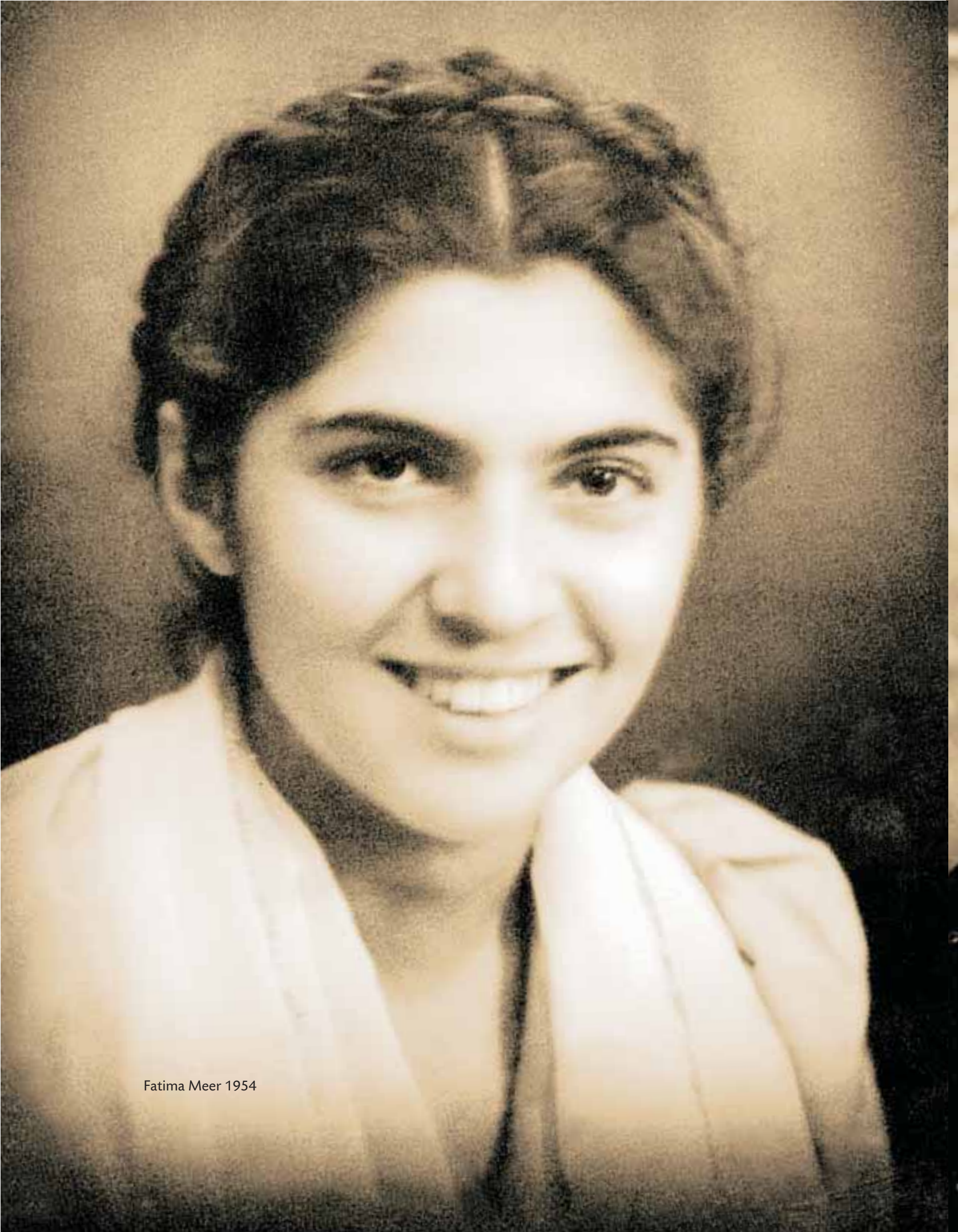




FATIMA MEEER

A PICTORIAL TRIBUTE

DASARATH CHETTY



Fatima Meer 1954

A TRIBUTE

Dasarath Chetty



Fatima Meer is an icon of the political struggle in South Africa. Since 1946, as a 17 year old, when as a high school student she founded the Students' Passive Resistance Committee to struggle against unjust laws, she has overcome race, class, gender and other barriers in a determined quest to contribute to the creation of a society based on social justice. The way Fatima has lived her life has served as an inspiration to a whole generation of activists, intellectuals, politicians, students and ordinary South Africans intent on challenging successive criminal, exploitative and oppressive apartheid regimes. Even after

the onset of democracy in 1996 which saw a rapid demobilization of the structures of civil society (due to the euphoria and heightened expectations of the time) that had previously resisted tyranny, Fatima fearlessly continued her outspoken, sometimes controversial and frank critique of those in power. Speaking truth to power became her hallmark from very early on in her life.

Sharing a platform with leaders with like Dr Yusuf Dadoo, Dr Monty Naicker and Dr Goonam who were leaders of the Passive Resistance Campaign in 1946 catapulted the young Fatima along a trajectory peppered with firebrand speeches, academic incisiveness, progressive publications and organizational leadership. So from her teenage years, obviously influenced by her father Moosa Meer, the Editor and publisher of Indian Views, a weekly publication focused on the struggle against white minority rule and anti-colonialism, Fatima's leadership became apparent.

In 1949 after the Indo-African race riots, Fatima helped organize Indian and African women into the Durban and District Women's League. Fatima served as Secretary of the League and Bertha Mkhize, President of the ANC Women's League, served as the Chair in what became the first women's organization with joint Indian and African membership. The race riots were a predictable outcome of the divide and rule approach used by the National Party government and served to inspire progressive, mass work from a generation of activists committed to harmonious inter-group relations and the use of the non-violent means to build a just society.

The 1950s was a period of heightened resistance manifested in the formation of the Congress Alliance in 1950, the Defiance Campaign in 1952, the Federation of South African Women in 1955, the Freedom Charter and the Women's Protest March to the Union Buildings in 1956, all significant events in which Fatima Meer had a role. The resistance to apartheid injustice was generally met with a forceful repression from which Fatima was not exempt.

She was amongst those banned in 1952 under the Suppression of Communism Act for a period of 2 years, her banning order confining her to the magisterial district of Durban, forbidding her to attend all public gatherings and from having her work published. In 1954 she was banned for a period of 5 years, an order that was renewed in 1976 for a further 5 years and in 1981 for another 5 years. In addition to these banning orders, Meer paid a heavy price for her tenacious opposition to the government of the day, having been imprisoned in solitary confinement in 1976, losing her son Rashid to exile and not seeing him for over 10 years and having to endure two bomb attacks and assassination attempts. Coupled with this Ismail Meer also faced serious and sustained persecution by the regime which banned him for 38 years from writing, publishing and public speaking.

It was in 1956 that Fatima began her career as a lecturer at the University of Natal being the first Black woman to be appointed in such a capacity at a white South African University. She served the University of Natal until 1988 having shaped thousands of young minds to view society from a critical perspective that challenged the status quo and unjust order.

The Institute for Black Research founded by Fatima in 1972, and which became relatively inactive due to her banning order was relaunched by her in 1983, with the formation of the Institute for Black Research Trust. I was privileged as a young academic and activist to have been invited by Fatima to become a trustee serving with her on a Board comprising the likes of Lewis Skweyiya, Paulus Zulu, Kwenza Mlaba, Saths Cooper and Winnie Mandela. My association with Fatima therefore spans over 25 years, during which time I was impressed and inspired by her intellect, courage and tenacity, her outspokenness and force of personality. It was an academic relationship, mentorship, comradely collaboration and friendship between two academics from the former Universities of Durban-Westville and Natal; a collaborative arrangement that was rare prior to the merger of the two universities into the University of KwaZulu-Natal in 2004. Both institutions, for the most part, operated in silos with very few examples of joint research initiatives, lecturer or student exchanges. Fatima however, bridged the chasm between historical advantage and disadvantage and perceptions of superiority and inferiority by addressing students at UDW on many occasions and by recruiting UDW students to undertake action research so characteristic of the Institute of Black Research, which she ran untiringly, with scant funding, almost single-handedly before and after her retirement.

Fatima's contribution to education was not limited to teaching and research. She also made a practical contribution by founding the Natal Education Trust which built schools in African townships, she founded the Tembalishe Tutorial College in 1979 which ran secretarial courses in

typing, established a Craft Centre at the Gandhi Settlement in 1982 and founded the Natal Education Organisation to address the problem of the low African matric pass rate. In 1986, as an IBR initiative, she also started the Phambili High School which enrolled 3044 students in two shifts and at the time had the highest enrolment of African matriculants (450) in the country.

In 1992 Fatima founded the Clare Estate Environment Group aimed at furthering the interests of shack-dwellers who were without clean water, sanitation and decent housing. Declining a seat in the ANC government of 1994 because of her commitment to bolstering the watchdog role of civil society in a democracy, Fatima went on to form the Concerned Citizens Group representing the interests of the poor, notably in Chatsworth and Phoenix, and became a founder member of Jubilee 2000 established to lobby for the cancellation of third-world debt. Such activism combined with the publication of 25 books epitomises sociology in action.

For such an outstanding contribution to the struggle for human rights and social justice Fatima has been acknowledged and affirmed both nationally and abroad. Amongst other honours, she received an Honorary Doctorate from Swarthmore College in 1984, an Honorary Doctor of Humane Letters from Bennett College in North Carolina in 1994, the Vishwa Gurjari Contribution to Human Rights Award in Ahmedabad, India, in 1994, the Archarya Kakasaheb Kalekar Universal Harmony Award, in New Delhi, India in 1996, an Honorary Doctorate in Social Sciences from the University of Natal in 1998, the Pravasi Bharatiya Samman Award by the government of India in 2003 and an Honorary Doctorate from Rhodes University in 2007.

To my friend and mentor, to a teacher, mother, professor, researcher, writer and activist, I thank you for living a life worthy of emulation. Your immense contribution, of historic significance, will always be remembered by freedom-loving people who adopt an anti-racist stance in the quest for egalitarianism, social justice and peace.

*with gratitude
and affection
Dassarath Shetty*



School Days

School Days



Student Passive Resistance Council 1946

Fatima Meer 1948



Young bride 1951



Photographer Eli Weinberg



Photographer Dennis Govenor

Wedding Day, Ismail and Fatima, 11 March 1951



Photographer : R Bughwan

"A picture that gave me strength
in detention"

Family. Circa 1957



M.A Graduation. Flanked by Hansie Pollock and Hymish Dickie Clarke

Guest Speaker at Charles Johnson Memorial Hospital 1971



With Ismail Meer, Monty Naicker, MN Pather, George Singh

“ She was only 17 when her voice was heard for the first time from public platforms in Durban in support of a brave and sustained campaign against racial legislation in 1946 which was in direct collision with the ethos which was dominating euphoric deliberations all over the world to usher a new dawn in the expansive and creative evolution of our wayward species.

It became a compelling and distinctive voice of rare beauty over the next five decades. Driven by a caring and sweet spiritual temper, an instinctive capacity for moral passion, incredible reservoirs of productive energy, a gifted and prolific pen, artistic instincts of manifest sensitivity and a consistent capacity to endure suffering with dignity and to turn adversity into triumph, she danced her way with a towering magnificence into our hearts and our minds. Her influence was pervasive. In brave and mass campaigns against racial injustice, against capital punishment and against passes for women, at universities and private homes, on educational boards and community forums, at political rallies and academic fora, in vibrant urban areas and isolated rural outposts, among the poor and the rich and the young and the old, in graceful saris and simple sandals, in learned volumes of advanced sociological scholarship and in crusading literature, in controlled essays and spirited biographies, in sweet poetry and in scolding prose, her voice was heard nationally and internationally - sometimes angry and passionate: sometimes measured and scholarly, sometimes controversial and argumentative, at most times a scintillating mixture of all this, but always clear and consistent. Even during repeated bannings, and solitary incarceration and in the face of persistent criminal prosecutions by the State, her extraordinary combination of gifts - both spiritual and intellectual - enabled her somehow to find the space to sing her great songs of beauty and to continue to dance within our hearts - sometimes by using the name of Shenaaz to disseminate her writings, and sometimes by bravely challenging through her Counsel the validity of the legal commands which sought to invade her freedoms. She gave to the rich and abiding truths of Mahatma Gandhi, a new birth and relevance. She integrated it potently with the ageless wisdom of Africa and the mature sagacity of Albert Luthuli and Nelson Mandela to restore to many their wounded dignity. ”

**CHIEF JUSTICE I MAHOMED AT A FUNCTION HELD AT THE
UNIVERSITY OF NATAL ON 5 SEPTEMBER 1998 TO CELEBRATE
THE BIRTHDAYS OF ISMAIL MEER AND FATIMA MEER.**

Leaving court after being tried for breaching a banning order with Ismail Mohamed (left) and Bobby Maree (right)



With Dr Goonam



Virginia Gcabashe and Ellen Khuzwayo carry the newly elected President of the Black Women's Federation, Teheresa Hendriekse, Zubie Seedat and Sally Motlana look on

The Institute for Black Research Board of Trustees. From left: Dasarath Chetty, Kwenza Mlaba, Paulus Zulu, Lewis Skweyiya, Fatima Meer, Winnie Mandela, Saths Cooper 1990



With Sushilabhen Gandhi



“ It is the truth about Gandhi, the great soul in the insubstantial vessel, the immense power of will, the hatred of cruelty and injustice, the passionate and unceasing resistance to them, and the positive assertion of the good that Fatima Meer conveys to us so simply and clearly. Her devotion to him, and her cool appraisal of him, are both evident in this slender book. It is a fine addition, and not only to the literature of Gandhi, but to the literature of South Africa as well. ”

**ALAN PATON, 25TH MAY 1970,
FOREWORD TO APPRENTICESHIP OF
A MAHATMA BY FATIMA MEER.**



“ Fatima Meer is not only a witness to history but she has herself made personal contributions to this Cause. Her independence of thought has at times been misunderstood, quite deliberately, by those whose ideologies differ from ours. We remain united by our commitment to justice, personal liberty and fundamental human rights. ”

**NOMZAMO WINNIE MANDELA,
18 JULY 1988, FOREWORD TO HIGHER
THAN HOPE. MANDELA BY FATIMA MEER.**

Ismail and Fatima Meer 1994

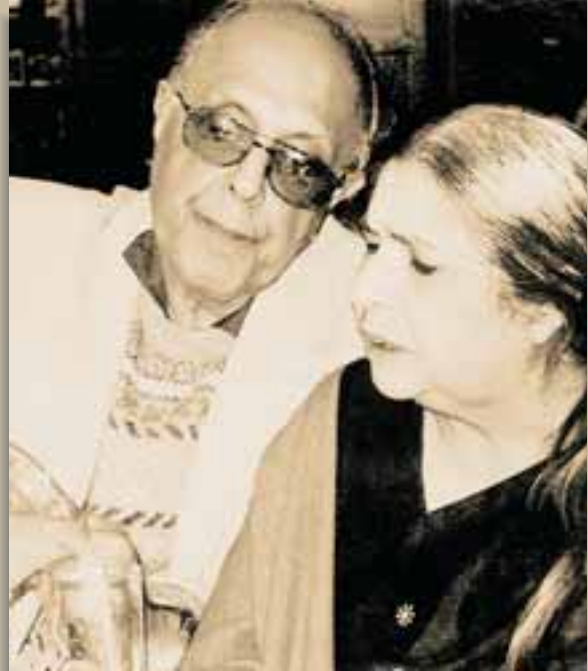


Back Row: Rashid, Nadia, Shehnaz, Maia
Front Row: Zen, Ismail, Shamim, Fatima, Ayesha, Kiara

With Sishupal Rambharos



With Ahmed Kathrada



With Priyanka, Sonia and Rahul Gandhi

With Archbishop Dennis Hurley



With Swami Sahajananda



Photographer: John Desmond

With Professors Pitika Ntuli, Ari Sitas, Dasarath Chetty, Louis Molamu at a book launch at UDW 2002

With Coretta King



With Benazir Bhutto



Receiving the Acharya Kakasaheb Kalekar Universal Harmony Award in New Delhi 1996

With Frenie Ginwala, Dasarath Chetty, Manto Shabalala Msimang 2003



Photographer: Sydney Reddy



Receiving an Honorary Doctorate from Rhodes University 2007



NELSON MANDELA

12 August 2008

Prof Fatima Meer
148 Burnwood Road
Sydenham
Durban
4001

Dear Fathu

Happy birthday! As one who has just reached the milestone of ninety years, I can welcome you to the status of octogenarian with particular feeling. It is a singular achievement, especially when accomplished with the style that you have made your own. We celebrate with you, and wish that the year ahead is a good one for you and your family.

We regret not being able to attend the celebrations which your family and comrades have arranged for you. We trust, however, that those who do attend will ensure that you feel very special.

Birthdays provide us with an opportunity to reflect on our lives and the work that we have done. In your case that reflection should be filled with pride and satisfaction. Your role in the struggles against apartheid and in the building of democracy is well documented, and should never be forgotten. On a personal note, I will never forget the support you and Ismail gave me and my family over many years.

We wish you health, and many more birthdays.

Warm regards

Nelson

Fatima Meer received an Honorary Doctorate from the former University of Natal in 1998 and Nelson Mandela received an Honorary Doctorate from the former University of Durban-Westville in 2001 making both luminaries distinguished alumni of the University of KwaZulu-Natal





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