

**UNIVERSITY OF DURBAN-WESTVILLE**

**DOCUMENTATION CENTRE**

**ORAL HISTORY PROJECT**

**"VOICES OF RESISTANCE"**

INTERVIEWEE: MUNIAMMAH NAIDOO  
INTERVIEWER: VINO REDDY  
DATE: 25 JUNE 2002  
PLACE: 151 PELICAN DRIVE,  
BAYVIEW, CHATSWORTH

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VR: Good morning. We're here today at the home of Mrs Muniammah Naidoo. It's an enormous privilege for us to be here. This lady has been in the Passive Resistance and we welcome you, Aya. Thank you very much for letting us interview you. We are from the Documentation Centre of the University of Westville, and my name is Vino Reddy. It's a pleasure to meet you. Aya, I want to ask you a few questions about yourself. Do you remember when you were born and where you were born?

MN: I was born in Port Shepstone.

VR: A long time ago?

MN: Ya, a long time ago, that was now, ya.

VR: How old are you now, Aya? How many years are you now?

MN: Now?

VR: Yes.

MN: 91.

VR: 91. You look very well for your age, Aya.

MN: Thank you.

VR: Right. And where did you grow up?

MN: In Durban. In Clairwood.

VR: And you lived there with your mother and your father?

MN: Mother, father.

VR: Yes, and did you have brothers and sisters?

MN: There were eleven children, two brothers, and two sisters.

Two brothers died, one sister died, one small sister, the fifth one, stays there, in Newlands West. Only two is living, me and my sister.

VR: Your sister is still alive too?

MN: Ya. Still alive, small.

VR: Is she younger than you?

MN: Younger than me.

VR: Alright. Now where were your parents from, where did they come from? Where did they live?

MN: My mother came here from India. She went to Port Shepstone, stayed there. I was born there. After, my brother [was] born there, small brother, my sister, everyone [was] born there. I came, my mother and father came to Durban.

VR: Alright, and your father? Where was your father from? Was he born in India too?

MN: Not in India.

VR: Not in India, but your mother was born in India?

MN: Ya.

VR: Okay. Now you came to live in Durban, the whole family came to live in Durban?

MN: The whole family.

VR: Alright. Now what did your parents do? How did they earn a living?

MN: They worked at a sugar factory.

VR: Where?

MN: Durban.

VR: And your mother?

MN: Mother worked.

VR: Both of them?

MN: Ya, both did that.

VR: Now were you able to go to school at all?

MN: School? Not going, at that time no school, they won't send me to school.

VR: Do you remember where in Durban you stayed, Aya?

MN: Durban?

VR: Ya, where was it in Durban that you stayed?

MN: Clairwood, Houghton Road. Clairwood, Houghton Road.

VR: Alright.

MN: The same road.

VR: Now did you have things like lights and water and so on?

MN: No water. The pond water, no [other]. That one.

VR: From the pond?

MN: Ya, no tap there, at that time. Must take clothes, wash and dry and bring again. Then no lights, no water.

VR: And no electricity?

MN: No lights, ya.

VR: Right, and you grew up, how long did you stay in Clairwood?

MN: Long time we stayed there.

VR: Your whole life, Aya?

MN: Ya. After I married, same road. I married, my mother stay in that same road. I'm staying in the same road, she sees me.

VR: How old were you when you were married?

MN: That one I forgot now.

VR: Were you very young?

MN: Young, young.

VR: Very young?

MN: Ya.

VR: May we pause for a moment, please?

MN: Ya.

MACHINE SWITCHED OFF

ON RESUMPTION:

VR: We're back again. Aya, tell me, when we were talking, you told us that you got married and you lived very close to where your mother and your father lived?

MN: Ya.

VR: And how many children did you have, Aya?

MN: Three. Two girls and one boy. Three children.

VR: And I believe you were widowed at a very early age.

MN: Yes.

VR: Your husband died.

MN: Ya.

VR: How did he die?

MN: He's sick, stomach pain.

VR: Something was wrong with his stomach?

MN: Yes, stomach.

VR: And there was no treatment for that?

MN: He went to hospital, staying there. McCord Hospital.

VR: And how old was he when he died, do you know?

MN: I don't know that one.

VR: And you were very young?

MN: Young.

VR: I believe you were about 24 when your husband died.

MN: Ya.

VR: Alright. How did you manage to bring up your children?

MN: What I must do? I went to work in the jam factory. Two places I went, ma, jam factory I worked a long time, then nuts factory ... cleans nuts, that one I worked there.

VR: And you brought your children up?

MN: Ya.

VR: Now tell us, you joined the Passive Resistance?

MN: Yes, ma.

VR: Now who encouraged you to join the Passive Resistance?

MN: I went there, the meeting, everybody going, ladies and men, boys, all go there. I asked, one auntie, where are you going?' 'No, there;s meeting there, nice meeting, you must come, Aya'. Everybody's going jail, this country [is] fighting. I think, Indians were fighting, I too went away. I went away and gave in my name.

VR: You went and gave your name as well?

MN: My name, ya, at that office.

VR: Now do you know who spoke to you about this? Do you remember who spoke to you to come and join the Passive Resistance?

MN: Ladies, ma.

VR: All the ladies?

MN: Ya. Going and signing there, that [those] ladies. I went away [too]. After I went to jail, that lady, I stayed at Central Jail ...two nights [I] stayed there.

Two nights in the Central Jail. Very hard , ma, there.

VR: Now the first - you went and you registered your name as a passive resister. And then did you go on a march?

MN: Ya.

VR: Tell us about that march that you went on. Was it a march that you went on?

MN: March I went on, ya.

VR: And there were lots of ladies?

MN: Lots of ladies, ya.

VR: And what happened? Did they arrest you? Did they allow you to go on your march? What happened? Tell us.

MN: I went there. They took us to jail, the Central Jail. I stayed 2-nights, very hard there. The first jail [inaudible] dry, I can't do. Two nights we stay, the third day that man came: 'Tomorrow you must go India you all, plane to India'. One lady: 'No, I can't go India, I came here, I can't go'. Next morning he took us to 'Maritzburg Jail.

VR: Oh.

MN: 'Maritzburg Jail, we went there.

VR: Okay, so they moved you from Durban Jail to 'Maritzburg Jail?

MN: Ya, I stayed there 30 days.

VR: For 30 days?

MN: 30 days, yes.

VR: Now why did they put you in jail? Did they tell you?

MN: This country fighting, I want a country.

VR: You were fighting for your country?

MN: Ya, country. [laughs]

VR: And did they say: 'Well, we are charging you with something?' What did they say they were charging you for?

MN: They never told me.

VR: They didn't tell you anything. Now tell us about the time you were in 'Maritzburg Jail, you spent a month there?

MN: Ya, a month.

VR: Now tell us, what was it like in that jail?

MN: In jail no work, nothing. Go inside, we were in one room, three ladies, one room, four ladies. Like that we lived. Next morning come the nurse, knock on the door: 'Go bath'. Took a bath, take your clothes in the bath, and go. Bath and come. After comes, dressed nicely, the food comes. Porridge and beans, sugar beans, it would be a little bit. Can't eat it.

VR: You couldn't eat the food?

MN: Ya, can't eat. That one some people eat, some people they won't eat it, the working people there.

VR: Now did you do any work while you were ...  
[interruption]

MN: No, nothing working there. 'Maritzburg Jail, nothing, sit there outside. Inside and outside, same.

VR: Alright. Now was your family able to visit you when you were in jail?

MN: No, nobody came there, family.

VR: No one came to visit you?

MN: No, no one came.

VR: Was it because - did the people in the jail say you can't have visitors?

MN: Can't come people and visit there, ya. Christmas and New Year, inside that year. Christmas Day they took everyone, ladies, men, they took on all for tea, cakes, they gave everybody. They drank one cup tea, cake.

VR: On Christmas Day?

MN: Ya, Christmas Day.

VR: Now were they kind to you or were they nasty to you in prison?

MN: No, I won't tell anything. They won't ask you anything. Wash your clothes, dry, again same, no iron, put it on like that.

VR: Was there a lawyer who came to see you?

MN: Ya, he come.

VR: There was a lawyer?

MN: Ya.

VR: Do you remember who the lawyer was?

MN: I don't know who's that lawyer.

VR: You don't remember his name?

MN: No, I don't know name.

VR: What did he ask you when he came to see you? There was a group of you, wasn't there?

MN: He asked: 'Why you people came to jail? Why are you struggling like that, husbands, children left at home? You all came here.' 'No, I came fighting my country, my country I want it, that's why I came'.

VR: Now how did your family feel about the fact that you joined the Passive Resistance and you went to jail, because that was a very brave thing you did, how did your family feel?



MN: They don't mind, my children only worried. My children, my mother-in-law, my little boys. Ya, family, a big family, at that time.

VR: And your mother, did she come and see you?

MN: No one came. Can't come.

VR: But did they support you? Were they happy with what you were doing?

MN: Happy, support me.

VR: They supported you?

MN: Ya.

VR: And your father?

MN: My father too.

VR: Were they in the resistance as well?

MN: No.

VR: No?

MN: No.

VR: Was anybody else in your family in the resistance?

MN: No, nobody.

VR: Do you remember some of the names of the ladies who were in your group? This wonderful photograph that you have here, do you remember ...  
[interruption]

MN: One lady there, my brother's wife.

VR: Your brother's wife, okay.

MN: Ya, that one lady.

VR: Do you remember her name?

MN: Khanamah.

VR: Her name was Khanamah.

MN: Khanamah Naidoo.

VR: Okay. And any of the others, do you remember any of the other ladies there?

MN: Other ladies, let me see.

VR: Do you want to have a look? Yes, that's fine.

MN: This lady is Saubaikium.

VR: Okay.

MN: That's all I know.

VR: Those are the ones you remember?

MN: Ya.

VR: Okay, that's fine.

MN: Two ladies I know.

VR: So at the time you went to prison, your parents had died then? Your mother and your father had died?

MN: Ya. Worry, ya.

VR: The worry?

MN: Ya.

VR: They were worried.

MN: I went to my cell, that people now tell I go to jail. I went.

VR: Now who cared for your children while you were in prison?

MN: My brother and his wife. My daughter-in-law, a big family, I left them and went away.

VR: Okay, how big were your children then?

MN: My daughter was a big daughter. Boy, small. Small third daughter, a small baby that time.

VR: She was still a baby?

MN: Ya.

VR: Okay. Now how did you manage - when you came out of prison, out of jail, what happened then?

MN: Nothing happened. Came at the house.

VR: Came home?

MN: Ya.

VR: And how did you manage to be a mother to your children, alone, and still do the things you were

doing in the movement, the Passive Resistance Movement? How did you manage to do all that together?

MN: [laughs]

VR: Was it hard to do, to be a mother and to ...  
[interruption]

MN: Ya, mother to children, ya.

VR: Okay. Now what else do you remember about the time you were involved in the Passive Resistance? Is there anything that you remember? Did anything good come from what you did? Did anybody do anything better for you and the people in your community after your involvement in the Passive Resistance?

MN: I went myself, nobody helped.

VR: Nobody helped?

MN: No.

VR: And when you came back home did anything change in your life? Did it get better at all?

MN: I worried my children. I came, saw my children, then they were happy, I'm happy. Ya.

VR: And were they well?

MN: Ya.

VR: And did they miss you?

MN: Ya, they missed me.

VR: Yes, they missed you. When you came back again did you have a better life? Was the home you lived in better?

MN: Ya, a better life.

VR: You had a better life?

MN: Ya, I had a better life.

VR: You had electricity and water and so on by then?

MN: No.

VR: No? Did you have those things?

MN: Ya.

VR: You had electricity and water?

MN: Ya.

VR: You did. Okay. When you think about those years long ago, who were the people that you thought were very important? Who were the important people then to you? You know, people you admired, you liked what they did. Do you remember other women or men who were important then?

MN: My grandson, my daughter, mother, father.

VR: Yes.

MN: Mother, father died, gone, but there's children there. My grandchildren.

VR: Your children and grandchildren were important to you. Now as the years went on tell me did you meet other people in the Resistance Movement?

MN: No.

VR: You didn't meet anyone else. Okay. May we pause for a bit?

MACHINE SWITCHED OFF

ON RESUMPTION:

VR: Aya, when you look back now on your life, have you had a good life?

MN: Good life. Ya, a good life.

VR: Are you happy now we've got our own government?

MN: Ya. I'm happy.

VR: You are, yes. Did you vote?

MN: Ya.

VR: And do you feel that we have a better life now?

MN: Better life now, ya.

VR: Good, I'm glad. And I believe you attended the Resistance Park about a month ago?

MN: Ya, I went.

VR: Tell me about that, Aya.

MN: There I went, ma, so happy, so much crowd, oh, so nice. Mandela came, he came that time, so much people coming. Can't see his face, came there talking, then I saw Mandela ...talking there. After seeing [him], I can't go inside, I sit there. Nobody went near, anybody went near, anybody went there near ... [they] went away slowly, nobody went... [inaudible] ....we ... talking there. Ma.

VR: Did you want to meet him?

MN: Ya, meet him.

VR: You wanted to meet him?

MN: Ya, I ['d] like [to].

VR: But I believe you met Mr Ahmed Kathrada?

MN: Ya.

VR: And a photograph was taken of you?

MN: Ya, a photograph.

VR: Oh, tell me about that, Aya. Who spoke to you there? Did people speak to you?

MN: Ya, they came and they took photos, standing there, photos, somebody, boys, men, all come, standing behind me, he took so much photos. I don't know his name.

VR: That's alright. But somewhere it's recorded that you were there?

MN: Ya.

VR: That's very important.

MN: So happy.

VR: Now you live with your children, Aya?

MN: Now I'm still living here.

VR: This is your home?

MN: My home, ya.

VR: And are you in good health? Are you well?

MN: Yes.

VR: You look very well.

MN: I go to another granddaughter's house, stay there, 1 month, 2 month, 3 months, like that. I come back here, stay, I go my sister's house, I stay there. I go everywhere, live there, my grandson.

VR: Well, it's nice to know that you are so well and we thank you for talking to us. All this information you've given us is going to be there for all the children in the years to come, for them to study, they'll be able to see it on video and they'll know all about your contribution to the struggle ...

[interruption]

MN: Nice, thank you.

VR: ...and the to the freedom of our country. Thank you, Aya.

MN: Thank you.

INTERVIEW ENDS

MACHINE SWITCHED OFF

ON RESUMPTION:

VR: We're back again. Joining us now is Mrs Govindah Moodley, who is the daughter of Mrs Muniammah Naidoo. Mrs Moodley, thank you for joining us.

GM: Thank you.

VR: Tell me, what are your recollections of your Mum's resistance years: when she joined the Passive Resistance?

GM: I was very small, I was only 16-years old, so when they all used to go to near the Moon Hotel, they had a marquee there, so everybody used to go to meetings. I also used to go every night. So I used to want to, myself to sign up, they said, 'No, you're very small, you can't go'. So all the ladies went. When they were going, then they went and then we came home, and then we didn't feel like we missed my mother, we had our big mother with us and her children. And like only my little sister became a bit sick.

VR: Now tell me, when your Mum went to this meeting what happened? Do you know? Do you recollect? Did anybody tell you how they were arrested and why?

GM: They all wanted their country, they were fighting for their country, that's what they went for. And we were happy that she went. That someone in our family did something.

VR: Yes, made a contribution.

GM: Yes.

VR: Did they arrest them on the same day, that group of ladies?

GM: No, I don't think - when - same day then they were arrested, they asked them to come on a certain day, so each batch went, like that they went.

VR: Okay. Now were they arrested at a march or at a meeting? What were they doing at the time they were arrested?

GM: That I can't even think of it, but I don't think they went for a march. I can't remember them going to a march ever. So from that meeting they went, I think

from then they must have took them to Central. I was only 16-years then, I won't even know much too.

VR: Yes. Now while your Mum was in prison who cared for you?

GM: My big mother. My father's brother's wife and I had an elder sister and my sister-in-law's. We don't tell them they are cousins children, we address them as our own brothers and sisters.

VR: Yes, that is the tradition.

GM: That way, and plus that we had two houses. My father and them had two houses, so one house we, all the family stayed and another house we let it out for rent. So that money, rent, they used to come to support us. So my mother and my big mother they used to work in a jam factory.

VR: In a jam factory?

GM: Ya. In Rossborough they used to work. So when we went for grant too, they never used to give us. So one month I know I collected a grant, I went to school to bank, they said, 'No, you're no supposed to bank you're collecting a grant'. We never collected very long, they never allowed us to even bank, do banking in school. But anyway, we didn't feel anything, like you know, left or anything, we had everything. We can't just fuss that we didn't have anything.

VR: Now tell me, the people in the community that you lived, this was in Clairwood?

GM: Yes.

VR: How did they view the fact that your Mum joined the Resistance Movement?



GM: They all were happy, nobody had anything to say.

VR: Did a lot of the women there, and the men, join the Resistance Movement too?

GM: Yes, all those ladies, all from Clairwood, all this group. [Pointing to a photograph].

VR: Do you know whether there was a very large number, or how big was the group? Apart from people ... [interruption]

GM: Each had their groups and they went like that. All didn't go at one time, certain groups at a certain time.

VR: Were you proud of your mother?

GM: Yes, I'm very proud of her. I don't know whether she's proud about me.

VR: [laughs] Mother's are always proud of their children. So over the years was there anything else that Mum did in terms of the resistance? Did she continue doing this kind of thing?

GM: No, I can't remember anything else after that.

VR: Do you know whether she was allowed to wear her own clothes, her sari, when she was in prison?

GM: No. I can't remember, I don't know what they wore in prison.

VR: And you were not allowed to go and visit her?

GM: No. We didn't go, nobody went.

VR: Was there a reason for that?

GM: I don't know why we didn't go, nobody took us there. And now it's a modern world, now everybody would have had it, but those day it was like that.

VR: Over the years has she shown interest in the things that have been happening in our country, during the very difficult times?

GM: Yes.

VR: She has shown interest in all that?

GM: Yes, she's shown a lot of interest.

VR: And how did she feel when it was time to vote?

GM: She was very happy, she was happy to go.

VR: Did she cast her vote?

GM: Yes.

VR: How many times? The first time when Mandela was elected President, did she vote then?

GM: Yes, she voted.

VR: And then again when President Mbeki became President?

GM: Ya, every vote she did.

VR: She cast her vote?

GM: Yes.

VR: Oh, that's good, I'm glad to see that. Tell me, her reaction to the trip to the Resistance Park, what did she say when she came home that day?

GM: She was very happy that her grandson and grandson's wife took her, she said she saw so much of people, but only she was very offended she couldn't meet Mandela.

VR: Well, who knows there might be another opportunity.

GM: That's what I told her, 'Wait, there will be another opportunity. You will meet him one day'.

VR: Or perhaps somebody in the family can phone Mr Mandela's office and find out when he's going to be in Durban again and maybe it can be possibly arranged.

GM: Yes, that's what I told her, 'You may, you will meet him again'.

VR: Because Mr Mandela does a lot of things, he goes out of his way to meet people, especially people who have been in the Resistance Movement.

GM: Ya, we see in the TV how he is with the children, so loving with the children.

VR: That's right, yes. And it's good to see that your Mum is in good health, and we thank you and your family for giving us this time. If there's anything else you would like to tell us, or if there's something she would like to say ... [interruption]

GM: I don't know what work she did in the sugar mill.

VR: Do you remember those ... [interruption]

MN: Sugar mill?

VR: Yes.

MN: Never worked in sugar mill. I worked at jam factory, at a nuts factory, ya.

VR: And what did you do there, Aya?

MN: I cleaned fruits at the jam factory, peaches, fruit, make jam there. Banana, pineapple, pear, grapes, every fruits coming there, must clean that one.

VR: How many years did you work?

MN: Long time at the - .

VR: How many years did you work?

MN: Ya, work and go. Ya. Near factory.

VR: Near home?

MN: Ya. Houghton Road jam factory. After I finished that one I went to a nuts factory. Oregon Road nuts factory.

VR: Oregon Road?

MN: Ya.

VR: Yes.

MN: There I went. Clean the nuts and fill the bag. One day, one bag fill can't do, half bag fill, clean it. Any stick there, you pick fruit, clean fruit.

VR: Was it hard work?

MN: Hard, hard that one, ya.

VR: Very hard?

MN: Ya.

VR: And in that way you were able to look after your children?

MN: Ya, children.

VR: You have every reason to be very proud of yourself. Thank you again for your time.

MN: Thank you.

INTERVIEW ENDS

