

Youth Day Commemoration

Mems Moosa

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The 1860 Legacy Foundation, the Ahmed Kathrada Foundation and the Tamil Federation Gauteng commemorated Youth Day by visiting the graves of passive resisters, as well as the Hector Peterson Memorial Museum.

At the Braamfontein Cemetery, wreaths were laid on the graves of Valiamma R. Munuswami and Nagappen Padayachee, who both contributed to the struggle against injustice.

The commemoration ceremony was attended by anti-apartheid veteran Ahmed Kathrada, Seth Naicker – a youth worker, and Shan Bolton - secretary of the 1860 Legacy Foundation. Also in attendance was Vishnu Pillay – chairperson of the Tamil Federation Gauteng as well as Shri Marie Pillay, and youth representatives from various religious sectors.

Chairperson of the 1860 Legacy Foundation Jody Kollapen spoke at the event. “With freedom comes the responsibility, and the youth who have come here in numbers, show this,” he said.

Valliamma (16) crossed the border into the then Transvaal in defiance of a law which restricted Natal Indians from settling in other provinces. She was arrested and imprisoned.

The passive resister entered prison as a healthy youth, but the brutal regime took its toll and she left emaciated and barely able to speak.

However, upon release, she lost none of her proud defiance, which had cast a magnetic spell on the community of resisters.

As result of her serving a term of imprisonment and the drastic conditions she had endured, Villiamma, in 1914, is remembered as the first martyr of Mahatma Gandhi’s Passive Resistance Campaign.

Nagappen was about 18 years old when he was sentenced on June 21, 1909 to three pounds or 10 days imprisonment with hard labour for hawking without a permit.

After spending a night at Fort he, was made to walk to the Jukskei Road Prison Camp, 26km away. He was discharged from the camp on June 30, and died on July 6 of double pneumonia and resultant heart failure. His body was full of bruises. Fellow prisoners reported that Nagappen had been physically abused in prison, and that his illness was neglected by the prison authorities. The official enquiry however, exonerated prison officials.

In Soweto, at the Hector Peterson Memorial, young people were given a short history lesson about the 1976 youth uprising by MP Ismail Vadi, while MP _____ sang ‘*Senzeni na*’ - meaning ‘What did we do?’ – the 1976 student protest song.

Gauteng Premier Nomvula Mokanyane had prior to this, also held a wreath-laying” ceremony at the memorial site. Fifa Local Organising Committee (LOC) CEO Danny Jordaan, LOC Chairperson Irvin Khoza and soccer legends Doctor Khumalo and Lucas Radebe were also present.

The June 1976 protest by pupils against Afrikaans as a medium of instruction, which saw Hector Peterson and others killed, is regarded as a watershed moment, leading to apartheid’s end

A comparison of the class of ‘76 with the current crop leads to interesting different struggles - today’s youth are at the forefront of the protests over service delivery - burning tyres and blocking roads! Those of the seventies had a convergence of various streams that met to create history’s agenda!

Source of some information: www.sahistory.org.za