

Apmal Dawood

Aluta Continua

Under the guidance of their teacher, the children sang:

I love the Hindus

I love the Muslims

They are brothers unto each other

They are the two stars of my eyes

How can two brothers

Fight each other?

Then they raised the flag. It was the first anniversary of India's independence, 15

August 1948, a day for joyous celebration. But the little faces were tense and the singing mechanical. The moment they left the school grounds they dropped all pretence and settled into their anxieties. One group of twelve-year-olds, on their way to their lahti (stick fighting) instructor , specifically recruited to teach the villagers how to defend themselves, looked very worried.

"Did you see the people who came into our village last night? The man's face was covered with blood and his wife's clothes were torn."

"I saw. I was frightened."

"That's my uncle. He lives in the next village. When he came to knock, my father took his stick before he opened the door."

"Your uncle! What happened? What happened?"

"He says the Hindus came and killed all the people in the village. They are coming for us next."

"God help us, what are we going to do? We can't stay here."

One of the boys looked gravely at the others. "I'm going to leave Maphral. My father is taking me to South Africa."

"You are so lucky. People there are rich and they don't hate each other."

It was the time of partition. In Maphral, a Muslim village surrounded by about ten Hindu villages, rumours of a Hindu attack were rife and the flag-raising ceremony and patriotic song had been a complete denial of reality. The little boy who was

leaving the country would find this thread of irony running through the major events of his life.

He left a strife-torn India at about the time the Nationalist Party came into power in South Africa and a Congress alliance was being formed to oppose the new government's apartheid policy; he was moving out of one situation of political strife into another. But for this little boy his first experience of violence in South Africa was bureaucratic rather than bloody. At the registration office where an official taking one look at his name, Abdul Rahman Shaik Dawood Mahomed Yacoob Jhamaney, decided he couldn't deal with this, took the first two names, asked for the boy's father's name, which was given as Dawood, attached it as a surname and, at the age of thirteen, Abdul Rahman Dawood was born in South Africa.

His father had brought him and a younger brother, Hoosain, to live with his father's sister's son, Ismail Ebrahim, a businessman in Prinsloo Street. The Ebrahims, who owned a big general dealership, Ahmed Ebrahim and Company, that sold a variety of goods including clothing and material, lived in rooms behind the shop. There was a room or two for the Ebrahims, another for bachelors to one side of the kitchen with a partitioned room for a married couple and their children on the other. They were crowded but they would have been worse off in the Asiatic Bazaar.

After six months Mr Jhamaney, who had stayed to see his sons settled with the Ebrahims, returned to India leaving Abdul and Hoosain with the understanding that though they were now in the care of their cousins, they would have to fend for themselves when they were old enough.

The boys, who had been admitted to the Pretoria Indian Boy's School in the location, rode the bus that the Prinsloo Street merchants had provided for their offspring. Being in an English-speaking environment was difficult at first, but the relatives and friends with whom they travelled to school became their guides and mentors and helped them to cope.

Abdul, who had been in Grade Seven in India, was put into Grade Three because he could not speak English. Though he struggled with language, he had no problem with maths, as his teacher discovered to her annoyance. Every morning, after she put sums up on the board, she reached for her newspaper, thinking that the children would be busy for at least half an hour. The moment she sat down, however, Abdul stood up. Somewhat irritated, she would shout at him: "Now what? Get on with your work."

"Madam, I have finished."

"What? Have you written down all the sums?"

"Yes, madam."

"Have you worked them all out?"

"Yes, madam."

"Bring your book here."

When she checked his work, she would find that all the sums were done and correctly answered. After a few months of this, the teacher took him to Mr Collinet, the principal, who promoted Abdul to the next grade leaving the teacher free to catch up with the news. In the new grade, with an excellent English teacher, Abdul made such speedy progress that he became a star student.

Despite his obvious potential, however, he left school after Std Six (Grade Eight). He regretted dropping out but he was eighteen years old. He could not continue to take his cousin's hospitality for granted and had to start providing for himself. So Cousin Ebrahim gave him a job, marking, selling and packing goods in the family shops on Prinsloo Street.

He worked from eight in the morning to six at night.

After work, he went with his cousins to visit family and friends in the location or in Lady Selborne. On Saturdays, after they closed the shops at one o' clock, it was time for fun and Cousin Ebrahim took all the boys to the bioscope in the location. But as they enjoyed Indian films best, they couldn't wait for Wednesday nights, for the latest releases at the Orient Bioscope, when the theatre was packed with Indians from all the surrounding areas including

Pretoria North and Brits. It was exciting to meet and mingle in this huge crowd - almost like being in India again.

After about three years of working in the shop, Abdul was ready for a change. A travelling salesman, Willy Pockroy, who called often at the Prinsloo Street shops, mentioned that the Feldman Company, wholesale tobacconists and sweets merchants in Skinner Street, was looking for a conscientious, honest, responsible person to manage their sweets section and put an end to the petty thieving that was going on. When Abdul heard Pockroy asking one of his cousins to recommend someone for the position, he expressed an interest in applying and was allowed to go for an interview.

Wolfy Cohen, the manager who interviewed him, was very frank. "Look Dawood, we are experimenting with Indians. If you prove yourself, we will hire more Indians. If you don't and we are not happy, we'll fire you. You're a guinea pig."

"I don't mind your experimenting with me but I'm leaving a secure job."

"I must be honest with you. You will be on probation for three months and if your work is not satisfactory, you will have to go."

Abdul accepted the job. It was a risk - not because he doubted himself; no, he wasn't sure of his employers. Abdul, now called Dawood, was hired at a salary of thirty-five pounds a month and joined a staff of more than twenty African workers and about a dozen whites. Dawood was the first Indian. When he arrived at work on the first day, he was greeted by Mr Viviers, a security guard, shouting, "Kom, kom, kom." When Dawood went to hang up his coat, he found that there was a place for African coats and a cupboard for white coats but no place for Indian coats. Viviers told him to keep his coat in his department. At teatime, when he saw an African table and a white table, he turned, once again, to his department.

Though the work at Feldman's was more challenging with Wolfy Cohen, the manager, who had married into the Feldman family, demanding hard work and a responsible attitude from everyone, Dawood felt more than equal to the task. He enjoyed taking charge of a department and making it run smoothly and efficiently. When Cohen put his son, who was learning the business, to work there with him, Dawood realised that this was tacit acknowledgement of his

competence. Cohen, who expected hard work and dedication from his son, hadn't given him a soft, privileged position; he had made him start at the bottom - packing and sorting. Dawood was privately amused at the interaction between father and son. On one occasion, he saw Cohen standing over a box of sweets lying on the floor where his son was working.

Cohen looked at his son, "Pick that up."

"It's just a box, Dad."

"Yes, it's worth three pounds and it's lying on the floor. If I dropped three pound notes on the floor, would you leave them there? Now pick up the box and pack properly."

Dawood, who had developed great respect for Cohen as a fair man and excellent manager, knew he could count on Cohen's good judgement when he encountered problems in the Sweets Department. As supervisor, Dawood had to give instructions to black and white people, all of whom regarded him as a labourer rather than a manager. If boxes of biscuits had to be taken upstairs, the African workers expected him to carry boxes as well. They didn't understand that as supervisor he had a different task and filling out orders kept him very busy, checking, packing and replenishing. With white workers it was a matter of attitude; they expected him to take orders not give them. When things got really difficult, Dawood was forced to appeal to Cohen who made it clear to all his employees that they had to respect one another's line functions. When he saw Dawood's coat hanging up in the department, he was surprised and brought that item out of exile. He also insisted that Dawood have tea at the white table.

Cohen found Dawood helpful and considerate and knew he could rely on him. Once, when an important client from a country town, arrived just before one o' clock, a white employee, asked to take care of his order, indicated that he would deal with it after lunch. As the client wanted to get home before dark, Cohen asked Dawood to help out. He got to work right away, had one of the female clerks write out the invoice just before she went on lunch, got a couple of workers to postpone lunch and give him a hand.

Within half-an-hour, the selected items were checked, packed and ready to go and the client was grateful that he didn't have to wait and could travel home safely.

When Cohen began hiring more Indians before Dawood's three months of probation were up, Dawood smiled. The risk he had taken had paid off.

A year after he began working for Feldman Wholesalers, Dawood married Mariam Bibi Abdurahman who also lived in Prinsloo Street. When he had seen her around in the area and in the shops, he had decided that she was the girl for him.

Of course, he did not approach her directly; that was against custom. As his parents were in India, he spoke to the Ebrahims who took the proposal to Mariam Bibi's parents after which the families arranged the wedding. Normally, a bride moves in with her husband's family but as Dawood's family was in India, he had to start a new home for himself and his bride.

He rented two rooms and a kitchen just outside the location, between Potgieter and Schubart Streets. After a year, he and Mariam had to vacate these premises, as their landlord required them for his own relatives. Dawood then found accommodation in the Asiatic Bazaar. When he and Mariam moved into Mohamed Jeeva's yard in Eleventh Street, they became part of the community in the location.

Mariam, who made friends with the Jeeva women, began to attend the Majalis Prayers that Amina Jeeva

[\[1\]](#)

conducted in the month of Muharrum.

When Dawood began shopping at MK (Moosa Kara) Stores, Mr Kara, learning that Dawood was the nephew of Shaik Ahmed, went out of his way to help the young man. As Shaik Ahmed was well known and well respected for his work in the community, Mr Kara was only too happy to oblige his nephew.

Unsolicited, he gave him an open line of credit. Though he would not take advantage of it, Dawood really appreciated this show of friendship.

Following his uncle's example, Dawood also became involved in community service and joined a few organisations in the location. When he became a referee for the Pretoria and District Muslim Football Association, he was surprised to find that there were two separate soccer fields, one for Muslims, the other for Indians, right next to each other with only a fence separating them. He learned that the division in location soccer had come about as a result of partition in the Indian subcontinent and was surprised that the conflict that he had lived through as a boy, had had such far-reaching effects. But he could see that people in Pretoria did not understand the horrors of that situation. It hadn't been a game. In the location, however, it had been played out at the soccer grounds.

In the early fifties, when a request to suspend matches to celebrate Pakistan's Independence Day (the same day as India's Independence Day) was turned down by the teams in the Pretoria Indian Football Association, the Muslim teams seceded from the association, formed their own and had no further dealings with the Indian Association.

The Muslim Brigade that came into being soon after, marched proudly down the location streets before matches, declaring the independence of the new association.

It made Dawood wonder what exactly was involved in the concept of independence.

Though Dawood was living in a time of intense political protest, he was not really politically awake and for him the Defiance Campaign, demonstrations, strikes, marches and the Treason Trial were simply a passing parade. While he was still working for cousin Ebrahim, he had been drawn to the old fruit-and-vegetable market on Church Street to listen to soapbox orators on Saturday afternoons. The communist and trade unionist, Stephen Tefu, had made the biggest impression on him with his forthright denunciations of exploitation and discrimination. Though Dawood had admired Tefu for his fearless stand, he had remained detached. Having been in the country less than ten years, he still had an emotional attachment to the mother country and was still an outsider adapting to conditions in a foreign land.

In the early sixties, however, Dawood was jolted out of his detachment when the Group Areas Board suddenly issued relatives and friends in Prinsloo Street with notices to move. He couldn't

understand how people could arbitrarily be thrown out of homes and businesses that they had occupied for over fifty years.

The people in town were the first targets and the people in the Asiatic Bazaar knew they were next.

How could this be happening?

He didn't understand until he read

"The Plight of the Indian Traders,"

a little booklet put out by H.E. Joosub, a leading merchant in the area, and gained his first insight into the precarious conditions of life for Indians in this country.

People rallying to Joosub's call, formed a committee to negotiate with the authorities but Dawood did not join them. He was part of a group of friends, about eight young men from Prinsloo Street, among them Sattar Motani, Anver Osman Alli and Ahmed Osman, who were ready to take action against forced removals but were looking for more effective strategies.

They met at Dawood's house to study the situation in depth. As they delved into the issue, they became aware that removals in themselves were only a tiny aspect of all the social engineering that was going on in the name of apartheid and while they were still deliberating, Nana Sita [\[2\]](#) was already challenging the Group Areas Board. Dawood and his friends watched in amazement his steadfast resistance against efforts to move him off his property. His willingness to suffer imprisonment and his absolute commitment to passive resistance, were awe-inspiring. It was as though Gandhiji had come back to life. Dawood's group was aware that many, believing that passive resistance had played itself out, were opting for guerrilla warfare instead. But with Nana Sita right there in their midst, Dawood and his friends could not easily dismiss satyagraha.

They decided to consult their hero, who had already been imprisoned twice for defying the Group Areas Act. Though he was ill, he spoke fervently of his belief in Satyagraha as the only effective strategy against oppression. As they sat around his bed, listening to him, he explained that non-violent resistance was a moral force against injustice aimed at redeeming, not destroying the enemy. He gave them examples of how it had worked in the past and in India and their admiration for this hero of past struggles was boundless.

But when they went away to think about what he had said, they could see that Satyagraha was idealistic. State terrorism had crushed mass action based on non-violent resistance,

reducing it to a strategy for the individual, and that could not bring about change. And it wasn't possible to redeem the enemy through appeals to basic human goodness; it had been tried but had resulted in the Sharpeville kind of atrocities. No, the enemy had to be defeated; the entire apartheid structure had to be brought down. They opted for the course of limited violence proposed by Nelson Mandela and joined Umkonto we Sizwe (MK) and the armed struggle.

After a period of training in urban guerrilla warfare, they recruited a group of about forty who were divided into different cells with a co-ordinating committee and a chief co-ordinator, Hussein Yacoob, Dawood's cousin. As there were three, at most four, members to a cell, known only to each other, anyone captured would not be able to reveal more than three names. When the Rivonia Trial began in 1963, they got their first opportunity to work underground.

Their task was to plaster the town with posters and stickers that read, "The World Is Watching Pretoria," "Release Our Leaders," and "We Stand By You".

This was protest not sabotage but the distinction between the two had been blurred after protest in any form had been outlawed and putting up posters had become a treasonous act.

The group worked under cover of darkness. One night, as Dawood's cell came to Church Street, a policeman suddenly confronted them. They bolted but he followed. Dawood spun around, pulled out a gun and shouted, "You take another step in this direction and I'll shoot you."

The policeman, stunned by this unexpected challenge, stopped in his tracks and they got away. Another cell was not so fortunate.

Two of its members were caught and the police discovered the names of the men who got away, one of whom was the chief co-ordinator, Hussein Yacoob.

Both these men had to skip the country.

From being an automaton in a world of everyday things, Dawood had suddenly become a revolutionary. With a purpose that extended beyond family and community, he felt for the first time that his existence had real meaning and he plunged into his new life with passion and commitment. But on the surface, he seemed exactly the same. The MK cadre

ready to fight to the death for freedom was hidden under the bland exterior of an ordinary man.

But the spirit of the MK cadre entered into this ordinary man going about his usual routine, making him much more enterprising and assertive in his everyday conduct. He moved out of the Jeeva's yard into bigger quarters, two rooms and a kitchen behind a vacant shop at 48 Barber Street. He cleaned up the premises, applied for a licence to open the shop, embarked on a lengthy battle with the licensing office, and was eventually permitted to run his café.

After five years, the Group Areas Board unwittingly did him a favour by relocating his business to Third Street, right next to the bus rank, a prime location, where it flourished. He had also quit Feldman's for a job with Sun Life Assurance of Canada.

As an insurance agent, the MK cadre could move about freely without arousing suspicion.

In 1971, Dawood went to London to see Hussein Yacoob, his cousin in exile. Since Dawood was not known as an activist, he was able to obtain a passport to travel to Britain. He returned just at the time that Ahmed Timol was arrested and a list of comrades, who had assisted him in distributing pamphlets and putting up posters, was found in his possession. That led to a police swoop on activists in the Witwatersrand area.

Though his name was not on the list, Dawood's home in Barber Street was also raided: his visit to Hussein Yacoob had exposed him. When the police found firearms and documents, they ordered Dawood to report the next day to the COMPOL Building, the headquarters of the Security Police in Pretoria. A close friend and comrade informed Dawood that his home had also been raided.

Before setting off for security headquarters the next morning, Dawood went to consult with him and to his surprise found him having a congenial cup of tea with a member of the security police. Dawood was shocked and disappointed. At the COMPOL Building, he was interrogated, charged and fined. Although he was not detained, he had to endure frequent raids on his house thereafter.

Despite the ongoing harassment that he and his family suffered, he did not give up his undercover work.

In addition, he was also embroiled in a conflict with the Group Areas Board. He had refused to move and was under the unrelenting threat of the bulldozers. Following Nana Sita's example, Dawood and his family had defied the Group Areas Board, had not relocated and were still in Barber Street in 1972, watching the location being razed before their eyes.

As soon as occupants left a house, the bulldozers arrived.

After most of the community had gone, there was no point in holding out especially as their proximity to the sewage works was affecting his children's health.

So Dawood took his doctor's advice, acquired a house in Laudium and moved.

But he was an MK cadre and underground work continued until the Soweto Uprising of 1976 that shook the masses out of their malaise and despair and awakened once more, in ordinary hearts and minds, the strength to resist openly. The government's attempts to co-opt the different race groups through provision of separate development structures, Homelands and Independent States for Africans and separate advisory councils for Coloureds and Indians, fuelled the resistance and people laughed at farcical elections with clowns for representatives. The government, however, had no sense of humour and laughter became treasonous. But it did not stop.

In 1981, Dawood joined the Anti-SAIC Campaign, an aboveground protest against SAIC elections, the government's tactic to validate the South African Indian Council (SAIC), a statutory body appointed in 1964 to advise the government on Indian matters. To confuse people, the government had adopted the people's own acronym, SAIC, which had stood for South African Indian Congress. In forcing these elections on Indians, the government was attempting to mask an apartheid instrument with a democratic convention.

But the community rose up in protest against this effort to foist separate development on them. Mass meetings in all Indian townships called for a total boycott of elections.

When Dawood was returning from one of these meetings, the Security Police picked him up for questioning.

"Why did you attend the meeting?"

"It was a public meeting."

"But it was in Johannesburg." Activists in Lenasia, the Indian township on the outskirts of Johannesburg, had organised the meeting.

"What's wrong with attending a meeting in Johannesburg? I go to work there every day."

"You spoke at the meeting."

"Spontaneously, from the floor. I simply supported a motion to boycott the SAIC elections."

The police let him go.

Dawood then took it upon himself to raise awareness amongst Indians in Pretoria. As the Transvaal Indian Congress (TIC) was not functioning, Dawood issued a pamphlet in his own name calling for a boycott of the SAIC elections. When he went to leave pamphlets at the mosque on Jewel Street in Laudium, he met Cass Coovadia, also carrying an armful of pamphlets. They eyed each other suspiciously. After Cass read Dawood's flyer, however, he willingly supported his call for a boycott.

Dawood's pamphlet announced a meeting at the Laudium Civic Centre at which Dr Ram Saloojee from Lenasia would be the keynote speaker. Dawood was pessimistic; he thought there would be no more than twenty people at the meeting.

But he had underestimated the community. When the proceedings began, he was overjoyed to be able to introduce Dr Saloojee to a full house. At this meeting, the community elected an Anti-SAIC Committee, with Dawood at the head, to launch the anti-election campaign. The Anti-SAIC Committee went into action raising consciousness and consolidating support and on

election day, 4 November 1981, only about two per cent of the people voted.

It was a resounding victory.

But the government paid no mind to the percentage poll. For officialdom, all that mattered was that elections had been held, people had voted, and there were elected representatives of the Indian community - that was democracy.

Dawood wrote to the Pretoria News in protest.

Letters (Pretoria News, 18 November 1981)

□ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ **Time to scrap the SAIC**

Sir - May I through the medium of your newspaper, reply to the numerous efforts being made to lend new credibility to the Indian Council (SAIC) after its humiliating rejection by the overwhelming majority of Indians.

After the unambiguous election outcome, the statement of Mr Chris Heunis, that: "The Council will be considered by the Government as the ONLY representative body of this community" - is the height of absurdity. Instead of accepting the expressed will of the people, the Government and its apologists are blaming intimidation and making other lame excuses for the ridiculously poor voter turn-out

According to many independent observers and news reporters monitoring the election, there were just no voters to intimidate at the polling booths. For the politically embarrassed candidates to now blame rejection of the SAIC on intimidation is a sick joke.

Sir, for 16 long years, respected community leaders have been consistently telling the

authorities that the SAIC and its members had no credibility or support in the Indian community.

The November 4 election was the first "acid test" of the Indian community's true feelings on this issue. It was a real trial for the acceptability of the very concept of racially separated and powerless institution as a "substitute for our democratic right to have representation in South Africa's central Parliament. T
The country-wide support for positive non-participation was in reality the people's emphatic rejection of this useless apartheid structure and everything that goes with it.

The election was a public exposure of the individuals purporting for so long to represent the Indian people. After this, let no SAIC member claim to articulate the true aspirations of the community.

It also demonstrates, the Indians are not insensitive to the injustice of the system with its callous uprootings and shunting around of thousands of settled families, of which Pageview, District Six and Nyanga are but just a few recent examples.

Government leaders always talk about winning the hearts and minds of all South Africans against the total onslaught. They boast about their willingness to listen to responsible opinion and reasonable requests made through constitutional channels.

Well, using the first and only legal and peaceful means accorded, the ballot box, the people have spoken, loud and clear.

We do not want the SAIC and its so-called leaders.

Please don't force them down our throats. After the clear election message, let it be now accepted that the SAIC and its new members stand completely isolated from the mainstream of Indian opinion in South Africa.

In spite of the fresh public postures, ministerial statement and appeals to give the elected SAIC a chance, I call upon the Government to reconsider its decision and disband the council. This will save millions of rands of the taxpayers' money on this futile exercise.

Any further attempts to give respectability to and project the SAIC as a forum for meaningful consultation and its members as representative leaders, will be a dangerous political deception all South Africans can least afford at this crucial period in our history.

- A.R. DAWOOD

.

Asian Bazaar

.

The government's dismissal of the community's "expressed will," strengthened the resolve to resist. After the elections, activists from Johannesburg invited Dawood to join a steering committee to resuscitate the TIC. The organisation was revived with Dawood and Maniben Sita [4] as Vice-Presidents. Then the TIC, with other anti-apartheid organisations, began to oppose new constitutional proposals for a Tri-Cameral parliament. In 1983, when the United Democratic Front (UDF) was launched, it brought together over 600 organisations pledged to ending apartheid. The TIC and NIC were key organisations in the Front and the immediate goal of the UDF was to prevent the establishment of separate racially based parliamentary houses. Africans, Coloureds, Indians and Whites worked together for a boycott of elections to the Tri-Cameral Parliaments. Their efforts kept the vote down to between 20 and 30 per cent, but as before, the government was not concerned with numbers. That an election had been held, was sufficient proof of its commitment to democracy.

After the elections, the UDF continued to mobilise people against government policy, and the decade of the 1980s became a period of mass action accompanied by brutal repression and terrible atrocities - torture, states of emergency, mass detentions, gunrunning, bombings, roadblocks, kangaroo courts and necklacing. It was a dark time. Few believed that the end of

apartheid was near.

Neverth

less, opposition to the government was intensifying and Dawood, involved both above and underground, was working with people like Father Smangaliso Makhatswa, Moses Molefe, Dr AB Nkomo and Peter Mangano in the Pretoria area.

He took part in protest marches, helped to organise funerals of comrades, held secret meetings in his home, helped settle disputes between Atteridgeville and Laudium residents, between Indian traders in Wynberg and civic leaders of Alexandra township and organised local consumer boycotts. When the UDF took command of the struggle inside the country, it outlawed official public holidays, declaring new ones - 21 March (Sharpeville Day), 1 May (Labour Day) and 16 June (Soweto Day). Dawood and the group of activists who gravitated around him called upon all people to stay away from work or close their businesses on these people's holidays.

They drove around Laudium monitoring the situation, noting those who went to work and those who kept their businesses open. Thus they spread their own minor terror campaign under the official reign of terror.

In 1986, when the UDF planned to mark the tenth anniversary of the Soweto Uprising on June 16, the government declared a state of emergency. Police began picking up hundreds of activists - it was called preventative detention. On the night of 12 June, just after Dawood had finished distributing pamphlets and posters calling on people to close their shops on June 16, a friend and comrade, Umi Ayob, who was dropping him off at home said, "You are the stupidest Kokney I know. Are you a fool? No UDF activist is sleeping in his own bed tonight. Do you want to be picked up?" Dawood thought it over and went to stay at a friend's place.

At 1:30 am, the police arrived at Dawood's home, searched the house and left after interrogating and threatening his family.

When Dawood heard, he realised he could not go home.

A friend offered to take him to Johannesburg. On the way, they pulled over to pick up a hitchhiker. When they saw that he was soldier, they got the fright of their lives. What had possessed them to pick up a hitchhiker at a time like this? They exchanged anxious glances as he settled himself at the back with his large kit bag.

As they continued along the highway, tense and apprehensive, concentrated only on the moment when their passenger would be gone, they were caught unawares by a roadblock. Dawood thought, "Now we've had it."

They had been unbelievably careless - travelling along the highway and picking up a hitchhiker!

They should have expected roadblocks; they ran into them everyday. Dawood sat there waiting to be pulled out of the car and whisked off to prison.

To his surprise, the soldiers at the roadblock waved them on, "Julle kan maar deurloop."

The soldier at the back of the car had made the difference. After they dropped him off, they took a back road to Johannesburg.

Dawood got out at the park in Mayfair. As he watched his friend drive off, it hit him that he was now adrift - a homeless person wandering around in a park with nowhere to go. As he looked about at other drifters, he couldn't imagine how they survived. Out of community, out of communion, unconnected. Dropping down on a bench, he thought about how much he took for granted, his family, his friends, his community. Community, the ummah, a central concept in Islam!

God, he was a Muslim!

My

As a Muslim he was not alone. He could go to the mosque. He remembered that a friend recently returned from Canada was living in a small place, two rooms and a kitchen somewhere in Mayfair. He didn't know where but he knew how to find him - at the community mosque.

Ebrahim Dassoo, whose family owned Goldfinger Banana Distributors, gladly took him into his home. After Dawood had been there some weeks, Dassoo aware that he was concerned about his family who didn't know where he was or whether he was safe, offered to go to the shop in the Asiatic Bazaar to reassure them. But this was a mistake. Dassoo, who was not connected in any way with political organisations or involved in political activity, had not been of interest to the police up to this point. After his visit to Pretoria, they began to investigate him so Dawood had to find a new refuge.

It was back to the mosque, this time in Fordsburg. Here, he found help in the person right next to him putting on his shoes after prayers. He knew this young man. He had been to the jewellery store where he worked and remembered him because the young man had the same name as his boss, Aadil. This quirk of memory made it simpler to approach the young man.

He could speak to Aadil as an acquaintance, not a stranger. When he explained his situation, Aadil agreed to take him in immediately after his child's birthday party.

Two days later, Dawood left Dassoo. Two weeks later, the police were at Dassoo's door.

During the time he stayed with Aadil, Dawood was very aware that he was endangering this family and knew he had to leave. When a comrade, Pepe Ravat, offered him a flat in Bosmont, he moved again and remained in the flat until the state of emergency ended. After six months in hiding, he returned home to find that his daughters were struggling to manage the business in the location and keep up with their studies at the same time. Although he was very reluctant to do so, he was forced to sell the business.

In the late eighties, when Mosioua (Terror) Lekota, Popo Molefe, Moss Chikane and other prominent leaders of the UDF were being tried for treason at Delmas, Lekota sent for Dawood to ask if he would organise a weekly meal for the twenty-two ANC comrades in prison. Dawood discovering that there were seven PAC prisoners as well included them all in the arrangement. He knew that outside prison, ANC and PAC comrades, motivated by different ideologies and strategies, found it difficult to co-operate, but inside, they were all comrades together. And during the two years of the Delmas trial, Dawood and his family, without any financial assistance from anyone, provided a weekly meal for twenty-nine detainees

Then came the joyous news of Nelson Mandela's release together with the unbanning of the ANC. Dawood was excited; he hadn't thought he would live to see Freedom Day. Now there was hope for the future. He could openly be part of a new democratic dispensation that would transform the country through recognition of the human rights of every individual. As he saw himself in a position of leadership, his mind began to race with ideas for improving conditions especially for poor people. After the 1994 elections, which brought in the new ANC government, Dawood was given the opportunity to serve in the Gauteng Legislative Assembly but he wasn't there for long. The opportunists whom the UDF had fought to keep out were now very apparent at all levels of government.

They understood power politics much better than activists like Dawood, whose idealistic notions made them easy prey to manipulation.

Working at local government level, Dawood became aware that merchants and businessmen in Marabastad, having established the Marabastad Development Forum (MDF), were making land restitution claims. When Dawood joined the MDF and was elected its chairperson, he became an advocate for redevelopment of the area. In his attempts to unite the Marabastad community behind a programme of reconstruction and development, he brought together squatters, traders and managers of public utilities in democratic forums where they could make decisions together. In the five or so years of its existence, the MDF began to make a difference.

It was a proactive, progressive organisation but despite its excellent beginning, it fell prey to bureaucratic prevarication, lost its funding, and expired.

Today, Dawood is a tour guide in Marabastad. [\[5\]](#) He loves the area for its vibrancy and diversity and is determined to be part of its development into a tourist destination.

But freedom cannot live with oppression and the struggle for liberation continues - the struggle against oppressive conditions of poverty.

Aluta continua!

[\[1\]](#) Amina Jeeva's story is told in Chapter 6

[\[2\]](#) See Chapter 5

[\[3\]](#) Pretoria News, 18 Nov 1981.

[\[4\]](#) Maniben's story, Chapter 5

[\[5\]](#) 2002