
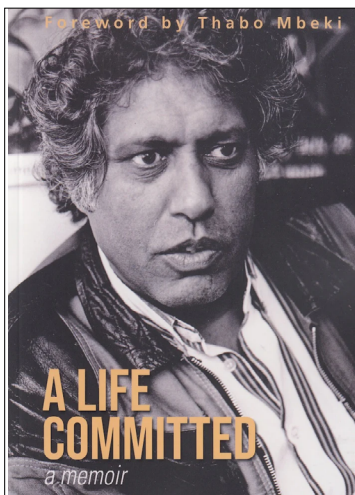


A Life Committed

A Memoir

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Memoirs are usually one of the best avenues to understand people's lives. They provide a first-hand account of one's life from different perspectives. One of the problems with them is that they are expectedly full of biases. It is difficult for a memoirist to criticize herself and reveal everything. Perhaps at first glance, this is what one might expect from a memoir of a person like Essop Pahad (1939–2023). However, it is a marvellous work that offers a reader with great historical accounts of events and life well lived. Pahad served as the Minister in the Presidency from 1999 until 2008 under former President Thabo Mbeki who wrote a foreword to this book, "I am happy to commend this educative tour through many decades of exciting struggles for our liberation and a better world, as contained in this autobiography" (p17). To have served Thabo Mbeki for such a long time and remained his close ally for years is a significant sign that Pahad was a distinguished politician

and intellectual in his own right.

In this book, he takes the reader from the early years of his activist family which used to house political leaders in their home in the Afrikaner nationalism-dominated town of Schweizer-Raneke in the Northwest. Leaders such as J. B Marks were among the leaders the family housed. Portraits of many leaders notably Albert Luthuli and Yusuf Dadoo leaders of the African National Congress and Indian Congress occupied the walls of Pahad's home making their house making it an even safer place for housing comrades. Pahad's father was a leader in the Transvaal Indian Congress and South African Indian Congress and a close friend of Yusuf Dadoo. No doubt this wealth of politics and activism in Pahad life in and outside his home became pivotal in shaping the man and activist he became. One of the that speaks about his mentors is evidence of this statement. His mentors include O.R Tambo (1917–1993) Dr. Yusuf Dadoo (1909–1983), Ahmed Kathrada (1929–2017), Govan Mbeki (1910–2001), and Nelson Mandela (1918–2013). For having looked up to these figures, Pahad was arguably of the true sons of the congress movement led by the ANC. It is no wonder he and Mbeki became close given the man who saw and nurtured their political development.

Moreover, the book also dives into Pahad's life in exile in London where together with his brother enrolled in 1965 as a students at the University College of London. He would later graduate with a Ph.D. from the University of Sussex in 1972. His relationship with Mbeki which had been sparked when they met in Johannesburg grew even closer. It led him to meeting O.R Tambo on Mbeki's invitation where the formation of a youth and student section. The meeting culminated in the formation of the ANC Youth and Student Section (ANCYSS). During this time Pahad was already a member of the ANC and South African Communist Party having joined in the 1960s. It is clear from the book that Pahad was involved immensely in the activities of the ANCYSS against apartheid in South Africa while at the same time, he was growing as an intellectual of the movement through academic education. His dedication to education and the SACP/ANC earned him a place at the Lenin

School in Moscow in 1973. There he spent eighteen months and came back battle-ready against the oppression of the people of the world. In 1975 he was sent to represent the SACP on the World Marxist Review editorial council. Jabulani Mzala Nxumalo another intellectual do the SACP and ANC would have joined council in 1988 and Pahad if it was not for his health status revealed upon arrival. For having served on this council Pahad was a towering revolutionary intellectual whose strength and command of revolutionary theory were above board.

Perhaps one of the captivating sections of this book is the part that speaks about Pahad's role in South Africa on his return in July 1990 and as Minister in the Presidency under President Mbeki. Much of his earlier role was his involvement in the Central Committee of the SACP. As a member of the CC, Pahad reveals how Thabo Mbeki, Jacob Zuma, and Azziz Pahad decided to withdraw their membership of the party because they were leaders of the ANC because of fear that "the ANC would be compromised and attacked by many powerful forces in African and the world as an organization under the control of communists" (p333). Furthermore, against the sometimes distorted fact of our contemporary times, Pahad reveals that during the Convention for a Democratic South Africa together with Joe Slovo, Enver Daniels, and Chris Hani they led an SACP delegation. In political circles, Chris Hani is usually disassociated with CODESA for its "sellout" agreements reached by the ANC. Insulating him from the decisions taken after all contributions were made.

As Minister in the presidency, Pahad reveals how Mbeki unleashed his leadership qualities and entrusted him with some of his important programs under his government. One such was the Umsobomvu Youth Fund, the South African Democracy Education Trust, the South Africa-Mali Timbuktu Manuscripts Trust, and later the organizing of the 2010 Fifa World Cup. The last two were essential to Thabo Mbeki's African Renaissance project. Not only was he dealing with Mbeki but also dealing with Zuma who was Deputy President. And seems Pahad suggests that under Zuma these projects were no longer a priority as they were under Mbeki. Even further, Pahad argues that Zuma had remained skeptical of him because he regarded him [Pahad] as Mbeki's ally. If anything, these revelations show us that the quarrel that led to the watershed moment for the country and the ANC was more glaring than the public believed. What led to Mbeki's resignation and the sudden decline in the ANC is an old antagonistic battle we will never know its finer details.

Essentially Pahad, in this section of the book appears to be defending Mbeki's government. From HIV/AIDS stance to the decisions he took as president of the ANC. He seems to suggest that the problem for the country and the ANC began the day Mbeki was removed as president. He associates his removal with a slur of propaganda from the ANC and its alliance partners. The demise of his ally prompted his resignation as Minister in the presidency in protest. Notwithstanding these notables, this is a personal story told from a personal view of events and the life of a towering intellectual who dares not to stop fighting and intellectually engage in the battle of ideas beyond the luxuries of his high status. It is a book perfect for engaging and no doubt it will shape and enhance our understanding of the history of South Africa and its leaders.

Book information

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