



# APDUSA VIEWS

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## *A TRIBUTE TO* **COMRADES**



*Natasha Tewary*



*Raman Munien*

## **INTRODUCTION**

On the night of Saturday 17 February 1990, the lives of two young cadres of the New Unity Movement were snuffed out in a bizarre motor accident — the kind of accident that takes place only in nightmares but not in real life. But on this occasion it happened in real life and thereby caused the deaths of Comrades Natasha and Raman while they were in the bloom of young adulthood.

The news of the terrible tragedy was initially met with disbelief, but later when the truth finally sank in, there was only horror. The immediate families were utterly devastated; friends and comrades were rendered numb with shock and grief. The people of Stanger rose to a person and demonstrated in unmistakable terms their solidarity with the bereft families and their love and respect for the two young people.

## **EVENTS PRECEDING THE TRAGEDY**

Comrades Natasha and Raman were part of a contingent of APDUSA and New Unity Movement members who had gone to Umtata to bury a senior member, Comrade J.B. Vusani. They participated in a Unity Movement street procession from Comrade Vusani's home to the hall where a service was held. Comrades Natasha and Raman attended the service where tributes were paid to Comrade Vusani and which lasted for the better part of the day. It was on the return journey to Natal that cruel fortune struck. Hence Comrades Natasha and Raman lost their lives while on duty as Unity Movement members.

## **A BEFITTING FUNERAL SERVICE**

People of Stanger are very proud of their community. One often has heard it said that the community spirit rises to the fore whenever there is a crisis, whether individual or general. Those of us who are not of Stanger witnessed first hand that community spirit in action.

The families of Comrades Natasha and Raman decided, very correctly, to hold a joint funeral service. Without pomp and fanfare, community leaders set up a committee to attend to the needs of the affected families concerning the funeral arrangements. The complications arising from the fact that there were two funerals, that there were two parts to the service, one political and the other religious, were all attended to by the Committee unobtrusively and efficiently. Arrangements were adhered to almost to the minute.

The service for these young cadres was held in the Stanger Town Hall.

The Unity Movement Youth Wing members adorned the Town Hall in a blaze of colours from Unity Movement and APDUSA banners. The service lasted for two hours during which time moving tributes were paid to Comrades Natasha and Raman by Mr J. Singh, who was the Master of Ceremonies; by Mr M. Aiyer, who represented the Stanger Community and by Comrade Dursen Moodley who spoke on behalf of the Unity Movement Youth Wing. Messages from various Unity Movement affiliates were read out. Hymns were beautifully sung by the Stanger Siva Sungum and the Lot 14 Divine Life Society.

The nature and content of the service dramatically altered the atmosphere. Instead of uncontrolled grief and weeping; instead of the concerned families and friends being prostrate with anguish and sorrow and instead of dark and sombre colours dominating the scene, there was a blaze of bright colours; speakers emphasized the promising qualities of the young comrades. There was a great deal of dignity displayed and one might even say a feeling of restrained triumph at the end of the service.

Striking as all these aspects were, what was most remarkable was the response of the people of Stanger. They turned up in their thousands. For almost two-and-one-half hours, i.e. from before the service commenced until almost the end of the service, there was a moving column of mourners from the street and into the hall. They then moved to the front where our two comrades lay in state. After paying due respect to both, the mourners, having failed to find a vacant seat went out of the hall into the passage which was lined with chairs.

At the crematorium, there were, again, a large number of mourners. Final tributes were paid by Mr Ramesh Misra, a teacher known to both, and by Comrade S.K. Venketrathnam, a senior member of the Unity Movement. The ashes of both comrades were scattered together in the sea at the Tongaat Beach.

## **ON COMRADES NATASHA AND RAMAN**

Tributes as to the personal qualities of the young comrades have been given at the funeral service in the Town Hall and at the crematorium. More importantly were the informal tributes by way of people narrating incidents involving the two young comrades.

The people of Stanger realized the loss to the community in the deaths of Comrades Natasha and Raman. Both had the reputation of being serious young adults, quite different from many people their age who model their lives on the sick and sickening “heroes” and “heroines” created by a decadent U.S. imperialist culture and drummed into people daily by television, films and video-tapes.

Our two Comrades had chosen the other road, where the search for truth and justice through study and acquisition of knowledge and involvement in the liberatory struggle were important priorities. Life values and ethics adopted by them were in tune with a commitment for striving for a new South Africa.

Comrade Natasha, as a young teenager, was one of founders of the Youth Wing of the Unity Movement in Stanger. At the time of her death, she was in the process of completing the degree of Bachelor of Science. Despite pressure of University work and family obligations, Comrade Natasha made her contribution to the struggle as best as any other person could have in those circumstances. She was a highly motivated person who saw no reason why women should not storm the citadels of the business world with its corporate culture of male chauvinism.

Comrade Natasha leaves behind her father, Comrade Vishnu, her mother Radha, her sister Verushka, her brothers Yashin and Razin and her husband-to-be Comrade Yogen Kista.

Comrade Raman hailed from a humble working class home. He was a second year law student and was the pride and hope of his family. He was a keen sports-person, committed to SACOS. According to knowledgeable persons, he had a future as a soccer player. He was a hardworking member of the Youth Wing of the New Unity Movement.

He was a loveable person with a sparkling personality bringing good cheer to whomever he came into contact with. Comrade Raman leaves behind his father Mr Sydney Munien, his mother Mrs Daphne Munien, his brothers Vasigan and Trevor, and his loved one Vasie Puckiree.

Both these Comrades were beautiful people with leadership qualities. Those of us who knew them have no doubt that had death not intervened, they would have blossomed into leaders, both in their professions and in the political struggle.

## **ATTITUDE TO THE TRAGEDY**

The people of Stanger did not understand the tragedy as simply the loss of two young people. It was not only a loss to their respective families. They understood the loss to be the loss of the entire community. Hence their

overwhelming response. Hence their tremendous tribute. Stanger witnessed its first political funeral. The people witnessed how we honour our dead.

The finality of death leaves mortals helpless. There is no going back. There is no bringing back to life. Those of us who remain, do whatever we can to counter the disintegrating effect of death. This we do by honouring the dead; by recording their deeds for posterity; by pledging to continue the work done by those who have died. In doing all this we minimize the impact of the blow and to that extent we succeed in negating death.

## **CONCLUSION**

We grieve the passing of Comrades Natasha and Raman. They were so young and they could have done so much with their lives. We also grieve their passing because they were so dear to us.

This simple tribute, for all its inadequacies, is an indication of our feelings for them. It also shows to the immediate families how others, outside the family, felt about their dear ones.

This tribute is also a record for posterity. Long after the healing power of time would have done its merciful work and memories of these Comrades begin to fade and become dim, this tribute will be a gentle reminder of the lives of these two comrades. There will then come a time when people would have forgotten the existence of these two comrades. When that happens we hope that

this tribute falls into the hands of a person with an inquiring mind. That person will share his or her discovery with others and they will learn how there once lived two young freedom fighters who lost their lives while doing their political duty.

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