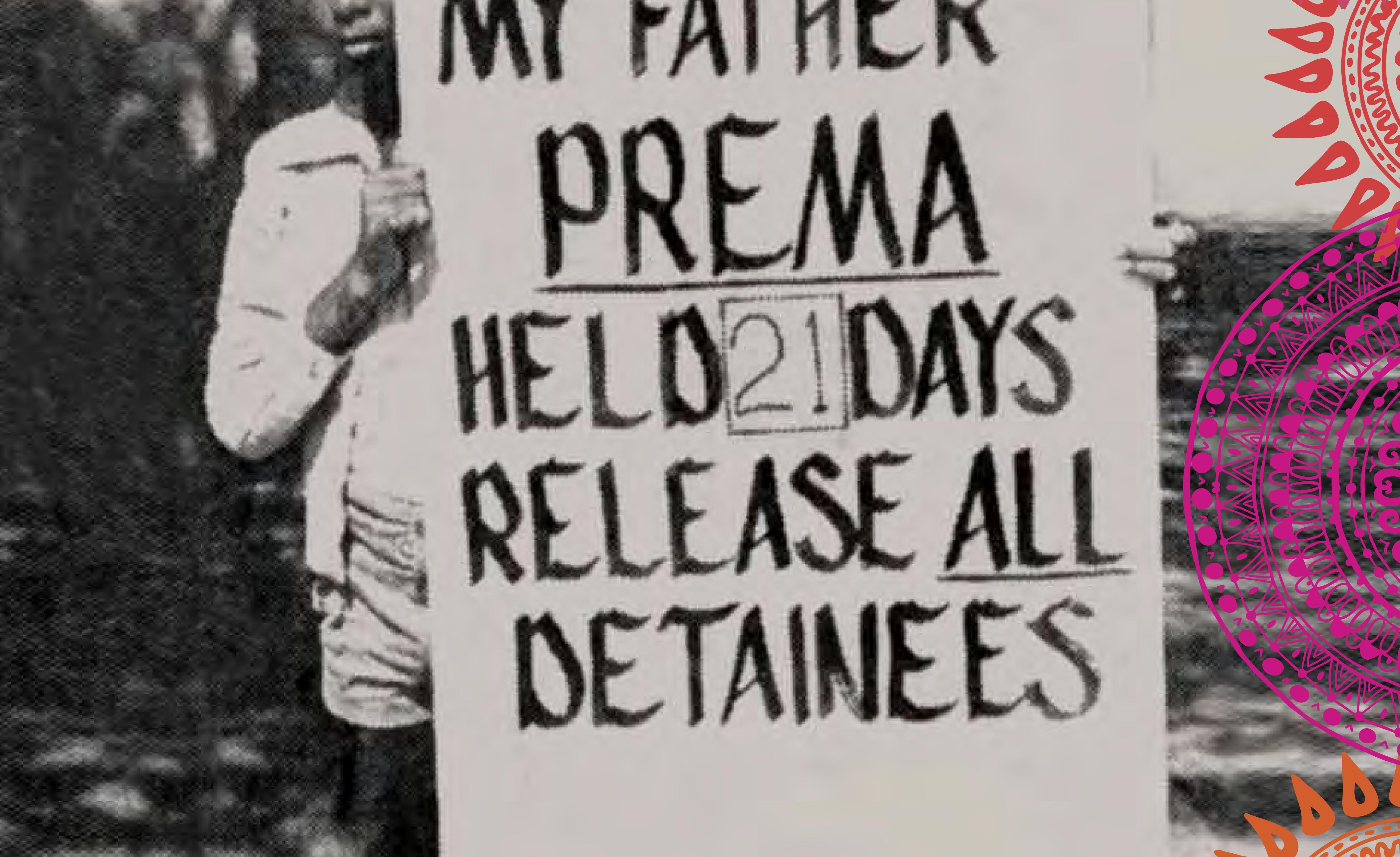
RESISTANCE IN THE E BLOOD

THE NAIDOO-PILLAY FAMILY: PACIFISTS, PROTESTORS, PRISONERS, PATRIOTS

INI FAINCR



APARTHEID MUSEUM





CUSTODIANS OF THE STRUGGLE

The history of the Naidoo-Pillay family in South Africa starts in the late 1800s with Thambi and Veerammal Naidoo, among the first Indians to join Gandhi's satyagraha movement and resist unjust laws. Both of them went to prison for their beliefs, Thambi fourteen times.

Their commitment to fighting injustice continued through subsequent generations. As national and global events unfolded in the 20th century, so did the family's activism evolve: from the satyagraha movement to mass mobilisation against segregation and apartheid, to armed struggle. In each generation various Naidoo and Pillay family members were detained, imprisoned and tortured for their beliefs. "Man's abiding happiness is not in getting anything but in giving himself up to ideas which are larger than his individual life, the idea of his country, of humanity, of God." Rabindranath Tagore

"Thambi Naidoo's descendants became the custodians of the struggle."

Barbara Hogan, former political prisoner

The Naidoo and Pillay women made a particularly important contribution. Not constrained by the expectations of tradition, they juggled roles as homemakers, cooks and mothers with political activism. Their homes were open to people of all walks of life, and all races. The family lived the notions of equality and nonracialism as contained in the Freedom Charter.

Core to the family ethos, through all generations into the present, is the notion of service to people, community and country. This has sustained them through the darkest times, and remains an activating force for change.

> Thailema (left) and Ama (right), "the custodians of the struggle", with Mandela outside his home in Orlando West, Soweto, on the Saturday after Mandela's release in February 1990. *Photo: Naidoo Family Collection/Liliesleaf*



PROMISES OF A NEW LIFE

From the 1840s, the British colonial government in India sent millions of Indians to work in other colonies through a system of indenture. The majority – over 450 000 – ended up in Mauritius, while more than 152 000 came to the then British colony of Natal to work on sugar farms. Among the indentured labourers to arrive in Natal were the maternal grandparents of Manonmoni (Ama) Pillay, who is central to this story.

The indentured labourers were contracted to work for five years. Indentured life was hard, with long working hours, low wages and poor living conditions.





"Not quite a slave, but neither a free soul."

Uma Dhupelia-Mesthrie, historian and Gandhi's great granddaughter

From the 1870s, 'passenger' Indians, who paid their fares on steamships bound for southern Africa, also arrived in Natal. They were mostly from the state of Gujarat, and came to trade and do business. Thambi Naidoo, who was born in Mauritius to Indian parents, was one of these passenger Indians.

By 1885, Indian farmers had cornered the fresh produce market in Durban and Pietermaritzburg. Despite – or perhaps because of – their success, Indians experienced shocking racism and discrimination at the hands of the white community in Natal.

Photo: Gandhi-Luthuli Documentation Centre

"The ordinary 'Coolie' and his family cannot be admitted into close fellowship with us and our families. He is introduced for the same reason as mules might be introduced from Montevideo. He is not one of us, he is in every respect an alien." The Natal Witness, 8 January, 1875

Indentured labourers arrive in the colony of Natal in the 1860s. Photo: Gandhi-Luthuli Documentation Centre



FAMILY TREE

THAMBI M. VEERAMMAL

Kuppusamy		Pakirisamy (Pakiri)		Naransamy (Roy) m. Manonmoni (Ama) Pillay		Shanthavathi (Shanthie)		Mithalin Muriel
	Thayanayagee (Thailema) m.		Barasarthi m. Nelie		Balakrishnan		Seshammal m. Sooboo Pillay	
	Perumal Pillay							

Melica & Liam

Deano & Rani

Shivum

Saahil & Arnaav

Sherlinka



Nava m. Kanthi Nagiah Kumara m. **Poornaree Pillay** Parmesh m. Rod Everitt _ Shan_ Thillay m. Melanie Naidoo _ ____ Zara Pavitray

Thirusha_

Pulen m. Samantha Lunn

Rev m. Anulka Mooloo_

Vasugee m. Soobiah Moodley

Gonoseelan m. Dhanum Naidoo

Sinda m. V. B. Naidoo

Pungie Pillay m. Georgie Govindasamy

Daya m. C. Padayachee

Sagren Pillay

Thava	
Jayandree m. Kiran Bhoolia	
	& Ushir
Subethri m. Nishkelan Moodley	Nilesh & Shaneil
Vinesh m. Nathani Chetty	Kivashen &
	Tanishka
Devan m. Sylvia	
Roshnee m. Derek Hyde	Asia & Brahm
Anusia	

Thushen m. Anita Veerabudroo ____ Krisen, Kiyashai & Yuneil



Kuppasamy, Balakrishnan, Roy, Thailema and Veerammal. Photo: Naidoo Family Collection/Liliesleaf

Shanthie m. Dominic Tweedie

Indres m. Shaeeda Vally

Bram & (Djanine)

Murthie m. Mogi Moodley	Zoya m. Manoj Lalloo	Kahil
	Roy m. Zahira Seedat	Ruhan & Rania
	Keerin	
	Kreeson	
Ramnie m. Issy Dinat	Natalya	Cian & Alice
	Sean	Anouska, Marissa
		& Leilah
Prema m. Kamala Pillay	Kuben m. Aarti Shah	Kimaya & Saahil
	Myan (Duggy) m	Kiara & Kiaan
	Mayuri Bhowan	

Mogi, Roy, Murthie, Zoya, Ama, Prema, Kamala and Kuben. Photo: Naidoo Family Collection/Liliesleaf



ANCESTRAL PASSAGES

Govindasamy Krishnasamy Naidoo, affectionately known as Thambi, was born in Mauritius in 1875. Thambi's father, who had emigrated from India to Mauritius, was a prosperous fertiliser and cartage contractor.

In 1889, when he was 14, Thambi, together with his brother and sister, decided to seek their fortune in southern Africa. They made the journey as passenger Indians from Mauritius to Port Elizabeth, then travelled on to Kimberley in the Cape Colony, where Thambi set up a trading business.

Three years later, the gold rush brought him to Johannesburg. He became a successful produce merchant and wholesaler and married Veerammal Pillay, the sister of a close friend.



"There was always a beautiful atmosphere in Veerammal and Thambi's home. One could drop in at any time, no matter how busy Veerammal was, and always feel a welcome guest." Mohandas Gandhi

Thambi, still in his teens, became a leading figure in the large Tamil-speaking community in Johannesburg and was a founder of the Tamil Benefit Society. Indians were restricted by law as to where they could live and do business. Thambi found this deeply unjust and was an outspoken opponent of such laws.

Thambi Naidoo (right) with Imam Bawazeer, another prominent satyagrahi. Both served on the Executive Committee of the Transvaal British Indian Association, later renamed the Transvaal Indian Congress. *Photo: Naidoo Family Collection/Liliesleaf*

"There was a smallpox epidemic in the Indian location. Indian traders were excluded from the Newtown Market while European traders were allowed free access. Father was active among the organisers of a protest against this discrimination." Thailema Pillay, Thambi's daughter

Thambi Naidoo (middle row second from the left) with the Executive Committee of the Transvaal British Indian Association in 1907, of which Mohandas Gandhi (middle row centre) was secretary. *Photo: Naidoo Family Collection/Liliesleaf*

SATYAGRAHA – HOLDING ON TO TRUTH



Indian prisoners being released from the Fort in Johannesburg. Between November 1907 and January 1908, about 2 000 Indians as well as some Chinese had been imprisoned for refusing to register. Photo: Transvaal Leader Weekly Edition

"Perhaps the bravest of all is the indomitable Thambi Naidoo. I do not know any Indian who knows the spirit of the struggle so well as he does. He has sacrificed himself entirely." Mohandas Gandhi

Through his activism, Thambi befriended Gandhi, who would become leader of the independence movement in India. A devout Hindu, Thambi was greatly influenced by Gandhi's philosophy of satyagraha, which was a form of nonviolent resistance meaning 'holding onto truth'.

In 1907 the colonial government passed yet another law discriminating against Indians. The Asiatic Law Amendment Ordinance forced Indians in the Transvaal to be fingerprinted and registered. Thambi campaigned, with Gandhi and others, for people to resist this demeaning law.

Gandhi and Jan Smuts, the Colonial Secretary, reached an agreement that Indians would register voluntarily and that the law would be repealed – but Smuts reneged and the law remained in place.

After signing the agreement with Smuts, Gandhi was assaulted by an angry resister. Thambi intervened and was badly beaten, suffering lifelong health problems as a result. On 16 August 1908, thousands of Indians publicly burnt their registration certificates. This and other protest action resulted in repeated



Football teams Pretoria Passive Resisters with striped jerseys vs. Johannesburg Passive Resisters in Mayfair, Johannesburg. Thambi Naidoo and Mohandas Gandhi top row fifth and sixth from the left respectively. *Photo: Wits Historical Papers*

"All Tamil prisoners discharged from the prison are ready to go to jail again and again until the government will grant us our request." Thambi Naidoo, in a letter to Gandhi, 1909

Thambi helped transform the philosophy of satyagraha into a mass movement across religious, ethnic and class divisions. He was particularly successful in mobilising indentured and other workers, women as well as men.

> Thambi Naidoo addressing a mass meeting of over 6 000 people on the Durban Indian Football Ground during the 1913 strike against passes imposed on Indians, and the nonrecognition of Hindu and Muslim marriages. *Photo: New Age, Wits Historical Papers*



A BRILLIANT EXAMPLE OF FORTITUDE



The women satyagrahis and their children who marched in 1913, including Veerammal (middle row, third from left) and her mother, Parenithama (middle row, fourth from left). Photo: Wits Historical Papers

In 1913 the Natal Supreme Court ruled that all marriages not performed according to Christian rites (therefore most Hindu and Muslim marriages) were invalid. Also, the £3 tax on non-indentured Indian families was crippling many families. Thambi, Veerammal and her mother, Mrs Parenithama Pillay, mobilised hundreds of women, most of whom were ordinary homemakers, to resist these unjust laws.

Thambi led a march to Newcastle in Natal to persuade Indian coal miners to strike against the £3 tax. Twelve women from Tolstoy Farm participated, some with their babies and children. Parenithama was the oldest woman on the march.

"My aunt Seshammal was only a little girl but she marched with her

mother, Veerammal, who was heavily pregnant." Shanthie Naidoo

When the miners decided to strike, the women were arrested and sentenced to three months' incarceration in the Pietermaritzburg prison, with hard labour. They were in prison during the great march of satyagrahis from Natal across the Transvaal border that ended with the arrest of Gandhi and hundreds of others.

The women were released in February 1914. Twelve hours after their release, Veerammal gave birth to a son, Mithalin.

