among them were the children of fellow travellers of Gandhi; Ahmed Cachalia and Thambi Naidoo had marched with Gandhi in 1913 and now their sons Molvi Ismail Cacahlia and Naranswamy Naidoo were prepared to resist under the leadership of Dadoo.

The build-up to the trip to India and the trip itself already show the broad outlines of Dadoo’s political philosophy- the need to stitch the nationalist struggle for liberation and the struggle for socialism. For Dadoo the Indian nationalist struggle was important in the broader struggle to defeat colonialism. That struggle was also vital in using it to win hegemony against the local conservative leadership of the Indian Congresses. Dadoo’s communism did not mean that he ignored the race question and simply wanted to build a non-racial organisation. For him winning hegemony inside of the Indian community was important.
At the same time the Communist Party with its openness to all racial groups became an important precursor for what Dadoo saw as the future evolution of the liberation movement. If Dadoo looked past Gandhi’s anti-communism, so Gandhi Dadoo’s communist leanings.

Gandhi for example dismissed letters from some South Africans who complained that Dadoo was a Communist and should be isolated. He wrote on 27 November 1947 to S.B. Medh, ‘The best way is not to bother about what any ‘ism' says but to associate yourself with any action after considering its merit. Dr. Dadoo has made a favourable impression on everybody here [India].’

The trip to India renews old connection in the form of Gandhi. His endorsement of the leadership of Naicker and Dadoo and importantly of the tactics and strategies of passive resistance are crucial. As if to reinforce this link on their return Naicker and Dadoo as part of the 1946 campaign meet at the border of Natal and Transvaal, evoking memories of Gandhi’s 1913 march.

Crucially though the transnational link does not reinforce an Indian struggle. Here Nehru is important. Independent India supports the local struggles against white minority rule and the building of Indian/African unity. The Indian Congresses were already moving in this direction but the Indian trip goes a long way towards solidifying this impulse.

The Indian nationalist struggle becomes important inside not only of the Indian Congresses but also in the ANC itself (cf. Suttner).

‘Fighter for national liberation, socialism and world peace’

In the decade that followed this visit to India, Dadoo was to become a major figure in the burgeoning anti-apartheid struggles. Once the Communist Party was banned, Dadoo still had a base in the TIC and the South African Indian Congress (SAIC). He was central in driving the Indian Congresses into the 1952 joint Defiance Campaign with the ANC. It was a breakthrough and was a catalyst in the building of the Congress Alliance symbolised by the adoption of the Freedom Charter of 1955. Crossing race and ideological boundaries Dadoo was a central figure in the anti-apartheid struggle of the 1950s his importance recognised when the ANC honoured him with the award of the decoration Istwalawandle-Seaparankoe at the Congress of the People in 1955. The other two recipients were Albert Luthuli and Father Trevor Huddlestone.
In 1956 Ezekiel Mphahlele wrote that one might say of Yusuf Dadoo that he ‘has a Marxist head, a Hindu heart, Mohammedan nails, and an African blood-system.’

It was testament to the boundaries that Dadoo was crossing as he was determined to stitch together the broadest coalition of forces. The Communist as post-modernist politician.

In exile, Dadoo still made the occasional trip to India and traveled on an Indian passport. But his main transnational link was now the Soviet Union. Dadoo was important in the securing of resources for the liberation movement. But it was more than this. Dadoo was an unashamed supporter of the Soviet Union.

As late as 1981, with Moses Mabhida, Dadoo wrote about the delegates to the Twenty-sixth Congress of the CP of the Soviet Union as ‘heirs of the great Bosheviks, no less fervent in their commitment to create a better life, not only for their own people, but for all humanity. There is no other Party which has produced such selfless, devoted and disciplined communists, such tenacious fighters for peace, freedom and socialism.’

It is now well known how the SACP could not see or refused to see the perversions of ‘actually existing socialism’. Contrast this with H.A. Naidoo who came through the local echelons of the CP and reached the highest leadership levels. In exile in Hungary, where he spent three years from 1953 to 1956, he was exposed firsthand to the shortcomings of that system and developed an aversion to it.

Dadoo was not just silent on the Soviet Union he was one of the foremost praise-singers. In 1976 he wrote:

> The greater the victories of the Soviet Union and the socialist world, the greater the triumph of the principles of Marxism-Leninism, the more intense becomes the counter pressure and propaganda of the bourgeois world, desperate to save the last bastions of profit and privilege from destruction. The Solzhenitsyns and Sakharovs who call for the destruction of Soviet power and bemoan the loss of Vietnam and Angola by the 'Free World' are honoured with Nobel prizes, the scribbling of every anti-Soviet hack dignified with the name of literature.\(^{36}\) AC, No. 66, Third Quarter, 1976

H.A. Naidoo, died lonely, marginalised, and largely unfeted. The uncritical Soviet Union devotee,
Dadoo, in contrast, was awarded on the occasion of his seventieth birthday the Order of Dimitrov of Bulgaria; the Order of Karl Marx by the German Democratic Republic; the Order of the Friendship of the People by the Soviet Union; the Gold Medal of the Afro Asian Peoples Solidarity Organisation; the Scroll of Honour of the World Peace Council; the decoration of the Hungarian Peace Movement; and the Wielki Proletariat of Poland.

Dadoo was given a string of accolades inside of the South African liberation movement as well. Oliver Tambo, the President of the ANC, speaking at Dadoo’s funeral in London in September 1983, described him as ‘one of the foremost national leaders of our country, of the stature of Chief Albert Lutuli, Moses Kotane, J. B. Marks, Bram Fischer, and Nelson Mandela.’

Dadoo lies buried at the Highgate cemetery in London, close to Karl Marx.

But his reputation by the late 1970s was gained not because he was an imaginative and innovative thinker around issues of national liberation and socialism but rather because he was a disciplined apparatchik of the Party and the Soviet Union. As exile unfolded Dadoo writings became turgid with all political questions sublimated to the science of Marxist Leninism. In the African Communist of 1974 he wrote: ‘Not only South African but also world history has shown that Marxism Leninism is the only correct revolutionary theory for countries in all stages of historical development.’

The keepers of the ‘correct revolutionary theory’ off course were the SACP and the model of its application of the theory was the Soviet Union. His admiration for the Soviet Model and his obsequious approach made for a popular joke among those on the left critical of Stalinism. It goes like this-Dadoo was walking the streets of London with an open umbrella. A fellow ANC cadre asked, ‘Comrade Yusuf why are you walking with an umbrella? It’s not raining.’ Without blinking, Dadoo shot back- ‘It’s not raining in London, but it is in Moscow.’

Shauna Mottiar writes that Dadoo …

… had to constantly assume roles; young professional trendsetter; protégé of Gandhi; liaison between Indians and Africans; dedicated communist; revolutionary; and dignified National Chairman. Like all good politicians however, he accepted these roles when the time was right for him to, and cast them away when they no longer served his cause.

There is a sense in which Dadoo accepted the need to play certain roles. Like Nehru, Dadoo probably had
his critique of Gandhi and probably chaffed at the bit when Gandhi asked for the postponement of the 1939 Passive Resistance Campaign. But he knew how crucial Gandhi was in the fight to win power in the Indian Congresses and win the support of the Indian masses in South Africa and he was quite happy to comply if this meant that he could get Gandhi’s allegiance.

One gets a profound sense that in following Dadoo’s life the post-modern mobiliser of the 1950s had ends up as a blinkered supporter of the Soviet Union and his politics formulaic. One wonders what he would have thought of Joe Slovo’s late critique of Soviet politics and bureaucracies that Slovo labelled ‘unbridled authoritarianism’ and a perversion of the party as a vanguard of the working class.”

But this attaching to role models and assuming roles as in the Soviet case in some mechanical fashion was not always the case. There was a time in the 1950s especially when Dadoo was not simply content with having hegemony within the SAIC, but striving to build a unity across racial boundaries and seeking to keep the banned Communist Party alive. He was not only committed to assuming roles but sought to create the conditions for new roles and broader terrains in which to conduct the struggle against apartheid. In the 1950s he could be seen as a maker of history, straining at the circumstance in which he found himself. As exile unfolded he appeared more a product of history, shaped by circumstance.

Where would Dadoo be today? Probably in one of ANC Youth League president Julius Malema’s “minorities” in the ‘economics cluster’ wearing both the hat of the SACP and the ANC.

Malema’s outburst, Mbeki’s 1996 so-called class project, the trajectory of the SACP and the question of transnationalism in this fast globalising world all point to the fact that the issues confronting Dadoo throughout his life-race, national liberation, the struggle for socialism and internationalism, continue to confound in post-apartheid South Africa. The race issue for example continues to startle the ANC in spite of its self congratulatory non-racialism. Emblematic of this is that in the build-up to the 2009 election, the ANC in KwaZulu-Natal launched the Indian, White, Coloured Working Committee (IWC), to find ways of garnering “minority” support while ANC leadership has admitted that it is befuddled in how to approach the “coloured” issue in the Western Cape. The Party continues to count “numbers” in parliament and the ANC NEC as it seeks greater influence in the ruling party. Lines blur. Often it appears as if the ANC’s influence over the Party has grown. The chairperson of the SACP Gwede Mantashe is seen overwhelmingly in his position as general-secretary of the ANC. The general-secretary of the Party and his deputy are both in cabinet. Is it the case of the advanced layers of the vanguard thinking they are
making progress climbing the ANC national liberation wall without realising that the wall keeps getting higher? And the higher they climb so the distance between the vanguard and the masses?

Dadoo’s epitaph reads: ‘Fighter for national liberation, socialism and world peace’.

This trinity of ideals motivated a whole generation of freedom fighters in the twentieth century. Given the changing terrain opponents of capitalism both in South Africa and globally find themselves, are these still the ideas that should animate our activism? And are the vehicles for achieving these aims, the vanguard party and international organisations like the United Nations? Or is the embryo of the twentieth first century struggle against capitalist globalisation to be seen in the alt-globalisation/global justice movements whose tactics and strategies and vision of a new world were revealed so spectacularly ten years ago on the streets of Seattle?

1 Dhupelia-Mesthrie, Gandhi’s Prisoner?, 255
2 Dhupelia-Mesthrie, Gandhi’s Prisoner?, 253
4 Wits interview.
5 Dhupelia-Mesthrie, Gandhi’s Prisoner?, 252
6 Leader, 27 February 1943.
7 Leader, 15 August 1943.
8 Leader, 29 August 1942.
9 This day was observed annually long before actual independence was obtained in 1947.
10. Leader, 30 January 1943.
16. Leader, 16 June 1946.
28. The Leader, 7 June 1947,
30. All three quotes accessed at http://www.anc.org.za/ancdocs/history/solidarity/artic-bk.html#NEHRU
31. Mesthrie-Dhupelia, 259
32. See Guha, Dominance without Hegemony (1998).
35. Dadoo and Mabhida, 26th Congress of the CPSU…African Communist, 3rd Quarter, 1981, 48
36. AC, No. 66, Third Quarter, 1976
38. AC, No. 56, First Quarter, 1974
39. Mottiar, 2000, 211