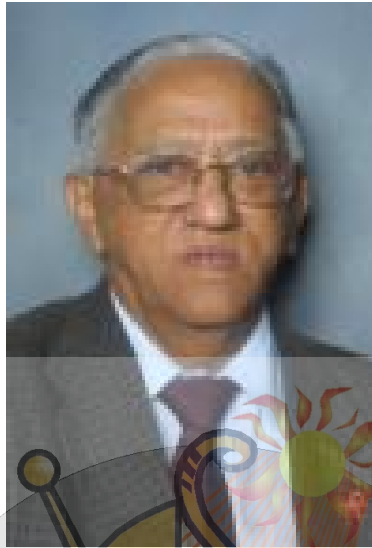


# RAM SALOJEE



BIOGRAPHY  
EDUCATION  
LENASIA RATEPAYERS ASSOCIATION  
PEOPLES CANDIDATES PARTY  
SPORT  
ISLAM  
INDIAN SOUTH AFRICANS  
YOUTH

No doubt the people of Lenasia are stunned by the dramatic events of the last ten days. It is a lesson of history, that it is not always premeditated and calculated moves that determine the course of events; but often decided by the unpredictable circumstances of actions, by arrogant authorities, who misguidedly, underestimate the proud resilience of subject people, to insults to their dignity and self-respect. We are powerless in terms of government; but we too, like all humanity, possess the inherent force to resist humiliation and degradation. We may not be white in colour, but we do not lack, in the spirit, to defend our humanity and our dignity. I consider this a proud moment, in the records of the Indian people. Proud because the 12 candidates, who had offered to contest the forthcoming elections, unreservedly and unhesitatingly united in the defence of the assault, on the honour of the residents of Lenasia. We may differ on specific issues; we may adopt different directions of strategy and we may even oppose one another, but on the fundamental question of our dignity we stand steadfast and united. On this vital issue we will break no division or opposition. Undivided and resolute we will stand. The sequence of events, which have prompted us to take the present stance, resurrects for us the panorama of the past, a well from which we can draw courage and determination from the inspirations and guidance of our many leaders, who have left an indelible mark on the struggle for justice and equity. As non-violent people, others try to take liberty of our passiveness; but let it never be said that we are spineless and gutless. We hope that the philosophy of tenacity of purpose and determination of action, will become a part of our present decision. Not that we had any illusions, regarding the intentions of the state to keep us as second-class citizens. A status which we cannot accept, nor one that we can allow to continue, unpretentingly. Let not posterity point a finger of neglect and guilt, at us.

For two years, as elected representatives of Lenasia, we had laboured against bureaucracy and racial prejudice, to improve the existing conditions and future development of our people. We knew the force of the odds stacked against us; we also knew that the instrument at our disposal was weak and sickly; but we felt that to allow this feeble institution, to fall into the hands of those that could use it for self-gain, had to be contested; we could not allow the further emasculation of the dispirited soul of our people; and thereby strengthen the grip of prejudiced authority, to deny us like it does others in S.A., the full fruits of our inalienable rights to equality and full participation, in a socially just and shared society. What prompted us to take this drastic decision? It was not impulsive or recklessly decided. It was due to the fact that Ministers of State, imposed upon us, to control our existence, showed cold concern and dispassionate interest in our multiple problems. They enthused mere, in what little had been done for us, then give us assurances for rectifying the shortages. Instead of receiving support from the hierarchy of the U.P. controlled Council, we got sarcasm and snubs. On that fateful day of the 9/10/75, any doubts we may had, regarding, the local meaning of words like dialogue, detente, moving away from discrimination and full expression to the abilities of communities - was shattered, by the architects of apartheid and some others who shared a common interest, in the oligarchic system of Government in S.A.

In no unmistakable terms we were reminded that dialogue and detente means that we must be grateful for the mercies shown us; that consultation meant the unconditional accept

that development to follow, according to the dictates of those in power and authority. The problems of our people and the deficiencies in our environment, defined at length, by me, in an 8 page memorandum received scant consideration. The absence of homes for the natural growth in population; the rehusing of people from the slum conditions of Thensville and backyard tenancies; the glaring deficiencies in planning regarding sites for creches, nursery schools, religious institutions, welfare organisations, schools, recreational centres, health clinics and decentralised shopping complexes; the agonising frustrations in finding a suitable hospital site; the protracted delay in building a police station; the high cost of unsubsidised transport facilities; the long delays in providing adequate drain, road, telephone, cemetery, park and sporting amenities; the piecemeal proclamation of extensions to Lenasia and the land crises - all these and other items paled in the face of a single swimming pool for Indians, in the last 80 years; the browned grassed and ungrassed sports fields; the grandiose plans for extension which may take upto 20 years to develop; the activity in the road program, which took 15 years to implement. At no stage did we say there was no progress, but all these have come grudgingly and haltingly. In the memorandum we also raised the need for reviewing the harmful effects of job reservation; unequal salaries; Group Areas; delays in transfers of land and homes; the permanence of temporary prefab schools; the denial of the state for admission to schools of children without registration documents; the need for abolishing control certificates for trading in Lenasia; the urgency for land being made available for city council and private development, to alleviate the housing shortage; the relinquishing of the monopolistic control of all development by Community Development; the justness of using profits accruing from sale of land in Lenasia, for the progress of the area; assistance through I.D.C. for erection and financing of small industries; the harm done to community stability and social security, because of delay in land for such purposes; the establishment of a technical training institution; the absence of a viable infrastructure in the economic field. All these pertinent questions rated little attention.

At the end of a deflating superficial "fact-finding" tour, our expectations for improvements and encouragement was drowned in the mutual spectacle of self-praising of state and city council. This back-slapping exercise, emphasised that for practical purposes for which the Ministers were invited, took a back-seat. In essence our presence was incidental and that we had to be eternally grateful for the largesse of the state and the Council. In a brief moment of magnanimous gesture, the Minister of Indian Affairs challenged the Indian community, in view of our resourcefulness and productive capacity to rise to the level of the white citizens of the country. Having being denied the opportunity, on the basis of protocol, of responding to the challenges, I had to offer my disappointment to the Minister, for not giving me the opportunity to reply. I had to remind him that we are not allowed to develop freely and the state had the power to decide the place, the extent and the means for our progress. Given equal opportunities and access to the government of the country, we could even surpass many of the privileged sections of the S.A. community. The policy of separate development basically stunted our development and never could be considered equal or just.

All along the tour, disparaging remarks on the characteristics of our people, were made by people of importance - in the City Council - some solemnly condemned the residents of the two-rooms, for the dirty environment - forgetting that the state created the slum conditions and deprived these people of homes and...

The legitimate needs of Lenasia, as enumerated in the memorandum was considered as unreasonable and poor co-operation. The Minister boasted of the sums to be spent on Indian education, in the next 5 years. Ofcourse this sum still falls far short of that spent on white children. The request by the harassed residents of Pageview for fair compensation is regarded as ingratitude; and the plea of the Plaza traders for economic rentals as crass impertinence. I could not remain silent in the face of these uncalled for abuses and had to remind indifferent authority that given equal opportunities and rights, we would live, as we have shown, despite restrictions to the best in the country; that our demands cannot be regarded as outrageous, and as our expectations as citizens was equal to that of any white, we would not ask for less or demand for more. The expenditure on education would be respected, when the per capita expenditure of all children in S.A. equalled that of the whites. I challenged the Minister, to state whether these requests were outlandish or unreasonable. On the question of the rentals in the Plaza I retorted that our people had suffered so severely by dispossession, that giving it rental free, would not be adequate compensation for the properties and rights we had lost in the heart of the City. Further, with grim-faced justification Pageview <sup>officially</sup> was considered outlined the buffers that would cordon off the Indians, from the whites, in Vrededorp, should this go Indian. Are we a contagion that needs to be effectively, kraaled off. Oh! where is Christianity and where is humanity.

balance this visit must be taken in association, with the fact, that it had been the unremitting demand of our Management Committee, over the past two years, that these Ministers come to Lenasia. Instead the Council conducted a flitting tour through Lenasia in which the problems and issues were superficially glossed over. There was even reluctance on the part of officialdom to stretch their legs, in the human misery of our state created slums. Yet when we reached the granite impersonality of the Oriental Plaza, the entourage leisurely admired the splendour of its 15million rand construction, a sacrifice in the interest of the Indian community. Forgetting that the Council was acquiring a 50million rand asset, at the expense of the traders, who would now become totally dependant on Council landlordship. Mere time was spent in inspecting the canvas flaps, that covered a pushcart in the Plaza, then some members of the party were prepared to spend in the two-rooms of Greyville. When the Minister of Community Development was tackled, on the housing shortage, he made it abundantly clear, that development in the next 3 extensions - nearly 1000 units, within the next 3to5 years would be primarily for re-settlement - political ideology would supercede the human needs of the local population. Thus the needs of the natural growth of the population and overcrowding in Lenasia will have to wait indefinitely - anything upto 10 years. I called for the abolition of the Group Areas Act and suggested that people who were living happily outside Lenasia, be left alone and that our internal demands be fulfilled. The Minister was annoyed at this suggestion and indicated resettlement was the priority, and that people in Lenasia would just have to wait, indefinitely.

You will agree that the whole design of the tour was frustratingly adverse to the interests of Lenasia. When refused the opportunity to address the gathering after the luncheon, I was told I should hire the Civic Hall, as the elections were near, and parade our grievances. Previously at the opening of the local health clinic I was refused <sup>to speak</sup> an opportunity. It appears from press reports that Mr Oberhelzer, had vowed, after our induction ceremony in late 1975, that he would never again allow me to speak. I was to be penalised for forthrightly and publically expressing the aspirations and grievances

If we are to disregard this whole affair; if we are to remain untouched by this show of coldness; if we are to passively acquiesce to this repetitive humiliations - it would mean that we deny ourselves the emotions of insult and injury; that we are compliant in our right, to be regarded as equal citizens; it would mean that we renounce our claims to dignity and honour; it would declare our inability to proclaim, ~~that~~ that our expectations as citizens are equal to that of the whites; it would announce that we are satisfied with unequal concern from the state and the council; it would indicate our fragility to stand up in defence of the rights of those who profess trust in us. It is for these reasons, reasons that men have striven, throughout the centuries, to exercise in their pursuit of justice and humanity. The mantle of leadership that the people have placed upon us, demands from us, action that will meet the circumstances. If at this critical hour, we were to balk at the challenge and shy away from our responsibility, would have been any better than a Brutus that stabbed a Caesar or a Judas that betrayed Jesus.. My conscience and the conscience of my colleagues, will not be flooded by your contempt or drowned in the sea of your reproach. It is better that my blood be shed, than to dilute it in the ocean of deceit and cowardice. If we are to continue to enjoy your trust and support, then we could not have acted otherwise. In this solemn hour of a crises of conscience, material considerations of profit and self, must not be allowed to drown the spiritual rectitude of devotion and duty.

The fact that Dr Jamine, in a press report to the Vaderland, showed relief, for the present non-existence of a Management Committee and that the Council could now go ahead, on its own, without having to consult the elected representatives of the Indian people, show the parochial and paternalistic attitudes of these officials. This shows that we are accepted on sufferance and that our concern for our people regarded as obstruction. They would be happy not to answer embarrassing questions. They would be equally relieved not to answer to demands such as - why is Lenasia only given approx. 2 million rand from a total Council Budget of 290 million rands. Of which over 60% go towards the salaries of whites in our areas. They would like to forget that the City gave the Indians nothing in the City when they had contributed rates and taxes over a period of 80 years. It is a tragedy that in the name of co-operation a certain Mr Essepchai Mesarka, is prepared to condone, insult and support the indignities heaped on the Indian people. If co-operation means the surrender of all our spirit of honour and to bow in cowering supplication for crumbs from the masters table and to thank in gratitude, with a cap in hand manner, then we will leave it to people without honour and without a conscience. We cannot allow ourselves to be the instruments of our own oppression and degradation. But by God I ask these conscienceless people to sell their souls, in their own names and not in the name of the Indian Community. May God have mercy on their misguided material opportunism.

We served on these state created institutions, not to support double standards, but to expose injustice and inequality. To see that justice was not only mouthed, but practiced in deed as well. From our experience it is obvious that despite protestations prejudice is too deeply rooted and healthy opposition or exposure of double standards is regarded as sacrilege. We cannot remain silent to the dubious standards that characterise separate development; we cannot allow unchallenged, the ever abundance of generosity and inducements offered to white immigrants, whose contribution to S.A. is small, in preference to the black and brown sons of our own S.A. soil. We too are of Africa, just as the whites, who now proclaim their African identity. We chose to be citizens when we rejected repatriation. Our loyalty knows no other land but S.A. In S.A. we are born in

from our responsibility, to strive for a non-racial S.A., in which there will be justice for all; and man will behave with his fellow-man, in the spirit that God has intended - not by colour; not by race; not by religion; not by caste; not by social standing; not by material values - but judged by the values and virtues of humanity and justice; reconciliation and love. We bear no hatred for any man; we bear no vengeance for those that defame us; but we will not sacrifice our right and the right of all subject people to dignity and self-respect. We will use every non-violent weapon available to us and every discretion permissible - to reach this final goal. This is a timeless ideal, if not attained, in the life-time of one leader; it becomes the clarion call of those that tread the path of morality and righteousness.

To those among the Indian community that believe that there is a definable distinction between purely Civic Affairs and Politics must guard against self-delusion and misleading the public. Lenasia is a political creation and the pedestrian rate and unequal pace of development is guided by political consideration - funds, extensions, housing, essential amenities follow a political pattern, which is peculiar to black areas. Those that have fallen prey to the false deception of differentiation between politics and civic affairs, must study international history and they will learn the fate of people, who remained blind to truth. We too must take cognizance of events and history, if we are not to make the same mistakes. Whatever the obstacles, we must not remain immobile, we must continue to press and demand for the underprivileged and the deprived the right to liberal life and opportunities. Any other course of action would be a betrayal of our moral responsibilities and spiritual convictions. Success will only come through persistence, perseverance and dedication. This we cannot hope to abandon - even in the face of opposition from within or without.

On the question of autonomy for Lenasia, we are opposed to a local autonomous arrangement where as a dormitory suburb of Jhb., we would be deprived and denied a share in the civic progress and development of our City. Why should citizens; any citizens, having contributed and are contributing, continually, to its development, be denied equal benefits. In the climate of changing expectations, it is necessary that a complete re-think is necessary. We want to be a part, an integral part, of the democratic process of Govt. - separate, unequal and inferior institutions can form no part of such a democratic philosophy. Only then will we have a speedy elimination of the problems that areas like Lenasia and others pose.

Finally - I seek not to impose my will on the wishes of the people. I seek guidance from your wisdom and your trust. I seek not to order but to serve. In mutual confidence will we find strength and in unity build the bonds of courage. As an elected guardian of your trust, I must remain loyal to your faith. To remain shackled and silent in the face of insults and indignities is to betray this faith and to surrender to weakness and cowardliness. To renegade now, from the path of honour and justice - the eternal route, mapped out by the deeds and actions of the prophets of yore. The light of God and the demand of His decree, <sup>and</sup> Given fresh impetus and purposeful meaning by those sons of humanity, who have become martyrs in the cause of sacrifice and justice. Many such have tread the soil of South Africa - and in the shadow of their greatness, we hope that we too can give our share. In prayer we will find comfort, in action fulfilment, and in deed results. May God bless us all and protect us from the injury of evil and give us courage in our convictions. May we succeed in the building of a better South Africa - where the virtues of social justice and the values of human dignity will be enshrined for all to share.

Those from within the community, who support or defend the actions of a Minister, with negative bias and unbalanced assessment, who galloped forth, in quixotic fashion, to heap praise and defend the double standards of the Council and state, deserve our contempt. It is easy for these self-styled authorities and arm-chair critics to sit in the comfort of their ample abodes and criticize, those that are involved in the problems of ~~our~~ <sup>our</sup> people. They are not aware of the plights of those who suffer the pangs of want, the pains of deprivation, the social stigma of slum dwellings, the deformities of disease and being easy prey to threats of violence and victimisation. Instead of continually criticising from the comfortable pedestals, why do not come to the rescue of their own people; and thereby contribute positively to the relief of human suffering, caused by unjust systems and social deficiencies.

Now that we have taken this decisive step, we will see, if the state will call for an impartial open inquiry, into the whole affair or as anticipated, act in an efficacious manner and impose its own solution. Only an enquiry of such a nature can reveal, for public appraisal, the utter vacuum of these institutions, which relegate us, into impotent citizens. Even the Jhb. City Council, which prides itself in verligtheid has so far failed miserably to institute an unbiased enquiry. The whole exercise of Govt. in S.A. is motivated towards the protection of the status quo. We are merely accommodated to give a semblance of power, to suit their aims and continued control. However, our refusal, in Lenasia, to prostitute the right of our people to elect their own leaders, through the co-optation of electoral colleges, for the S.A.I.C. and now our determined and spontaneous efforts to show solidarity, against the humiliation of our people, may appear <sup>tiny</sup> pebbles in the stagnant pools of change; but the ripples created have the inbred potential to activate the conscience of justice and reason; and we hope it releases a whirlpool of rethinking, on the continued subordination of people of colour.

I would like to re-assure Lenasia, that in this hour of crisis, we have no intention of casting you to the greedy wolves of self-motivation and opportunism. Our vigil, in the protection of your interests will not be dimmed or diluted. The spotlight of concern and the wheels of action, will be intensified and devotionally highlight the issues at stake. Appropriate measures to combat the evils of double standards will religiously form part of our armoury of watchfulness and action. Your trust in us will be zealously guarded and we will not allow, by default, any issues to escape our attention or vigilance.

The problems of Lenasia, are intertwined with those of other areas and we have now to seriously consider the casting of our nets, into deeper waters and scan wider horizons, in our search to enlist support and contributions to our combined cause, on provincial and national levels. If this proposal is to succeed - involvement by the people, for the people and with the people, is mandatory. Your presence here to-night is clear indication that we will not be lacking in that support. As Indians we must break down the barriers of narrow visions, which entrench caste, religion and race, and to align ourselves in the wider spectrum of national commitment. Our fate will depend upon our attitudes and our sacrifices, in the realization of these wider goals; Goals which demand expression and involvement, in the pursuit of a harmonious and a just society. Goals which are vital if we are to see and experience peace and stability, on this southern tip of the African continent. Goals which are not only pertinent for the S.A. of today; but necessary for the security of to-morrow. If we love our children and our families; if we believe in patriotism, which we no doubt do, to the soil of S.Africa, then we are duty bound to pursue these wider efforts. In this lies our salvation and in this lies our honour. Now is