

period of some 50 years, the gradually emerging pattern of racial separation. Indeed, as a sociological study made in 1958 accurately observed that — and I quote — “of all the cities in the Union, Durban, through its City Council, has shown the greatest enthusiasm for compulsory segregation”. This compulsion had initially been enforced by a Provincial Ordinance, which led to various Government “Pegging” Acts, and eventually to the Asiatic Land Tenure and Indian Representation Act of 1946. The Nationalist Government’s Group Areas Act, promulgated in 1950, merely sanctioned, therefore, and lent an awesome rigidity to this process of residential segregation, whose prime motivation of course had been fear on the part of the economically dominant, if numerically inferior, White group.

Taking 1950 as the watershed, the ecological jig-saw of the Durban complex until this date revealed the Indian domiciled areas to have been mainly on the alluvial flats that stretch from the Umhlaas to the Umgeni Rivers, and in the peripheral zones behind the more favoured seaward facing slopes of the Berea and Bluff ridges. A very small minority — 7% — of the more prosperous Indians had, however, managed to penetrate this elevated, and almost exclusive preserve of the White man.

Since that significant date — 1950 — the implementation of the Group Areas Act combined with an ever accelerating process of White expansion has effectively forced the Indian community to be removed even further towards the perimeter — to the north and to the south of Durban City. Only a few enclaves of Indian settlements remain in relatively close proximity to Durban’s industrial and commercial centre — and these are regarded as purely transitional arrangements. (The vexed and thorny question of the Grey Street area — the hub of Indian commerce — remains in abeyance.)

Typical of these so-styled transient settlements is Springfield Flats, which is situated in the lower reaches of the Umgeni River valley. Commonly referred to as “Tin Town” Springfield Flats is sited on municipal land, and therefore comes directly under the control of Durban’s City Council. Many of its occupants, prior to their establishment at Springfield, had been illegal shack dwellers, who, in 1957, following the demolition of their homes, had been re-housed in this controlled slum area in houses of sub-economic construc-

NANA SITA

MR. NANA SITA died on the 23rd December, 1969 at the age of 71. He was a former president of the Transvaal Indian Congress, a disciple of Mahatma Gandhi and a firm believer in passive resistance. He served several prison sentences for refusing to leave the house he and his family had occupied for 44 years when the suburb was proclaimed for white occupation only.

The ideals he lived for are best summed up in the words he spoke at his trial under the Group Areas Act in the Magistrate’s Court in Pretoria on the 17th August, 1967.

“I stand before you for flouting the provisions of the Group Areas Act, which for the reasons stated above, my conscience does not allow me to comply with. Therefore in obedience to the higher authority of conscience I have decided not to meekly submit to the provisions of the Act. Being a follower of Mahatma Gandhi’s doctrine of “Satyagraha” (Passive Resistance) based on truth, love and non-violence I consider it my sacred duty to resist injustice and oppression and in doing so am prepared to bear the full brunt of the law and am willing to face the consequences thereof.

If you find me guilty of the offence for which I am standing before you I shall willingly and joyfully suffer whatever sentence you may deem to pass on me as my suffering will be nothing compared to the suffering of my people under the Act. If my suffering in the cause of noble principles of truth, justice and humanity could arouse the conscience of White South Africa then I shall not have strived in vain. I am 69 years of age, suffering with chronic ailment of arthritis but I do not plead in mitigation. I ask for no leniency. I am ready for the sentence.”

tion — the erection and maintenance of which are the responsibility of the owners themselves. This was, I emphasise, 12 years ago, and today the position for these humble folk, as for the rest of Springfield’s indigent community, is as untenable as it was then.

The human composition of Springfield Flats has, in fact, been drawn exclusively from the lowest income group of Durban’s Indian community, and of the approximate 400 families present in the location an estimated 80% are currently living below the breadline.