

## TRIBUTE TO ABDUL KADIR SALOOJEE

(Dr Ismail Vadi)

Lenasia's anti-apartheid struggle veteran, Abdul Kadir Saloojee, a leading member of the African National Congress (ANC), the Transvaal Indian Congress (TIC) and the United Democratic Front (UDF), passed away after a short illness in Lenasia on Wednesday, 26 May 2021, at the age of 80. Known affectionately as "Kadirbhai", his death marked a great loss to the liberation movement and the people of South Africa.



*Abdul Kadir Saloojee with Pravin Gordhan (left) and Joe Slovo (right) in Lenasia, 1990*

The second eldest son of Suliman and Fatima Saloojee, Kadir was born on 31 January 1941 in Newlands, Johannesburg. The Saloojee family lived on Main Road in Newlands, within a stone's throw from Sophiatown, where Kadir attended school.

When the racist National Party government enforced segregated education and forced people to move to a "group area" in Lenasia in the mid-1950s, Kadir attended the "Congress School" that was set up by the TIC with teachers such as Molly Fischer, "Murvy" Thandray and Duma Nokwe. As a youngster, he was a keen sportsman, playing tennis and cricket.

During the 1940s, Kadir's father aligned himself with the radical "Nationalist bloc" of the TIC led by Dr Yusuf Dadoo, Molvi Ismail Cachalia, Molvi Ismail Saloojee, Nana Sita and Naransamy "Roy" Naidoo, in opposition to the conservatives that controlled the Indian Congress at the time. Kadir's eldest brother, Khalil Saloojee,

participated in the 1946 Passive Resistance Campaign against the Asiatic Land Tenure and Indian Representation Act, known as the “Ghetto Act”. He served a month’s hard labour for illegally occupying land in Durban.

The National Party came to power in 1948 and immediately set about implementing its policy of apartheid. The Saloojee family of Newlands participated in many of the pivotal campaigns of the 1950s led by the ANC and the South African Indian Congress such as the Defiance Campaign of 1952, the Campaign for the Congress of the People in 1955, and the historic Women’s March of 1956. Family members recall that the Newlands TIC activists would collect funds on Wednesdays to support the accused of the 1956 Treason Trial. They would also hold regular *zikr* (prayer sessions) in support of various political campaigns.

The Saloojee family - deeply supportive of the anti-colonial struggle in India - opposed partition and strongly supported the Indian National Congress, including its leaders such as Jawaharlal Nehru and Maulana Abul Kalam Azad. Kadir’s brother, Dr Yusuf Saloojee, recalls that their father closed his shop as a mark of respect when Mahatma Gandhi was assassinated in 1948. These political developments had a lasting impact on Kadirbhai and contributed to making him a lifelong activist in the Congress movement.

The Saloojee family witnessed the destruction of their home in Sophiatown and the harsh implementation of the Group Areas Act in the mid-1950s. Their father Suliman, and after his passing, his wife Fatima and eldest son Khalil, engaged in a long-standing court battle that challenged the loss of their property, which ultimately was unsuccessful. Consequently, the family moved to Lenasia in 1966.

Kadirbhai married Rashida Jada in 1967, the daughter of another TIC leader in the Vaal. He worked as a sales representative for many years, travelling the length and breadth of Transvaal and Natal provinces, where he established firm business relationships in the school uniform trade.

The 1980s witnessed the revival of political activity in Indian townships across Transvaal. It was during the campaign against the elections of the South African Indian Council (SAIC) in November 1981 that Kadirbhai began playing a key role. His extensive networks in virtually every town and city of Transvaal enabled the Transvaal Anti-SAIC Committee (TASC) to effectively campaign against the puppet SAIC and popularise the message of the Freedom Charter. At the time, Kadirbhai’s brothers, Khalil, Yusuf, Abdulsamad and Ahmed, all became involved in the campaign, as did the other members of their family. Khalil Saloojee will forever be remembered for singing freedom songs in Urdu, including the memorable song from the Indian struggle named *Parna Janda* (*Don’t allow the flag to be lowered*). Kadir’s uncle, Molvi Ismail Saloojee, who was elected TIC President when Dr Dadoo was

forced into exile, graced the stage on many occasions during the campaign, speaking passionately against the SAIC in Gujarati.

On 1 May 1983, Kadirbhai was elected Treasurer of the TIC, a position he held throughout the 1980s. His wide-ranging contacts in the business world, along with a strong belief in the noble cause of freedom, enabled him to confidently and effectively fundraise for the organisation. He would book out a play at the Market Theatre and get the activists to sell the tickets at premium prices.

One of the most important campaigns of the TIC and UDF in the 1980s was against PW Botha's racist Tricameral Parliament. Once again, Kadirbhai reached out to his extensive political networks to enable TIC activists and leaders to engage in door-to-door campaigning, leaflet distribution, mounting posters and holding protest meetings throughout the province. During the successive states of emergency from the mid- to late 1980s, he remained unbowed and continued working as TIC Treasurer.

With the unbanning of the ANC in 1990, Kadirbhai and the rest of his family joined the ANC Lenasia Branch. During the difficult years of the transition, they provided a solid backbone of support to the ANC branch and campaigned enthusiastically for the ANC during the 1994 election campaign.

Socially, Kadirbhai enjoyed playing Bridge with friends. He became a reputable cook for weddings and funerals. It started out as a hobby and soon became a regular business activity. Legions of activists remember him cooking for striking mineworkers in the mid-1980s, and at political rallies and weddings of close friends and comrades.

Over the years, Kadirbhai was active in a wide range of community organisations in Lenasia such as Johannesburg Institute for Social Services (JISS), TIBA Blind Association and the Nishtara Lodge drug rehabilitation centre.

Kadir Saloojee made an enormous contribution to the struggle against apartheid. He was a resolute anti-apartheid fighter, a firm pillar of community development; a fundraiser par excellence; a passionate and talented cook; a man of incredible energy; a devoted family man; and above all, a kind, honest and modest person.

Over the last few years, he was a regular visitor at the Ahmed Kathrada Foundation in Lenasia and would regale staff members about his life adventures. He would recall that he met several presidents during his lifetime, among whom were Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat, and Presidents Nelson Mandela and Thabo Mbeki. His departure has left a deep void in the wider Saloojee family, the Congress movement and the community of Lenasia.

He leaves behind his wife Rashida, children Zakia, Mohammed, Somayya, Hajira and Ozayr, ten grandchildren, and one great grandchild.

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