

**INDRASENA
'INDRES'
NAIDOO**

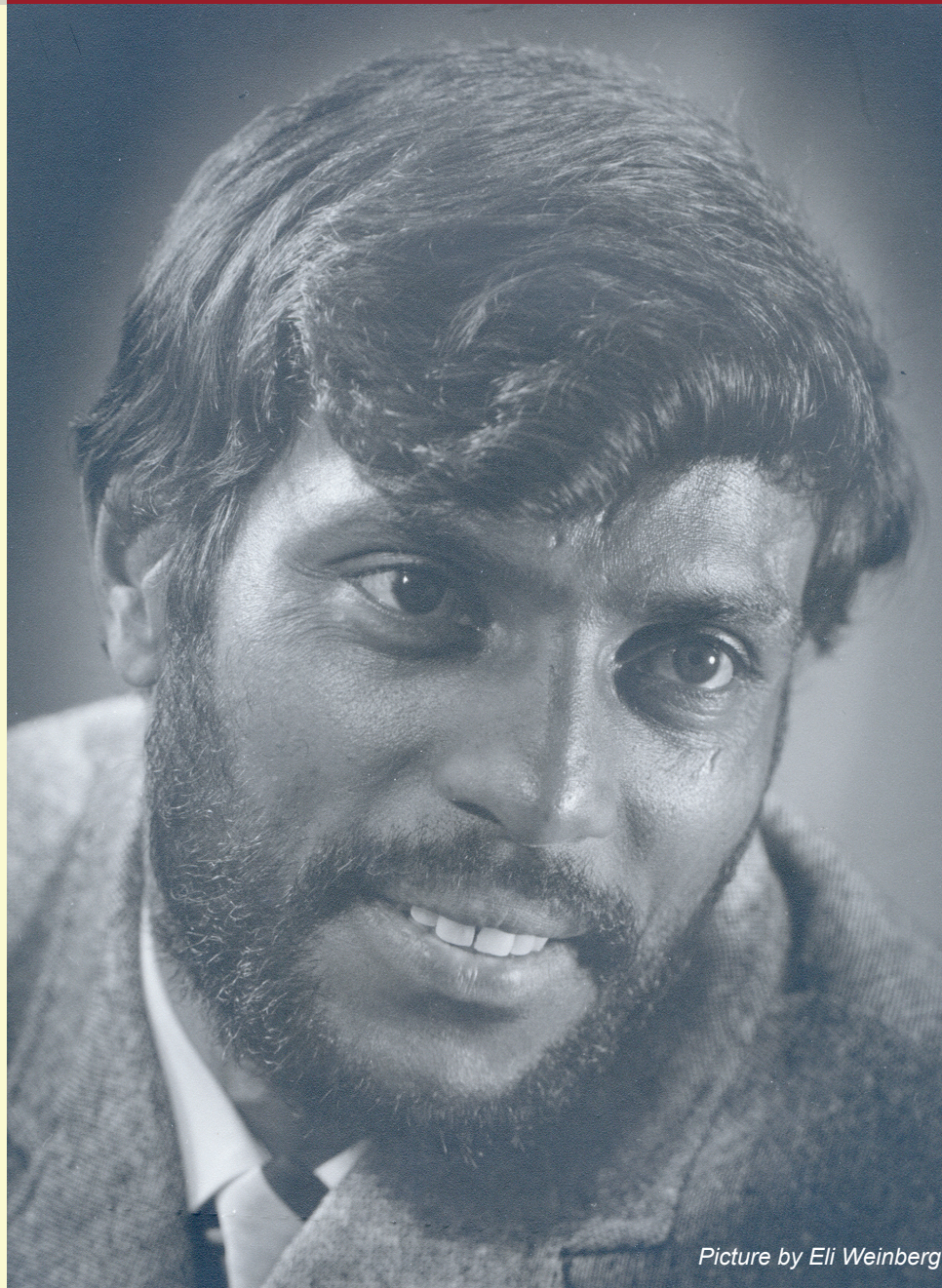
A Lifelong Revolutionary

LIVES OF A COURAGE PROJECT



Ahmed Kathrada
Foundation

Deepening Non-Racialism



Picture by Eli Weinberg



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- 1 – Mac Maharaj and Indres Naidoo in London
- 2 – Indres Naidoo with his brothers Murti and Prema
- 3 – Bram Naidoo, Mohammed Timol, Aarti Shah and her daughter Kimaya with Indres Naidoo
- 4 – Indres Naidoo with his son Bram, nephew Kuben and Kimaya and Sahil
- 5 – Indres Naidoo with his nephew Kuben and grand niece Kimaya
- 6 – Indres Naidoo is seen with his sisters, Shanti and Ramnie, brother in law Ismail 'Issy' Dinat, Wolfie Kodesh, and Saeeda Vally.
- 7 – A moment of tranquility for Indres Naidoo with his nephew and niece and his mother, Ama.

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Indrasena ‘Indres’ Elatchininathan Naidoo passed away on 3rd January 2016 at 2 Military Hospital in Cape Town.

He was a veteran of the African National Congress (ANC) and the South African Communist Party (SACP). He was also a member of *Umkhonto we Sizwe* – ‘Spear of the Nation’ (MK) and a Robben Islander.

EARLY LIFE

Indres was born in Doornfontein, Johannesburg on 26 August 1936. His family was deeply involved in South African resistance politics. His grandfather, Thambi Naidoo, was a contemporary of Mahatma Gandhi, and was an active organiser of the passive resistance or satyagraha campaigns waged under Gandhi’s leadership.



A young Indres Naidoo

Indres’s father, Naransamy ‘Roy’ Naidoo, immersed himself in resistance politics, strongly aligning himself to the Yusuf Dadoo grouping in the Indian Congresses, a bloc that was youthful in nature, militant and committed to working with Africans.

His mother, Manomoney ‘Ama’ Naidoo, was also an activist, courting arrest in the 1946 and 1952 campaigns, and was one of the 20 000 women who marched to the Union Buildings in 1956 to protest against the extension of the pass laws to women.



Indres Naidoo and his mother 'Ama' after his release from prison on 13 May 1973

The Naidoo household in Doornfontein was frequented by the prominent anti-apartheid leaders of the time, and the young Indres was awed and inspired by discussions taking place at the family home.

His political activism was inevitable. Indres recalled:

“When I was a little boy in the nineteen thirties, I used to walk down the streets of Johannesburg with my father, shouting: ‘Long live Congress, down with the Nationalist Party, down with General Smuts.’”

When he was 10 years old, he started selling the progressive newspapers of the time, such as *The Guardian*, *Liberation*, *Fighting Talk* and the *Passive Resister*. He also joined the Young Pioneers, the children’s organisation linked to the Communist Party.

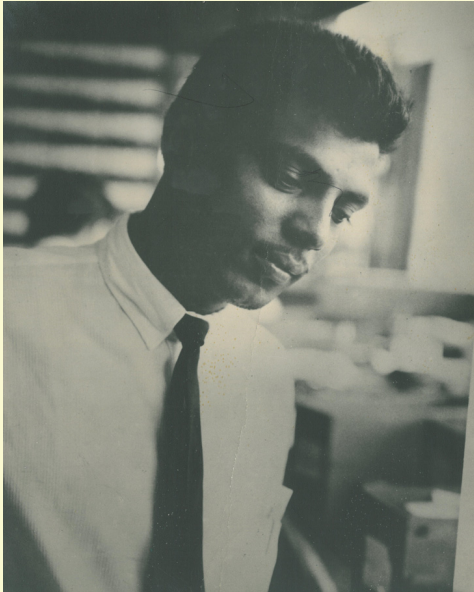
Being too young to become a volunteer in the Defiance Campaign of 1952, Indres played his part by helping to distribute leaflets. By the age of 18, he was elected onto the executives of the Transvaal Indian Youth Congress and the South African Peace Council. It was during the run-up to the Congress of the People that Indres’s participation intensified.

“We, as young people, used to go out to the countryside; to Barberton, to Middelburg, to Brits, to canvass to get people’s opinions of what they wanted in the Charter, and for six months we worked continuously, every weekend. We covered virtually the entire Transvaal.”

He also had fond memories of the march of 20 000 women to Pretoria:

“I was part of a reception group; our task was to receive the delegations from all over the country. Women started coming in by the hundreds from all over, from Transkei, from Ciskei, from Pondoland. It was incredible... and our [first task] was to... [start] making sandwiches and, man, we made sandwiches and sandwiches and sandwiches.

We were making coffee and tea for the women as they were coming and as they were coming in, we were sending them off to the various accommodations and, you know, in those days there were no hotels and no accommodation for black people, so it was a question of sending them to various homes.”



Indres Naidoo was active in politics from an early age.



Essop Jassat, 'Mosie' Moolla, 'Babla' Saloojee and Indres Naidoo are amongst this group in Cape Town, 1954

THE MK OPERATIVE

By 1960, Indres had joined the underground of the SACP, and was recruited into MK in 1962, soon after its formation. He recalls that they were amateurs, with very little, basic training. Their first act of sabotage was a failure, as the gelignite did not explode. They learnt rapidly by reading extensively about explosives, but had very few opportunities for training and experimentation.



Indres Naidoo sporting long hair

The MK unit consisted of Reggie Vandeyar, Shirish Nanabhai and Indres. At some point, the need to get hold of dynamite became quite urgent, and a fourth member, Gammat Jardine, joined the unit, although the unit was suspicious of him. Jardine procured a box of dynamite, with promises of more to come.

Reggie, Shirish and Indres were caught red-handed on 17 April 1963, trying to bomb the signal relay-box at the Riverlea railway station. Jardine had sold them out and disappeared from the “scene of the crime”.

Indres was shot while trying to escape. The shot, by 'Rooi Rus' Swanepoel, entered his shoulder and exited at the back. He was taken to hospital to treat the wound and then to his home for a search, with his shirt saturated with blood. He was beaten and tortured during the next few days.

He described his torture:

"I felt a punch, and before I realised what was happening, all the police had made a ring around me and were kicking and pushing me, saying, 'Now we're playing rugby' - one policeman would dive full length onto me, hitting me on the side, then another would come up and kick me as though I was the ball...

The next thing, I felt a wet cold canvas bag being put over my head... they started squeezing a knot and choking me. I gasped for air, and every time I breathed in, the canvas hit me in the face. I was choking, my nostrils and mouth were blocked by the wet canvas; the harder I tried to get air into my lungs, the tighter the bag clamped over me, cutting off the air, preventing my lungs from working.

'Coolie, today you're going to die.' Laughter. 'We've got the bastards.'

I was struggling, thrashing around, almost unconscious.

The bag was released and I swallowed air desperately, but then the canvas slapped back into my mouth and once more I started to choke, my body in a total panic.

'Coolie, you're going to talk.' More laughter.

I kicked my legs and arms as hard as I could, feeling my head go dizzy. The bag opened. I was finished. I could hardly stand...

They pushed me into a chair, and I found my shoes being taken off and two policemen holding my hands behind the back of the chair. One of the group started hitting me on the soles of my feet with a rubber baton and a terrible pain shot up my leg...

Next I felt all sorts of wires being attached to me... My arms were stretched out at my sides and I was held down from behind, and then I saw the main lead running to a dry cell battery... as they attached the lead to the battery I felt a dreadful shock pass into my body...

Again the shock travelled through my whole body, convulsing every particle of me, going on and on for ever, absolute pain from top to toe."



*MK platoon commander Laloo 'Isu' Chiba, with members of Indres Naidoo's MK unit, Shirish Nanabhai and Reggie Vandeyar
Picture by Mems Moosa*



Fellow Robben Islanders at the funeral of Reggie Vandeyar, who passed away in 2015



Reggie Vandeyar and Indres Naidoo

PRISON AND EXILE



A picture of a communal cell on Robben Island. When Indres Naidoo was imprisoned, he would have slept on a floor mat.

Indres and his co-accused were charged under the Sabotage Act on three counts, and convicted on 13 May 1963 by Justice Bekker. The unit was the first to be convicted under the Sabotage Act. Each man was sentenced to 10 years' imprisonment the following day, and they were part of the first batch of MK recruits to serve on Robben Island.

Indres was to spend the next 10 years in the general section of Robben Island. These were communal cells separated from the single cells in B section, which housed the Rivonia Trialists.

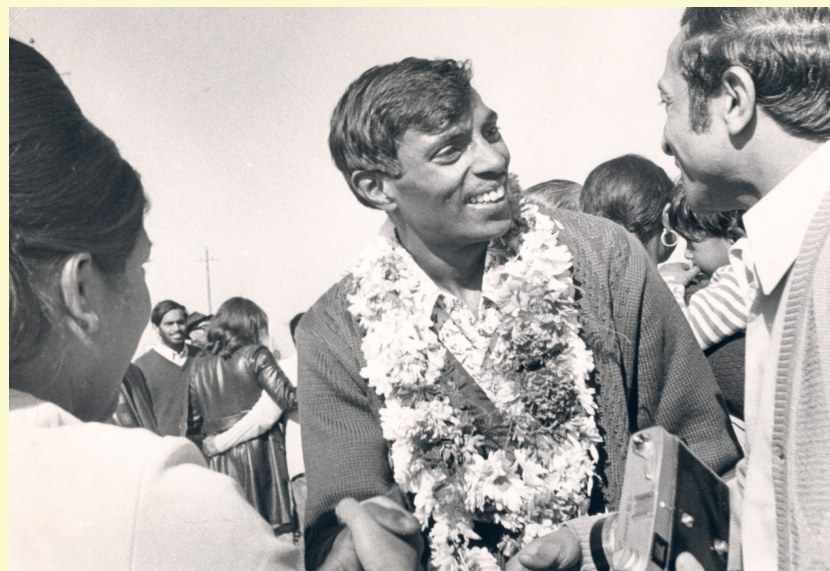
Extract by Indres Naidoo from *Island in Chains*

“I was amongst very few prisoners who were given lashes on Robben Island. The warders came up to me... one of the Kleynhans brothers... who were sadists, absolute sadists, the eldest one came up to me and said I must go to the pool of dirty, stinking, stagnant water and drain the water in the quarry. I went there and I started draining the water when he said, ‘No, no, no. Take off your shoes and get into the water.’ I said, no, there’s no way I’m going to get into the dirty, stagnant water, as there was fine gravel stone there, you could get cut and it wasn’t safe, so I refused.

On returning to the prison that evening, he reported me to Lieutenant Naude saying that I refused to work and I disobeyed a lawful command. I was then charged for disobeying a lawful command and the final result was I was sentenced to four strokes. They tie your hands on both sides and your feet down there, you are stark naked, they put a padding on your back and a padding on your thigh exposing your buttocks only. The warder who did the caning could easily have weighed a hundred kilograms or more and he was a person two metres tall. He chose one of six or seven canes that were lying there. After testing the canes he said, ‘I’m going to make the Coolie cry today...’

The first shot that landed, landed right in the middle of my buttock, it cut my buttock down the middle. I felt the pain, but I kept my mouth shut and held on. The warder then applied iodine which was even worse, because the iodine burnt you... The fifth one landed right on the first cut, cutting me even deeper and they again applied iodine... They loosened me and I felt that if I put my clothing on there, I would faint immediately, so I just grabbed my clothing and walked to my cell with my clothing. It was only when I got to my cell that I fainted.”

In May 1973, Indres was released with his co-accused Reggie Vandeyar and Shirish Nanabhai, and was immediately placed under house arrest.



Indres Naidoo after his release from prison on 13 May 1973

Soon thereafter, with Joe Gqabi, Henry Makgothi and others, he became active in ANC underground structures. He also helped found the Ahmed Timol Memorial Committee, which later became the Human Rights Committee. The committee organised commemoration meetings and rallies, produced a newsletter, and generally kept the voice of the Congress Movement alive.

Indres married Saeeda Vally soon after his release. Their son Bram was born on 22 March 1975, and named after the late Bram Fischer. This marriage unfortunately would collapse during the difficult years of separation and exile.

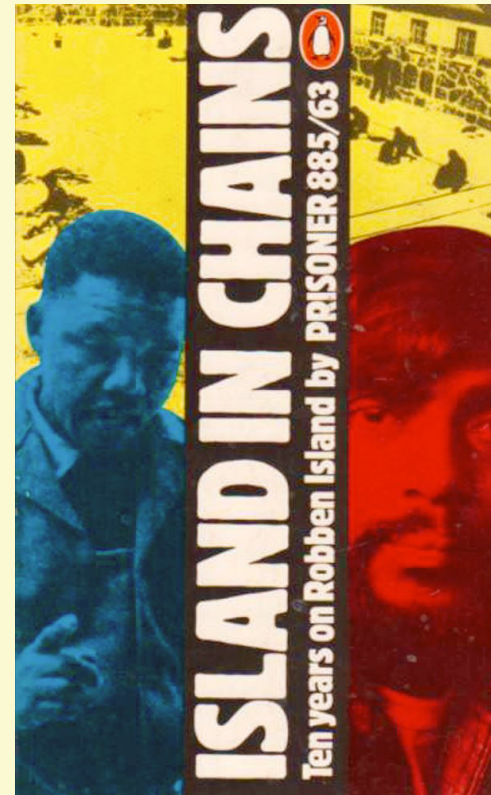


Indres Naidoo and his son, Bram

When Joe Gqabi was arrested in 1977, he sent a message saying Indres had to leave the country. The following day, Indres was smuggled out by Mohamed Ismail. He was taken to the Swaziland border, where Stanley Mabizela received him. After about a week, he was transferred to Mozambique.

Thus began a new chapter in Indres's life, that of exile. In Mozambique, he was tasked with establishing the ANC underground and smuggling ANC literature into South Africa.

In September 1977, Indres appeared before the UN Special Committee Against Apartheid to testify about prison conditions and torture meted out to political prisoners in South Africa. He also used the opportunity to highlight the many deaths of political activists in apartheid prisons and police cells. Albie Sachs documented the story in Indres's own words of what Indres experienced during his 10 years imprisonment on Robben Island.



'Island in Chains' was jointly published by Indres Naidoo and Albie Sachs

From his base in Mozambique, he continued establishing channels to smuggle literature and arms into South Africa. Because of the country's proximity to South Africa, there was the constant threat of attacks, both overt and covert, from apartheid security operatives.

Indres and his fellow comrades had to at all times, be on high alert to these dangers. In 1983, the South African Defence Force bombed three places in Matola and Maputo, killing 13 ANC cadres and four Mozambican civilians.

After the Nkomati Accord of 1984 between South Africa and Mozambique, ANC operatives were compelled to leave Mozambique. Indres, however, remained in Maputo as part of a group of ten to staff the ANC diplomatic office. While in Mozambique, Indres met Celia Meneses and they had a daughter, Djanine Zoya in 1986.



Djanine Zoya Naidoo

In January 1987, in response to a demand from the South African government, Indres, together with Jacob Zuma, Susan Rabkin, Mohammed Timol, Sonny Singh and Keith Mokoape, were compelled to leave Mozambique. The regime alleged that these six named ANC cadres were responsible for 92 percent of all attacks in South Africa.

Thereafter, the ANC deployed Indres to the then German Democratic Republic (GDR) as Deputy Chief Representative. In Berlin, Indres immersed himself in his work and addressed rallies all over the GDR. During one of these rallies, he met Gabriele 'Gabi' Blankenburg, whom he married. Gabi was active in the Anti-Apartheid Movement in the GDR.

UNBANNING OF LIBERATION MOVEMENTS AND FREEDOM

In 1990, Indres was in Stockholm, Sweden on a visit with the ANC leadership when he heard the news of the unbanning of the ANC and the SACP, and the imminent release of Nelson Mandela. In April 1991, Indres returned to South Africa. Gabi came to South Africa the following year and they settled down in a flat in Yeoville.

On his return, Indres was employed by the SACP, and one of his main responsibilities was the distribution of the *African Communist*. He also assisted in the preparations for the first public rally of the SACP to be held legally in South Africa in July 1990. In addition, he participated in various ANC campaigns and activities.

Indres was elated at being able to vote on 27 April 1994. He recalls:

“Standing for hours in that very long queue in Yeoville, Johannesburg, I waited to enter the polling booth for the first time in the 58 years of my life. When at long last the moment came, I was very nervous. I could not believe that the time had finally come, the time to put my X on the ballot papers.”

The ANC won the election by a landslide victory. Indres was on the ANC list to parliament, and soon after, he and Gabi departed for Cape Town. Indres was sworn in as a Senator for Gauteng. He held this position until he retired in 1999 and continued to live in Cape Town.

The Order of Mendi, awarded to him in 2014, was one of many accolades Indres received for his years of sacrifice and struggle in the pursuit of a non-racial, non-sexist, free South Africa.



Ama Naidoo finally reunited with her children after 30 years of forced separation through apartheid. The family is seen with Gabriele 'Gabi' Blankenburg, Saeeda Vally, Kamla Naidoo, Shirish Nanabhai and Bobbai and Sinda Naidoo.

Like Indres, his siblings have lived their lives in the culture, traditions and values of the Congress Movement. Indres's eldest sister, Shanti, was arrested many times, but the detention in 1969 was particularly brutal. She was tortured severely and served a sentence for refusing to testify against her friend and comrade, Winnie Mandela.

Both of his sisters, Shanti and Ramnie, were forced into exile. His brother Murti was first detained in 1965 and was again detained during the 1980 school boycotts for a lengthy period. His youngest brother, Prema, was repeatedly detained and badly tortured during the 1980s. He was, along with Shirish Nanabhai, sentenced in 1982 for harbouring an ANC escapee.

Indres is survived by his wife Gabi, his son Bram and his daughter Djanine Zoya Naidoo.



Indres Naidoo and his son Bram

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