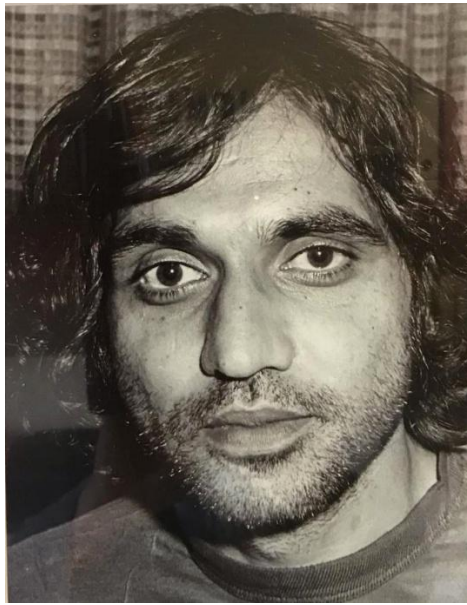


Sadecque Variava - Fired After Three Days!

(Ismail Vadi)

Sadecque Variava probably holds the record in Lenasia for being fired within three days of his appointment as a teacher because of his political beliefs. Born on 8 July 1948 in Pietersburg, he was an early recruit to the Black Consciousness Movement in the early 1970s. His siblings, Haroon, Yusuf and Rooha, too were active in the liberation struggle.



Sadecque went to the Pietersburg Indian-Coloured Primary School. When his family moved as non-economic migrants to Vrededorp in 1963, he was forced to complete his secondary education at Lenz High School, travelling by train to attend classes. In 1968, Sadecque was in matric when he organised students to boycott the Republic Day celebrations held at the school. In the same year, he led the first ever protest march of about 2 000 high school students from Lenz High and Nirvana High Schools to the Lenasia Stadium. They objected to the change of school times on Fridays, which meant that Muslim students attending the Friday noon prayers were forced to return to classes after the time of worship. Previously, schools were dismissed once students went to mosque for prayers. This religious issue served as a pretext for their expression of opposition against the takeover of education by the Department of Indian Affairs. Sadecque delivered his speech standing on a dustbin at the stadium. Later he was questioned by the principal and the Director of Education and suspended from attending school for a week.

In 1969, Sadecque enrolled as a student at Transvaal College of Education, where he immediately got involved in student politics. In September, he contested the SRC elections and was voted as President as a first-year student, having defeated Guru Kistasamy, who was the out-going SRC President. At the time, he met with Steve Biko, President of the South African Student Organisation (SASO) at the Braamfontein Station

and developed a friendship with him that endured until the latter's death in detention in 1977. Under Sadecque's leadership the SRC disaffiliated from NUSAS and joined SASO. Henceforth, he remained an active member of SASO, where he developed firm political relationships with Black Consciousness Movement leaders such as Aubrey Mokoena, Barney Pitso, Strini Moodley, Goolam Mayet Abram, Aubrey Mokoape, Harry Nengwekhulu, Tom Manthata, Muntu Myeza, Pandelani Nefolovhodwe, Kenneth Rachidi, Ben Langa and Saths Cooper.

At college Sadecque would address students on a weekly basis and got them to abolish initiation practices and introduce cultural programmes with a political slant. In April 1972, Onkgopotse Abraham Tiro delivered a militant speech at a graduation ceremony at Turfloop criticising apartheid education for which he was expelled. Sadecque mobilised TCE students to boycott lectures in solidarity with Tiro. Saths Cooper later called on him to speak to students at the University of Durban-Westville, ML Sultan Technical College and Springfield College of Education to join the strike. A Commission of Inquiry was appointed at TCE looking into the students' strike and it found Sadecque guilty of inciting students.

Meanwhile, the Variava family had moved to Lenasia in 1969. Sadecque was part of the group that organised a protest meeting against the death in detention in October 1971 of Ahmed Timol. Having qualified as a teacher, Sadecque started teaching at Lenasia High School in January 1973, but he was fired after three days on the job. An apologetic Mr Lorgat, principal at Lenz High, served him with his termination of employment notice, saying he had nothing to do with it. Sadecque demanded payment for three days' service and was given R18 from the school fund. Subsequently, Sadecque devoted all his time to his political activities within the Black People's Convention (BPC) and focussing on using theatre as an instrument of political conscientisation, particularly of youth. Sadecque was instrumental in the formation of the BPC and set up its local branch in Lenasia.

Together with fellow teacher, Sulayman 'Solly' Ismail, Rashid Valli Moosa, Haroon Variava, Roy Moodley and Rashid Mayet, they formed the Black People's Theatre Group in Lenasia, hosting poetry recitals and workshops with Don Matera and Farouk Asvat. In March 1973, the group was renamed the People's Experimental Theatre (PET), an avant-garde political theatre grouping that worked closely with cultural artists in Soweto. Sadecque edited the PET newsletter, "The Spear Lives On", which featured poetry, articles on Black Consciousness and news about the theatre group. PET hosted Black poetry recitals in communities and produced plays of a radical nature, such as "Shanti", a play about revolutionary struggle and love across racial lines written by the Vice-President of the Black People's Convention, Mthuli Shezi. Sadecque and his fellow activists held workshops and seminars in schools and communities to conscientise younger people. They drew on the political writings of Franz Fanon, Paulo Freire, Ivan Illich, Stokeley Carmichael, Antonio Gramsci and Bertolt Brecht.

In September 1974, BPC activists organised rallies in various cities to celebrate Frelimo's victory in Mozambique, but the rallies were banned by the government. The Durban rally went ahead in defiance. The government cracked down on the entire BC movement and arrested most of its office bearers. Eventually, in April 1975, thirteen leaders were put on trial, charged under the Terrorism Act, with Variava and Sulayman "Solly" Ismail being among those charged from Lenasia. The others indicted in the SASO Trial were Muntu Myeza, Saths Cooper, Mosioua "Terror" Lekota, Aubrey Mokoape, Nkwenkwe Nkomo, Pandelani Nefolovhodwe, Gilbert Sedibe, Zithulele Cindi, Strinivasa "Strini" Moodley, Rubin Hare and Sivalingam Moodley. Sadecque and Solly Ismail were held in detention for nine months before lawyers moved for the withdrawal of charges against the two of them, including Ruben Hare and Sivalingam Moodley. On his release he was re-charged together with Nomsisi Kraai (Khuzwayo), released on bail of R5 000, and restricted to the Pretoria magisterial district. The latter charges were subsequently withdrawn by the state. Sadecque then worked as a chauffeur for struggle lawyer, Shun Chetty.

Sadecque linked up with a younger generation of activists, including Lentswe Mokgatle, Solly Dinath and Shabeer Randera and formed a branch of the Black Community Programme in Lenasia, headed by Shabeer Randera. The next few years saw the 16 June 1976 uprisings in Soweto, the death in detention in September 1977 of Steve Biko and the banning of Black Consciousness organisations on 19 October 1977. He organised one of the largest meetings at the Lenasia Civic Centre in protest against the killing of Biko. At the Biko memorial meeting he called on members of the Lenasia Management Committee (LMC), a toothless apartheid structure led at the time by Dr RAM Saloojee's People's Candidates (PC), to resign. The call was heeded by Dr Saloojee's team and PC members resigned *en masse*, thereby discrediting the LMC in the eyes of the public.

Sadecque was one of many arrested as the state swooped on activists throughout the country. He was detained at Modderbee Prison together with fellow activists such as Jackie Selebi, Dr Nthato Motlana, Percy Qoboza and Hanif Vally. In July 1979, Sadecque was released from detention and placed under a five-year banning order. When he accepted a lift from Johannesburg to Lenasia with three other people, he was charged with contravening his banning order and found guilty. He was sentenced to three months, suspended for three years. His appeal against his conviction was upheld.

In the 1980s, Sadecque worked in several family businesses until his brother Ishaq and himself established their own haberdashery business. After South Africa's first democratic elections in 1994, Sadecque Variava continued as an activist and leader in the Azanian Peoples' Organisation (AZAPO) and was elected Deputy Chairperson in Gauteng. He stood as an AZAPO candidate in several general elections but failed to win a seat. He continues to work as an activist, conscientising youth about South African, Africa and world through the Abubaker Asvat Institute based in Lenasia.

