



Bernard Lazarus Emanuel Sigamoney: A Multi-Faceted School Teacher's Biography

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Francois Cleophas

Department of Exercise, Sport, and Lifestyle Medicine (Division of Sport Science)

University of Stellenbosch, Stellenbosch, South Africa

Orcid: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-1492-3792>

fcleophas@sun.ac.za

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Abstract

Bernard Lazarus Emanuel Sigamoney was born in 1888 as part of the indentured labour community. His parents ensured that he received an education and this helped him climb the social ladder in local communities in Durban and Transvaal. Consequently, his name became linked to the scout, sport, social, religious, and political movements of the day. He died in 1963 leaving behind a footprint that calls for recognition. This article placed Sigamoney, a South African politically active schoolteacher, under scholarly analysis. His circumstances of being subjected to institutional racism and forced removals make a coherent narrative an impossible task for a historian. Therefore, a disjointed but important narrative from the scraps left behind in newspaper accounts, internet searches, and general history sources was constructed. These accounts revealed how he contributed to South African political liberation on a national and local community level. The political networks he created also present readers with a window into twentieth century resistance movements in local communities. His voice was also present in the early socialist and later anti-apartheid sports movements. He used his position as a schoolteacher to launch actions that challenged the segregation and apartheid regime of the day.

Introduction

Bernard Lazarus Emanuel Sigamoney's name appears in an increasing number of historical accounts dealing with South African black sports history in the twentieth century.¹ Sigamoney was part of a community that was regarded as 'aliens' in apartheid South Africa.² Sigamoney is a unique figure in many ways. He was, unlike his South African Indian compatriots, a Christian. Most were either Hindu or Muslim. Then, he was a school teacher, unlike most other community activists from his geographical region who were business people. Lastly, he moved from a nationalist political outlook to a more syndicalist approach in his work. He likely portrayed this outlook when he was the presiding officer at the meeting which formed the South African Cricket Board of Control (SACBOC) in 1947.³

The first encounter that I had with Sigamoney was reading about the success he and a certain Gopie Munsook had in persuading the Cape administrative officials in 1953 to allow an Indian cricket team from Southern Rhodesia to enter South Africa after initially being refused.⁴ I subsequently learnt about his involvement in sports unity talks during the apartheid period, his chairmanship of the South African Non-Racial Olympic Committee (SANROC), his career as a school teacher and much more. He also helped to form more than ten trade unions during his life.⁵ According to one newspaper, he was 'one of South Africa's best-known sportsmen and administrators in his day'.⁶ His name also appeared in indigenous-language newspapers.⁷ One month before his death, a newspaper reader mentioned that he was starting a Transvaal Political United Front among the Indian community.⁸

- 1 P Alegi, *Laduma! Soccer, politics and society in South Africa* (Pietermaritzburg, University of Kwazulu-Natal Press, 2004), p. 108; M Allie, *More than a game. History of the Western Province Cricket Board 1959 – 1991* (Cape Town, Western Province Cricket Association, 2000), p.13; A Odendaal, *The story of an African game. Black cricketers and the unmasking of one of South Africa's greatest myths, 1850-2003* (Cape Town, David Phillip Publishers, 2003), pp. 97, 107, 109, 165; A Desai, V Padayachee, K Reddy & G Vahed, *Blacks in Whites: A century of cricket struggles in KwaZulu-Natal* (Pietermaritzburg, University of Natal Press, 2002).
- 2 A Odendaal, K Reddy & A Samson, *The blue book. A history of Western Province cricket, 1890 – 2011* (Fanele, Jacana, 2012), p.145.
- 3 A Desai, V Padayachee, K Reddy & G Vahed, *Blacks in Whites. A century of cricket struggles in KwaZulu-Natal* (Pietermaritzburg, University of Natal Press, 2002), p.206.
- 4 A Desai, V Padayachee, K Reddy & G Vahed, *Blacks in Whites...*, pp.117-118.
- 5 *Elethu Mirror*, 13 April 1963, p.2.
- 6 *The Views and News*, 15 April 1963, p.3.
- 7 *Ilanga Lase Natal*, 14 November 1936, p.12.
- 8 *The Views and News*, 15 March 1963, p.10.

As a physical education schoolteacher myself, I realise that South African sports biography is closely connected to education. This is so because teaching was one of the few professional fields open to aspiring middle classes under segregation and apartheid. However, formal studies that sketch the history of education in South African Indian communities have ignored Sigamoney's role. This article charts Sigamoney's public political life. I could find no evidence to show that Sigamoney's socialist political life overlapped with the more popular Mahatma Gandhi's nationalist outlook. Archive records revealed an interaction between the two at a South African Indian Congress (SAIC) meeting in 1933.⁹ He was also present at other executive meetings of the SAIC where he debated with Gandhi.¹⁰ However, these debates could not be traced and their nature remains unknown. The subdivisions of Sigamoney's life are so broad that conclusions become arbitrary and cannot lay claim to any final scientific truth. This is also true of this article. Before I proceed with a biography of Sigamoney, however, a few words on theory will be apt.

Social historians are receptive to autobiographies and biographies, such as those of Sigamoney, because they are 'valuable sources of emotions, ideals, interests, sensations, impressions, private opinions, attitudes, drives and motives of individuals'.¹¹ It is from scraps of information and other works that it is possible to recreate these sources so that they draw attention to those forces and processes which shaped them.¹² However, Sigamoney lived a life in a society where there were institutional contradictions between white and black people. Thus, while not trying to fill or close every gap, it is possible to create coherent stories with all the details in explanatory order and with everything accounted for and in its proper sequence.¹³ This article relies on available sources and admits that there may be gaps in telling Sigamoney's narrative. It is possible to detect your subject's weak points from scraps of information, and Sigamoney is no exception here. For example, in 1933 an *Indian Opinion* reader accused Sigamoney of ignoring rural boys for selection in a touring soccer team.¹⁴

From early on in his career, Sigamoney displayed traits of Muscular Christianity by involving himself in sports and physical cultural activities. Muscular Christians, such as

9 *Indian Opinion*, 25 August 1933, p.268-269.

10 A Cheddie, "The colonial-born settlers' Indian association and Natal Indian politics 1933 -1939" (M.A., University of Natal, 1992), pp. 31, 37.

11 D Booth, *The field. Truth and fiction in sport history* (London, Routledge, 2005), p.76.

12 N Penn, *Rogues, rebels and runaways. Eighteenth century Cape characters* (Cape Town, David Phillip Publishers, 1999), p.2.

13 D Booth, *The field. Truth and fiction in sport history* (London, Routledge, 2005), p.77.

14 *Indian Opinion*, 4 August 1933, p.252.

Sigamoney, believed that sport should be a space where fair play had to be allowed, no matter what injustices exist outside the world of sport. Other Muscular Christians, such as Karma Reddi, used expressions in public such as ‘... play the game ... [and] behave like a sportsman.’¹⁵ Srinivasa Sastri therefore reportedly stated in 1929 that ‘if the Indians played the game, the Europeans would play the game.’¹⁶ Sigamoney supported Reddi and responded by referring to how ‘sport brings people together.’¹⁷ He was referring to an Indian golfer from Natal who was sent to the Empire championship in England in 1929.¹⁸

However, Sigamoney has still not reached the level of visibility that other anti-apartheid activist Christian clerics such as Trevor Huddleston, Desmond Tutu, Beyers Naude, and Allan Boesak have reached.¹⁹ Yet, Sigamoney’s life was filled with anti-segregation politics and he even participated in activities hosted by the Black Sash and sent support for the Cottesloe decisions in 1961.²⁰ I could, however, not locate any biography of a South African school sports teacher from the black community to model a narrative of Sigamoney. There are, however, a significant number of published biographies on schoolteachers in black communities in South Africa. The two foremost include those of Richard Dudley and Allie Fataar from the Western Cape, South Africa.²¹ There is also a published work that covers teacher biographies from the same geographical area as Dudley and Fataar.²² These works were all shaped in the reconstructionist mode of history writing. An objective of reconstructionism is the discovery of the unique past as it was. This is in opposition to constructionism that interprets the how and why of patterns and trends. Reconstructionism

15 *Rand Daily Mail*, 4 April 1929, p.4.

16 *Rand Daily Mail*, 31 December 1930, p.10.

17 *Rand Daily Mail*, 4 April 1929, p.4.

18 *Rand Daily Mail*, 4 April 1929, p.4.

19 Only once was the work of Sigamoney compared to the work done by Huddleston. This comparison was made by a Mr. Bulman who wrote a letter of support for Huddleston who was appealing for money towards the construction of a swimming pool for Johannesburg’s black community, *Rand Daily Mail*, 10 December 1953, p.11.

20 *Rand Daily Mail*, 3 March 1961, p.15; *Rand Daily Mail*, 14 May 1962, p.12. The Cottesloe statements condemned major aspects of South Africa’s race policies. It was issued after a seven-day conference in Johannesburg in 1961 which was attended by 80 top ranking churchmen from eight Protestant churches affiliated to the World Council of Churches, *Rand Daily Mail*, 27 October 1961, p.2.

21 A Wieder, *Teacher and comrade. Richard Dudley and the fight for democracy in South Africa* (Albany, State University of New York Press, 2008:75); A Wieder, *Voices from Cape Town classrooms: Oral histories of teachers who fought Apartheid* (New York, Peter Lang, 2003); Y Omar, “‘In my stride’: A life history of Allie Fataar, teacher” (Ph.D., UCT, 2015).

22 E D Damon (compiler), *Lifelong learning. South African teaching stories* (Stellenbosch, ED Damon, 2022). Page number?

is also in opposition to deconstructionism which reflects on a fragmented past.²³ All this implies that a reconstructive narrative is a story that originates from the historian and not the studied subject's complicated interest. I will use this method in reconstructing a historical-political life of the schoolteacher, Bernard Sigamoney.

Bernard Sigamoney—An Overview

Sigamoney was born in Durban in 1888 and attended school in Durban during the first decade of the twentieth century.²⁴ His parents were Anokum (Emmanuel) Sigamoney (father) and Naikum Doorgoo (mother).²⁵ According to a Facebook page, Sigamoney's grandparents were indentured labourers who arrived in South Africa in 1877. His grandfather, Frances Sigamoney, was a constable at the magistrate's court and his father, Emanuel, a waiter. It was a family that achieved some prominence in colonial South African Indian society. For example, it was reported that his sister, Cecila Moodley, was the first Indian school teacher in Natal.²⁶ According to historian Lucien van der Walt, he was a member of the educated elite and politically broke with Indian nationalism, siding with the syndicalist movement.²⁷

According to his obituary, he founded some of the first black trade unions, was chairman of the South African Non-Racial Olympic Committee (SANROC), and started working as a teacher at St. Aiden's School in Durban in 1907. He began studying theology at age 35 in London and served there in a diocese but returned to South Africa in 1927, 'inspired by the English education system ... which he consider[ed] to be the best in the world.'²⁸ He was an important figure and when he was assaulted in 1944, it was reported in detail in the media.²⁹ The following year, he was called upon to lead the Transvaal Indian community in thanksgiving prayer for victory in the war.³⁰ By 1946 he was also serving on political

23 D Booth, "Evidence revisited: Interpreting historical materials in sport history", *Rethinking History*, 9(4), 2005, p. 462.

24 *Rand Daily Mail*, 27 November 1947, p. 8; *Rand Daily Mail*, 7 November 1955, p.6; *Rand Daily Mail*, 8 April 1963, p.2.

25 Reverend Bernard Lazarus Emanuel Sigamoney (1888–1963) – Genealogy (geni.com). Date accessed: 12 April 2024

26 *Rand Daily Mail*, 23 April 1963, p.3.

27 LJW van der Walt, "Anarchism and syndicalism in South Africa, 1904-1921: Rethinking the history of labour and the left" (Ph.D., University of Witwatersrand, 2007), p.410.

28 *Black Sash News*, "The education of Johannesburg's children". A multi-racial forum, 6 (2), 1962, p.13.

29 *Rand Daily Mail*, 27 March 1944, p.3.

30 *Rand Daily Mail*, 8 May 1945, p.6.

committees with the well-known Dr Yusuf Dadoo of the South African Indian Congress (SAIC).³¹ The same year he was selected by the SAIC—along with Sorabjee Rustomjee, A.S. Kajee, M.D. Naidoo, Albert Christopher, S.R. Naidoo, A.A. Mirza and S.M. Desai—to be part of a delegation that would embark on an overseas visit.³²

The following year he participated in activities of the South African Institute of Race Relations.³³ Throughout his public life, he was present at many socially visible Indian events, often making speeches.³⁴ Sigamoney was politically open to all persuasions but in 1934 he appealed to all Indians to speak with one voice.³⁵ It was also not unusual that newspapers that targeted communities beyond Sigamoney's racial designation as Indian also reported on him.³⁶

Most of his life was spent working with people living in the slums of Vrededorp, Doornfontein, and Fordsburg in Johannesburg.³⁷ It was here where he was dubbed 'the humanist of the poor'.³⁸ Sigamoney was also a church minister and one of the congregants from his parish in Vrededorp, Anthony Francis, became the first Indian school inspector.³⁹ At the age of twenty, Sigamoney married Georgina Elizabeth, who was born in the Orange Free State. She was the daughter of a Cape Malay priest who converted to Christianity in Paarl. Very little documentary evidence remains of her existence. Sigamoney left six children and about thirty grandchildren behind when he died.⁴⁰ One son, Bernard, was a school vice-principal, a soccer captain for the South African Indian XI, a regular member of the Transvaal Indian XI in the Sam China soccer tournaments in the 1940s, captain of the Witwatersrand Indian soccer XI, and in 1936 vice-captain of the Fort Hare University touring soccer team.⁴¹

On 4 April 1963, Sigamoney passed away from a heart attack at 75 years of age, while

31 *Indian Opinion*, 5 January 1940, 17.

32 A Desai & G Vahed, *Monty Naicker: Between reason and treason* (Pietermaritzburg, Shuter, 2010), p. 162.

33 *Rand Daily Mail*, 31 October 1947, p.6.

34 *Rand Daily Mail*, 2 November 1933, p.13.

35 *Rand Daily Mail*, 25 September 1934, p.6.

36 Cape Standard, 3 October 1939, p.16; *The Bantu World*, 18 October 1941, p.4; *Umteteli we Bantu*, 8 August 1953, p.1.

37 *Rand Daily Mail*, 4 April 1963, p.3.

38 *Rand Daily Mail*, 5 April 1963, p.14.

39 *Rand Daily Mail*, 11 December 1965, p.3.

40 *Rand Daily Mail*, 15 October 1958, p.3; *Rand Daily Mail*, 20 July 1961, p.9

41 *Rand Daily Mail*, 22 August 1967, p.32; *The Bantu World*, 13 June 1936, p.19; *The Bantu World*, 12 October 1935, p.14.

writing a message of support for a Natal soccer team.⁴² R.G. Pillay, Chief Indian Scouts Commissioner, paid the following tribute to Sigamoney:

*The sudden death of the Reverend B.L.E. Sigamoney removes from the South African scene a great leader of youth, a versatile sportsman and above all, a doughty fighter for the rights and privileges of the underdog. As a diplomat, an organiser, [a teacher] and leader of men, the Reverend stands supreme among his contemporary leaders and our world is poorer by his passing.*⁴³

What follows is a historical description of his life in Natal and Transvaal so that future historians might have a springboard from which to work.

Sigamoney in Natal

To date, little evidence has been found of Sigamoney's life and career in Natal. According to a Facebook account, from 1899 onwards Sigamoney was an active sports administrator and later became a prominent boxing promoter in Durban. An early encounter with him placed him in the Durban United cricket team in 1901 and later he played for a team called, Schools.⁴⁴ The first decade of the 20th century was characterised by strong opposition from white government officials to Indian immigration, settlement and progress. In that context, Indian education was thus still hampered by a lack of competent and reliable teachers.⁴⁵ Under these circumstances, he started a teaching career in 1903.⁴⁶ In 1907, Sigamoney was appointed assistant teacher at St. Aiden's Boys School for Indian children in Natal. He later became headmaster at Escourt, Isipingo, Mount Edgecombe, and Sydenham Boys' School. Eventually, he was appointed vice-principal of St Aiden's Provincial Training College.⁴⁷ The College was established in 1904 with lecturers from India and had a very low student output.⁴⁸

In 1910, Sigamoney was elected vice-president of the Durban and District Indian Cricket Union (DDICU) and represented Natal in 1913.⁴⁹ In October 1914 Sigamoney

42 *Rand Daily Mail*, 4 April 1963, p.3; *Rand Daily Mail*, 8 April 1963, p.2.

43 A Desai, V Padayachee, K Reddy & G Vahed, *Blacks in Whites*... p.61.

44 A Desai, V Padayachee, K Reddy & G Vahed, *Blacks in Whites*... p.59.

45 C Kuppusami, "A short history of Indian education", South African history online (available at <https://www.sahistory.org.za>), as accessed on 29 August 2023), pp. 8-9.

46 *Black Sash News*, "The education" ..., p. 13.

47 *Rand Daily Mail*, 6 January 1949, p.9.

48 C Kuppusami, "A short history of Indian education"... , p.8.

49 A Desai, V Padayachee, K Reddy & G Vahed, *Blacks in Whites*..., p.59.

proposed at a DDICU meeting that Malays be allowed to participate in one Union match per year.⁵⁰ From early on he spread ideas of political unity amongst South Africans. In January 1916, Sigamoney was part of a black Durban teachers' cricket team that toured Pietermaritzburg where they played against Indian and coloured teams.⁵¹ Later in the year, he called for a 'cricket match between a European eleven and Indian eleven and the proceeds devoted to War Funds ... [because] Europeans and Indians were fighting together.'⁵² We further find Sigamoney as an early cricketer who stored mats at his house until 1915 when he moved to a smaller home.⁵³ He was one of those early post-World War I teachers who urged other teachers in 1918 to play sports, particularly cricket and football.⁵⁴

In 1913, legislation was passed by the government which prevented all Indian males from entering the Union of South Africa. This was the Immigrants Regulations Act No. 22 of 1913 that declared immigrant Indians as aliens in South Africa and prohibited them from moving freely between the provinces inside the Union.⁵⁵ This protected white tailors from their nearest rivals, who happened to be labelled Indian. In response, from 1915 onwards, according to a postgraduate thesis, Sigamoney and Gordon Lee started organising Indian and African workers under a small but militant Marxist group—the International Socialist League (ISL)—an influential revolutionary syndicalist group.⁵⁶ This group opposed the war since they believed it was a conflict between European imperialists and capitalists in which the working class did the dying. According to the labour studies scholar, Lucien van der Walt, the ISL championed the rights of workers of colour and wanted workers' control of production through the unions.⁵⁷ The Natal Indian Teachers' Society claims that Sigamoney, Albert Christopher, A.I. Kajee, P.R. Pather, S.L. Singh, and J.C. Bolton were instrumental in forming trade unions in Natal during the second decade of the twentieth century. The International Workers' Union (IWU) was established in 1915 with G. Lee (chairman), M.K. Moodley (organiser), and B.L.E. Sigamoney (secretary). Sigamoney

50 A Desai, V Padayachee, K Reddy & G Vahed, *Blacks in Whites ...*, p.70.

51 C Merret, *Sport, space and segregation. Politics and society in Pietermaritzburg* (Scottsville, Pietermaritzburg, 2009), p.25

52 A Desai, V Padayachee, K Reddy & G Vahed, *Blacks in Whites ...*, p.49

53. A Desai, V Padayachee, K Reddy & G Vahed, *Blacks in Whites ...*, p.51.

54 A Desai, V Padayachee, K Reddy & G Vahed, *Blacks in Whites ...*, p.38.

55 Immigrants Regulations Act No. 22 of 1913, pp. 216 – 217.

56 B Madri, "A historical investigation into the garment industry in Natal with specific reference to the Garment Workers Industrial Union [Natal]" (unpublished Honours' thesis, Durban, University of Durban-Westville, 1986), p.15.

57 L van der Walt, "Bernard Sigamoney, Durban Indian revolutionary syndicalist" (available at <https://zabalaza.net/2014/11/26/bernard-sigamoney-durban-indian-revolutionary-syndicalist/>), as accessed on 29 August 2023.

held street corner meetings from where he exhorted workers to form trade unions and join the IWU. He was the major driving force behind the IWU and when he left for England, the organisation ceased to exist.⁵⁸

In March 1917 the ISL formed a syndicalist Indian Workers' Industrial Union (IWIU) in Durban with members working on the docks, in the garment, laundry, industry, painting, hotel, catering, and tobacco industries.⁵⁹ Sigamoney and a Mr Sokedo were elected secretaries, with Gordon Lee as chairman.⁶⁰ In 1917 the price of rice escalated and there were threats of starvation amongst the Indian population. Sigamoney attended a meeting, addressed by Reverend Koilpillai, along with other leftwing politicians C.V. Pillay and Gordon Lee to show solidarity with the poor, suffering class.⁶¹ He also chaired a major leftist congress in September 1917 and addressed the 1918 ISL conference. Sigamoney, the ISL and the IWIU supported waiters on strike in 1919. He was investigated by police for instigating the 1918 strikes by African dockworkers but was cleared.⁶² It was a time however when anti-Indianism was at its peak amongst white South Africans. Indian workers in hotels, restaurants and tearooms, under the influence and guidance of Sigamoney, responded in July 1919 by forming a trade union.⁶³ The following year, Sigamoney supported a strike by the independent Tobacco Workers' Union, and in 1921 he supported a strike by the Indian furniture workers. Later he returned to his family church, where he became a radical Anglican minister and associated himself with the Industrial and Commercial Workers' Union (ICU).⁶⁴

Sigamoney in England

In January 1923, Sigamoney left for England on the RMS Saxon to study a four-year theology

58 Natal Indian Teachers' Society. Centenary lectures. "The story of Indian people in South Africa, 1860 – 1960" (unpublished brochure, 1960), p.11.

59 L van der Walt, "Bernard Sigamoney, Durban Indian revolutionary syndicalist", 26 November 2014 (available at <https://zabalaza.net/2014/11/26/bernard-sigamoney-durban-indian-revolutionary-syndicalist/>), as accessed on 29 August 2023).

60 G Vahed, "Give till it hurts': Durban's Indians and the First World War", *Journal of Natal and Zulu History*, 19 (2001), p. 57.

61 L van der Walt, "Bernard Sigamoney, Durban Indian revolutionary syndicalist" (available at <https://zabalaza.net/2014/11/26/bernard-sigamoney-durban-indian-revolutionary-syndicalist/>).

62 G Vahed, "Give till it hurts' ...", p. 54.

63 G Vahed, "Give till it hurts' ...", p. 58.

64 L van der Walt, "Bernard Sigamoney, Durban Indian revolutionary syndicalist" (available at <https://zabalaza.net/2014/11/26/bernard-sigamoney-durban-indian-revolutionary-syndicalist/>), as accessed on 29 August 2023).

course at St. Paul's College, Burgh, Lincolnshire.⁶⁵ There he represented Lincolnshire County at cricket.⁶⁶ While in England, he also associated himself with the Boy Scout movement.⁶⁷ It was during his stay in England, according to Desai et. al., that he learnt, what he called, 'to be obedient, to love and respect one another and [be] discipline[d]'.⁶⁸ However, the same authors report, perhaps mistakenly, that he played for Old Collegians in Natal before 15 January 1927.⁶⁹ On his return to South Africa in March 1927, according to Desai et al., he was welcomed by a wide range of local people, including many members of the Natal Indian Congress.

Sigamoney in Transvaal

Sigamoney arrived in Johannesburg in July 1927 as a reverend who was '... educated at Burgh Theosophical College in Lincolnshire ... coming to work for the Church of England amongst the local Indians ... to start a church, a high school for girls and to institute medical work amongst women under a lady doctor'.⁷⁰ His public life was characterised by his interactions with like-minded officials in terms of showing compassion to outcasts in society. Not surprisingly, therefore, he engaged personally with prominent individuals like Stakesby-Lewis.⁷¹ His life in the Transvaal was dedicated to widely advocating for Indian political rights there and in South Africa.⁷²

Church and Education

By December 1927, Sigamoney had established an Indian Christian church, the St Anthony's Indian Mission.⁷³ He initially gained popularity in the news media as a church minister. His arrival in Johannesburg coincided with a donation of 80 pounds to build a church in Pageville for Indian Christian congregants in Johannesburg. Because most

65 The Cape Indian, January 1923, p.8. Elsewhere it is stated he left for England in 1922, *Black Sash News*, "The education ...", p.13 and LJW van der Walt, "Anarchism ...", pp. 592-593.

66 A Desai, V Padayachee, K Reddy & G Vahed, *Blacks in Whites ...*, pp.60-61

67 RG Pillay, "Historical survey of Indian scouting in South Africa", *Fiat Lux* 10 (2), March 1975, p.24.

68 A Desai, V Padayachee, K Reddy & G Vahed, *Blacks in Whites ...*, pp.60-61.

69 A Desai, V Padayachee, K Reddy & G Vahed, *Blacks in Whites ...*, p.171.

70 *Rand Daily Mail*, 11 July 1927, 9; *Rand Daily Mail*, 15 June 1939, p.15.

71 *Rand Daily Mail*, 20 March 1942, p.5.

72 *Rand Daily Mail*, 17 May 1929, p.15; *Rand Daily Mail*, 18 May 1929, p.12.

73 *Rand Daily Mail*, 17 December 1927, p.4; LJW van der Walt, 'Anarchism ...', p. 527.

Indians were either Hindu or Muslim, Sigamoney had to rely on white support.⁷⁴

In Transvaal, he was a member of the Transvaal Indian Congress (TIC) and his debates there and at the South African Indian Congress (SAIC) centred on education and politics.⁷⁵ In 1930 he started a Doornfontein Indian and Coloured school, which became Gold Street School in 1941.⁷⁶ It was here at this school, in 1938, that Sigamoney advocated separate Indian and coloured schools because, according to him, 'Indians and coloureds differed in culture and civilization.'⁷⁷ During the 1930s, Indian people in Transvaal numbered about 18 000, of which only one quarter was at school.⁷⁸ In a quote which was extremely reconciliatory in tone towards the education authorities of the day, he claimed that the education department's lack of provision for higher education for Indian children was 'strange ... [but] ... understandable given their low numbers in the prevailing economic climate of the time ... [however] Indians could not complain ... as far as education is concerned ... since they are on an equal footing with whites.'⁷⁹ His voice was notorious around political decisions in education.⁸⁰ This was because Sigamoney was a school principal, a very prestigious occupation during his time, and a member and later president of the Transvaal Indian Teachers' Association (TITA).⁸¹ He was outspoken against racism and publicly supported Mr Zwarenstein, the principal of the Johannesburg Indian School, who spoke out, perhaps contradicting himself with the words he spoke later in 1938, against drawing a racial dividing line between children in the Transvaal.⁸² His testimony to the Transvaal Education Commission in 1937, along with that of a colleague, K.L. Desai, provides much insight into the conditions of schooling received by their community in the Transvaal between the two world wars. Their recommendations included: a separate teacher training school for Indian teachers; Indian student teachers to write the same examination for the official Transvaal Teachers' diploma; entry into teachers training courses should be grade 12 for all; Indian teachers to be appointed permanently into Indian schools; introduction of compulsory education for Indian children up to grade eight or under seventeen years of age; all school buildings should be government sponsored;

74 *Rand Daily Mail*, 8 March 1948, p.5.

75 *Rand Daily Mail*, 26 May 1933, p.10; *Rand Daily Mail*, 19 September 1946, p.5.

76 *Rand Daily Mail*, 6 January 1949, p.9.

77 *Rand Daily Mail*, 26 June 1938, p.8.

78 *Rand Daily Mail*, 26 June 1937, p.8.

79 *Rand Daily Mail*, 12 December 1931, p.13.

80 *Rand Daily Mail*, 3 February 1934, p.13.

81 *Rand Daily Mail*, 26 June 1937, p.8; *Rand Daily Mail*, 11 December 1945, p.4; *Rand Daily Mail*, 12 June 1948, p.10.

82 *Indian Opinion*, 17 November 1933, p.360.

separate schools for Indian and coloured children; an independent secondary school for Indians to be established, separate from a primary school; and all Indian teacher trainer students must have matric to enter college.⁸³ This provides much insight into the poor conditions in which children in the Transvaal, classified as Indian, received their education. He retired from teaching in 1949.⁸⁴

Scouts and guides

According to Desai *et.al.*, Sigamoney is regarded as being the founder of South Africa's first Indian Boy Scout troop.⁸⁵ In the 1920s Advocate Valangaiman Sankaranarayana Srinivasa Sastri, the first official Indian diplomat to be appointed by the Indian government in South Africa, advised Sigamoney to introduce scouts to Natal first. This he did and took a Transvaal troop of the scout movement from the local community to Natal in 1928 and 1929. In this way the scout movement in the Indian community was started, without official recognition.⁸⁶ This was a time when the official scout movement labelled African boys as Pathfinders.⁸⁷ African boys were thus not regarded as scouts—Sigamoney criticised the movement since 'the chief scout, the grand old man [Baden Powell] ... never intended there to be a colour bar.'⁸⁸ Sigamoney stated how he '... looked forward to the day that youths of all colours will stand together in loyalty to their God, their King and their country.'⁸⁹ The visit to Natal became an annual event, and in 1931 the *Indian Opinion* described a typical two-week scout expedition to Natal. According to the newspaper, boys marched from the station with the Union Jack, the Union flag (which was presented by General Hertzog), and the Indian national flag.⁹⁰ In 1936, the *Bantu World* reported how these Transvaal scouts had been visiting Natal since 1927 where they would set up camp at the Durban Indian Sportsground. That year, 1936, about 80 boys from Johannesburg, Doornfontein, Vrededorp, and Ferreiratown left Johannesburg station under the charge of Sigamoney with five other males.⁹¹ The following year, Sigamoney welcomed 184 boy

83 *Rand Daily Mail*, 26 June 1937, p.8.

84 *Rand Daily Mail*, 6 January 1949, p.9. Elsewhere, it is recorded that he retired in 1948, *Black Sash News*, "The education ...", p.13.

85 A Desai, V Padayachee, K Reddy & G Vahed, *Blacks in Whites...*, p.61.

86 RG Pillay, "Historical survey ...", p.24.

87 *The Bantu World*, 13 August 1932, p.9.

88 *The Bantu World*, 23 September 1933, p.2.

89 *Indian Opinion*, 6 October 1933, p.311.

90 *Indian Opinion*, 10 July 1931, p.231.

91 *The Bantu World*, 20 June 1936, p.20.

scouts and girl guides from Natal representing 23 different troops.⁹² Sigamoney however criticised segregation in the scout movement.⁹³ Nevertheless, in 1934 the girl guides from Boroda, India visited his school in Doornfontein.⁹⁴

Sport and recreation

Sigamoney interacted with a number of sportspersons across the colour line, and in 1929 he shared a platform with Lady Dalrymple, wife of Sir William Dalrymple.⁹⁵ The latter had donated a floating trophy for athletics competition in 1921, which became known as the Dalrymple Cup, at the first intervarsity on 1 October.⁹⁶ Eight years later, Sigamoney and Dalrymple again shared a platform. Here, Dalrymple opened the first Christian Indian church in the Transvaal, St. Anthony Indian Church, Johannesburg, with well wishes from General Jan Smuts, Patrick Duncan, Jan Hofmeyer, Colonel C.P. Stallard, and the Johannesburg mayor, M. Freeman.⁹⁷ Sigamoney wrote in 1929 that, '[Although] there are many cases of injustice perpetrated against the non-European ... for the sake of sport, let that be free from all unfairness ... [since] the Englishman is fair in his dealings.'⁹⁸ At the same time, he also advocated fairness and equality for Transvaal Indians.⁹⁹ Also in 1929, he was associated with the Vrededorp Indian Girls' Club and was president of the South African Indian Football Association.¹⁰⁰

From early in his public life in the Transvaal, Sigamoney held office as a sports official. In 1930 he convened a meeting that led to the formation of the Witwatersrand Indian Cricket Union (WICU), with three affiliated clubs: Moonlighters, Hindus, and the Vredons.¹⁰¹ The same year he appeared as a cricket bowler for a Transvaal team playing against a Natal Indian teachers' side.¹⁰² At the time there were a number of Indians who were playing in a coloured union. Over time, the City of Johannesburg provided the WICU with two pitches.

92 *The Bantu World*, 2 January 1937, p.18.

93 *Rand Daily Mail*, 20 September 1933, p.12.

94 *Rand Daily Mail*, 23 August 1934, p.13.

95 *Rand Daily Mail*, 4 April 1929, p.4.

96 A Joubert, *The history of inter-varsity sport in South Africa* (Natal, Natal Witness, 1985), p.7.

97 *Rand Daily Mail*, 10 April 1935, p.10; *Rand Daily Mail*, 15 April 1935, p.13.

98 *Rand Daily Mail*, 24 June 1929, p.10.

99 *Rand Daily Mail*, 18 May 1929, p.12.

100 *Rand Daily Mail*, 17 June 1929, p.8; *Rand Daily Mail*, 24 June 1929, p.10.

101 Sigamoney was a member of the Vredons Soccer Club. *e-Goli*, 31 August 1952, p.9. There was also a Moonlighters Soccer Club, *e-Goli*, 6 July 1952, p.15.

102 *Rand Daily Mail*, 20 December 1930, p.15.

At the AGM at the Gandhi Hall in 1945, thirteen clubs applied for membership, some being formed only that year. With only two pitches available, six clubs had to be refused.¹⁰³

In 1932, he was also vice-president of the Transvaal Indian Football Association (TIFA), a position he still held by 1940.¹⁰⁴ By 1932 he was also part of an Indian Soccer Team from Transvaal which played against Natal Indian Schools.¹⁰⁵ The following year, he was the manager of the Transvaal Schools' soccer team that visited the Durban Indian Schools' Football Association.¹⁰⁶ Sigamoney had established relations with influential people across the artificial racial divide by then. This came in useful when the TIFA could not complete their soccer fixtures on their home ground. Sigamoney then successfully approached Solomon Senoane, secretary of the Johannesburg Bantu Football Association (JBFA), to use their facilities at the Wemmer Sports Ground.¹⁰⁷

In 1934 a report appeared which indicated that Sigamoney was president of the Johannesburg Indian Sports Association.¹⁰⁸ In this position he received a floating trophy on behalf of the WICU, when he officially opened the new Indian sports ground in Johannesburg, alongside the mayor.¹⁰⁹ This was the same year that the government awarded Indian people in Transvaal a sports stadium.¹¹⁰ From 1929 onwards there was a movement to get Indian soccer and cricket teams to visit South Africa.¹¹¹ This did materialise and in 1934 a soccer team from India visited South Africa where Sigamoney gave the toast at the reception in Johannesburg.¹¹² It was also the same year that media reports indicated that he was the referee for the All India versus the South African Indians soccer match at the Natalspruit ground in Johannesburg.¹¹³

It was through sport that Sigamoney met with leading personalities of his time. Here reference can be made to Jan Hofmeyer whom Sigamoney met in 1936 at the Incape Hall, Johannesburg. This was at a celebration event of a cricket tournament in the Transvaal where cricket teams competed for the Sigamoney trophy.¹¹⁴ Hofmeyer was also the patron of the

103 *Cape Standard*, 30 October 1945, p.10.

104 *Rand Daily Mail*, 30 March 1932, p.16; *Indian Opinion*, 5 April 1940, p.123.

105 *Rand Daily Mail*, 20 July 1932, p.15.

106 *Indian Opinion*, 21 July 1933, p.233.

107 *The Bantu World*, 21 October 1933, p.18.

108 *Rand Daily Mail*, 1 June 1934, p.7.

109 *Rand Daily Mail*, 1 June 1934, p.15.

110 *Rand Daily Mail*, 1 June 1934, p.7.

111 *Rand Daily Mail*, 4 April 1929, p.4.

112 *Rand Daily Mail*, 14 June 1934, p.15.

113 *Rand Daily Mail*, 21 June 1934, p.17.

114 *Rand Daily Mail*, 14 August 1936, p.12.

newly established Inter-Race Cricket Board. While Sigamoney was president of the Board that year, he donated a trophy for competition purposes. The tournament that was held and drew participation from the Transvaal Coloured Cricket Union, Transvaal Bantu Cricket Union, City and Suburban Coloured Cricket Union, Witwatersrand Indian Cricket Union and the North-Eastern (European) League. The City and Suburban Coloured Cricket Union won the Sigamoney trophy for the first three years.¹¹⁵ This was a cricket institution that promoted non-racialism in sport.¹¹⁶ The Inter-Race Cricket Board (IRCB) drew crowds from all sectors of society to its games during the Second World War when Sigamoney was still president.¹¹⁷ When Sigamoney, on behalf of the IRCB, welcomed Dr Ernest Godfrey back to South Africa in 1937, there were representatives from sports organisations across the South African racial divide.¹¹⁸

In 1938 Sigamoney was re-elected president of the IRCB.¹¹⁹ The following year, he was president of the TIFA.¹²⁰ In 1940, Sigamoney was still part of the TIFA and he served with Dr William Godfrey, who was the patron of the association.¹²¹ Godfrey and Sigamoney had previously attended political and sports meetings together.¹²² The previous year, Godfrey and Sigamoney, along with the president of the South African Indian Lawn Tennis Association (SAILTA) and other notables in black society, were joint guests at an entertainment party in Johannesburg for a visiting Indian tennis team.¹²³ Sigamoney and Godfrey also worked together in a soccer organisation called the Dr William Godfrey South African Cup Board of Control. This was a national soccer organisation started in 1934 that elected Godfrey as patron and Sigamoney as auditor in 1937. Also on the executive was Solomon Senaoane who served as secretary and who was regarded by some black football historians as ‘a strong and successful leader of men.’¹²⁴ Senaoane himself deserves further attention since he was also president of the Transvaal Bantu Cricket Union, treasurer of the South African Inter-

115 *The Bantu World*, 5 March 1938, p.19.

116 *The Bantu World*, 8 February 1936, p.17.

117 *The Bantu World*, 15 January 1944, p.10.

118 *Cape Standard*, 26 July 1937, p.5. Ernest Godfrey promoted soccer in black communities and donated a trophy for a competition in the Transvaal Bantu Football Association, Anon. “Introduction”, GAL Thabe (ed.), *It’s a goal! 50 years of sweat, tears and drama in Black soccer* (Johannesburg, Skotaville Publishers, 1983), pp.8, 11.

119 *Cape Standard*, 1 March 1938, p.12; *The Bantu World*, 5 March 1938, p.19.

120 *Rand Daily Mail*, 16 September 1939, p.15.

121 *Rand Daily Mail*, 28 March 1940, p.15.

122 *Rand Daily Mail*, 21 August 1933, p.9.

123 *Cape Standard*, 10 January 1939, p.9.

124 *The Bantu World*, 10 July 1937, p.19; Anon. “Profile: Senaoane”, GAL Thabe (ed.), *It’s a goal! 50 years of sweat, tears and drama in Black soccer* (Johannesburg, Skotaville Publishers, 1983), p.3.

Race Cricket Board, and secretary of the Johannesburg Bantu Football Association.¹²⁵ The following year it was reported that Sigamoney had donated a trophy to the Inter-Race Cricket Tournament that had as its aim, 'Unity amongst Europeans, coloureds and Bantus'.¹²⁶ He also played goalkeeper for the TIFA against a Johannesburg Football Association team in 1938 and he was involved with the national Inter-Race Football Board, a soccer body that tried to unite people beyond segregationist practices.¹²⁷

In 1940, Sigamoney was elected president of the Witwatersrand section of the Transvaal Indian Cricket Union.¹²⁸ It was also a time when he called upon the white society to recognise the sacrifices 'non-Europeans are making towards democracy ... and ... to agitate public opinion for the removal of all legislative restrictions ... [against them].'¹²⁹ At age 52, he still played cricket for the Witwatersrand Indian Union against the Transvaal Bantu Union.¹³⁰ It was also the year that Sigamoney, along with M.S. Badat, S.L. Singh,¹³¹ .I. Haffjee, and Sookdeo (all from Natal), and Willie Ernest and Bob Pavadai (from Transvaal) established the South African Indian Cricket Union (SAICU). Sigamoney was elected vice president. Despite being in his fifties, he represented Transvaal and in the first tournament in 1947, he was appointed honorary life-president.¹³²

He was elected president of the SAICU in 1942–1943 and was manager of the South African Indian cricket team in 1945 and 1951.¹³³ In 1946 he met J.B. Eksteen, chairman of the Western Province Coloured Amateur Athletic and Cycling Association (WPCAA&CA), to establish a national athletic organisation.¹³⁴ This was the same year that the South African Indian Congress made Sigamoney, along with A.I. Kajee, Dr Yusuf Dadoo, A.M. Moola, and P.R. Pather delegates to England and America to seek political sympathisers in England and

125 *The Bantu World*, 8 October 1938, p.16; *The Bantu World*, 5 March 1938, p.19; *The Bantu World*, 21 October 1933, p.18.

126 *The Bantu World*, 8 October 1938, p.16.

127 *The Bantu World*, 10 September 1938, p.17; *The Bantu World*, 12 March 1938, p.18.

128 A Desai, V Padayachee, K Reddy & G Vahed, *Blacks in Whites...*, p.110.

129 *Rand Daily Mail*, 13 October 1941, p.2.

130 *Umteteli wa Bantu*, 9 March 1940, p.13.

131 In 1946 Singh donated a trophy for the launch of the Natal Inter-Race Soccer Board, EG Rooks, "Inter-race in Natal", GAL Thabe (ed.), *It's a goal! 50 years of sweat, tears and drama in Black soccer* (Johannesburg, Skotaville Publishers, 1983), p.64. Many of these individuals were founder members of the SAICU in 1940 – Badat (secretary), Singh (secretary), Sigamoney (vice-president) and Haffjee (vice-president). See A Desai, V Padayachee, K Reddy & G Vahed, *Blacks in Whites...*, p.111.

132 A Desai, V Padayachee, K Reddy & G Vahed, *Blacks in Whites...*, pp.111, 113-114.

133 *Cape Standard*, 20 March 1945, p.4; A Desai, V Padayachee, K Reddy & G Vahed, *Blacks in Whites...*, pp.61, 207.

134 *Cape Standard*, 5 February 1946, p.1; Western Province (C) Amateur Athletic and Cycling Association, *Rules and Constitution*, 1945, p.1.

America.¹³⁵ Six years later, in 1952, Sigamoney was elected vice-president of the Transvaal Indian Tennis Association (TITA).¹³⁶ The same year, he accompanied S.L. Singh, who was by then the president of the South African Soccer Federation (SASF), along with Sol Ernest and D. Pavadai, to interview the Indian High Commission with the intent to get an Indian soccer team to visit South Africa again.¹³⁷ He also donated a trophy towards a visiting Lourenço Marques (present-day Maputo) coloured soccer team that defeated Motherwell Football Club that year.¹³⁸ It was also a year that Stan Seymour, Newcastle United manager, visited Johannesburg, and Sigamoney ‘garlanded him at the Indian sportsground’.¹³⁹

He was also introduced to a FIFA delegation who visited South Africa in 1956.¹⁴⁰ In 1963 Sigamoney was elected vice president of SANROC.¹⁴¹ He was also, along with Rashaad Varachia, on the executive of the South African Cricket Federation.¹⁴² Previously, between 1947 and 1951, Varachia and Sigamoney were delegated by cricket organisations that formed SACBOC.¹⁴³ It was in the capacity of being a SACBOC executive member that he accused Vivian Granger, the National Football League chairman, of racism.¹⁴⁴ Sir Stanley Roux, the FIFA president, visited South Africa in 1963 and met with all South African soccer federations.¹⁴⁵ Sigamoney was part of the SASF delegation. Here too, Sigamoney criticised the arrangement of a barbeque held in honour of Roux, claiming that it was held to impress upon Roux that racial discrimination in South African sport did not exist.¹⁴⁶ When Roux returned the following year, a letter from the deceased Sigamoney was presented to him.¹⁴⁷ One month before his death, the *Spark* newspaper reported that Sigamoney had also sent a letter to the United States of America’s ambassador to South Africa wherein he complained about an intended boxing tour to America.¹⁴⁸ This was after David Levin, a

135 South African Indian Congress. Resolutions passed at the 17th session held at the mayor’s hall, Cape Town on 8th till 13th February 1946, p.4.

136 *e-Goli*, 21 September 1952, p.9.

137 *Indian and e-Goli Coloured Supplement*, 17 August 1952, p.9.

138 *Indian and e-Goli Coloured Supplement*, 24 August 1952, p.5.

139 *Indian and e-Goli Coloured Supplement*, 20 July 1952, p.18. Garland is an Indian tradition where flowers are placed on the head or over the neck of a significant person.

140 *Rand Daily Mail*, 17 January 1956, p.9.

141 *Spark*, 24 January 1963, p.16; V Chetty & R Naidoo, *Master of turbulence. Morgan Naidoo and the struggle for non-racial sport* (Durban, Rebel Rabble, 2023), p.74.

142 *Elethu Mirror*, 25 August 1962, p.15.

143 A Odendaal, *The story of an African game ...*, p.107.

144 *Rand Daily Mail*, 5 November 1962, p.5.

145 *Rand Daily Mail*, 11 January 1963, p.1.

146 *Rand Daily Mail*, 16 January 1963, p.3.

147 *Elethu Mirror*, 12 January 1964, p.3.

148 *Spark*, 14 February 1963, p.16.

boxing promoter, travelled to America to sign up three American professional boxers for fights in South Africa.¹⁴⁹ Sigamoney was however in some ways different to other more renowned Muscular Christians in that he largely worked amongst people classified as Indian in the Transvaal.¹⁵⁰

Local Political Struggles

In 1929 Sigamoney was the secretary of the Transvaal Employees Union and an official of the colonial-born Indian Association.¹⁵¹ Sigamoney was also secretary of the Indo-European Joint Council.¹⁵² The Indo-European Joint Councils were formed in Johannesburg and Durban during 1928–1929.¹⁵³ This was an attempt by a few liberal whites to create space for South Africans across the colour bar, to meet one another, and share concerns in their communities. Several such councils were established throughout South Africa. Sigamoney engaged individuals associated with these councils. He critically engaged with Dr A.B. Xuma, the African National Congress (ANC) president who joined the Johannesburg Joint Council in 1928, at a Children Aid's Society function, as well as with J.D. Rheinallt-Jones, a white senior official and co-founder of the Indo-European Joint Council, in August 1932.¹⁵⁴ Rheinallt-Jones had acquired a reputation for working with all South African communities in physical education-related activities. He also played a leading role in the administration of the African Scout Movement and held the rank of Chief Pathfinder since its inception in 1918. There is also evidence that he worked with many members of the Teachers' League of South Africa (TLSA) on the Joint Council Movement.¹⁵⁵ In 1932 he was also a guest speaker at a welcoming function for Kunwar Maharaj Singh, the new Indian Agent-General present in South Africa.¹⁵⁶ Three years later, in 1935, he called for a leading Indian to visit South Africa to speak against the government which was '[discriminating against] Indians

149 *Rand Daily Mail*, 1 January 1963, p.13.

150 *Rand Daily Mail*, 7 November 1955, p.6.

151 *Rand Daily Mail*, 7 February 1929, p.6; *Rand Daily Mail*, 11 March 1929, p.9.

152 *Rand Daily Mail*, 4 April 1929, p.4.

153 RJ Haines, "The politics of philanthropy and race relations: The joint councils of South Africa c. 1920 – 1955" (Ph.D., University of London, 1991), p.114.

154 *Rand Daily Mail*, 5 August 1932, p.10; *The Bantu World*, 13 August 1932, p.9; RJ Haines, "The politics ...", p. 170.

155 R Archer & A Bouillon, *The South African game. Sport and racism* (London, Zed Press, 1982), 123; FJ Cleophas, "Physical education and physical culture in the coloured community of the Western Cape" (Ph.D., Stellenbosch University, 2009), p.135.

156 *Rand Daily Mail*, 27 August 1932, p.11.

and segregating them in locations.¹⁵⁷ In 1936, A. Gnana Prakasam, the Ceylon government commissioner at the Empire Exhibition, was Sigamoney's guest at the 13th anniversary ball of the St Joseph's Home in Johannesburg.¹⁵⁸

Sastri started this Council and Professor J.M. Watt was president.¹⁵⁹ In 1930, as a Transvaal Indian Congress (TIC) member, Sigamoney was present at the Johannesburg train station to bid Dr Karney, the bishop of Johannesburg, farewell.¹⁶⁰ Three years later, at an emergency meeting of the SAIC, Sigamoney made a severe attack on government officials who tried to repatriate South African-born Indian people, to India.¹⁶¹ The same year, he also criticised the government for providing hospitals of poor condition to Indian and coloured people in the Transvaal.¹⁶² At some time, he visited the Indian Public School in Newtown, Johannesburg. Afterwards, he successfully persuaded the education department to change the medium of instruction from Gujerati to English. He also pointed out that there were too few coloured and Indian teachers being trained. The department responded by opening a teachers' training college. He also actively agitated for an increase in teachers' salaries. Other educational rights that concerned him were compulsory education for all children, irrespective of race.¹⁶³

In 1936, he successfully persuaded the Anglican synod to 'draw the attention of the Johannesburg City Council to the pressing need for improving the housing conditions under which the poorer section of the Indian community lived.'¹⁶⁴ A repeat of this call was made ten years later.¹⁶⁵ Occasionally, individual criticism would appear against his actions in the press.¹⁶⁶ On most occasions though, he would be appreciated by fellow black readers.¹⁶⁷

In 1943, Sigamoney was supportively outspoken on behalf of the Transvaal Tamil Benefit Society in favour of a new housing scheme in Coronationville by the Johannesburg City Council.¹⁶⁸ He was a member of this society as early as 1939.¹⁶⁹ Also in 1943,

157 *Rand Daily Mail*, 17 October 1935, p.16.

158 *Rand Daily Mail*, 9 September 1936, p.9.

159 *Rand Daily Mail*, 4 April 1929, p.4.

160 *Rand Daily Mail*, 13 February 1930, p.10.

161 *Rand Daily Mail*, 21 August 1933, p.9.

162 *Rand Daily Mail*, 17 October 1933, p.3.

163 *Black Sash News*, "The education ...", p.13.

164 *Rand Daily Mail*, 15 October 1936, p.16.

165 *Rand Daily Mail*, 10 October 1946, p.9.

166 *Rand Daily Mail*, 27 March 1947, p.8.

167 *Rand Daily Mail*, 5 May 1952, p.8.

168 *Rand Daily Mail*, 25 November 1943, p.3.

169 *Rand Daily Mail*, 15 June 1939, p.15.

Sigamoney was instructed to leave his home in Doornfontein, with nowhere to go, since a nearby biscuit factory wanted to enlarge their property.¹⁷⁰ Exactly ten years later he stated that '... no one gives a thought to Coloured and Native housing'.¹⁷¹ By 1954, he was chairman of the Coloured and Indian Tenants Protection Society in the Transvaal.¹⁷² That year he supported the idea of an Indian housing development in Germiston.¹⁷³ Sigamoney's personal circumstances deteriorated by 1955 and he was threatened with eviction again as his room at St Anthony's Mission in Sherwell Street, Doornfontein was needed for a factory building.¹⁷⁴ Despite this, he still found time to help a destitute Ms Maud Edwards, 'an expectant 26-year-old mother who had to sleep on the hard ground with her six-year-old son and four-year-old daughter for two months on an open lot in Ferreira Town in the city'.¹⁷⁵ He eventually resided at 15 Krause Street, Pageview.¹⁷⁶ On at least one occasion he criticised his community by lashing out against 'Indian capitalists who were exploiting the less fortunate of their own race'.¹⁷⁷ After his formal retirement, he campaigned for the evicted.¹⁷⁸

Sigamoney was equally prominent and visible in the field of public health.¹⁷⁹ Thus, during the Second World War, he convinced the synod of the Anglican Church in Johannesburg to highlight the inadequacies of non-European soldiers' pay.¹⁸⁰ By 1961 Sigamoney was rallying against landlords who accepted rent of R10 but only gave a receipt of R2 'to evade the Rent Act'.¹⁸¹ He also called on the council to withdraw permits for rebuilding houses in Vrededorp, Johannesburg, 'until new homes are built for Coloureds

170 *Rand Daily Mail*, 14 October 1943, p.3.

171 *Rand Daily Mail*, 27 November 1953, p.9.

172 *Rand Daily Mail*, 22 September 1954, p.9.

173 *Rand Daily Mail*, 24 November 1954, p.16.

174 *Rand Daily Mail*, 7 November 1955, p.6; *Rand Daily Mail*, 1 April 1955, p.1; *Rand Daily Mail*, 6 April 1955, p.6.

175 *Rand Daily Mail*, 9 February 1955, p.11; *Rand Daily Mail*, 17 February 1955, p.9.

176 *Rand Daily Mail*, 20 July 1961, p.11.

177 *Rand Daily Mail*, 17 August 1939, p.13.

178 *Rand Daily Mail*, 25 April 1951, p.10; *Rand Daily Mail*, 12 March 1951, p.7; *Rand Daily Mail*, 20 March 1951, p.7; *Rand Daily Mail*, 29 April 1952, p.9; *Rand Daily Mail*, 1 May 1952, p.7; *Rand Daily Mail*, 9 May 1952, p.13; *Rand Daily Mail*, 16 May 1952, p.9; *Rand Daily Mail*, 6 June 1952, p.12; *Rand Daily Mail*, 14 May 1952, p.9; *Rand Daily Mail*, 20 May 1952, p.7; *Rand Daily Mail*, 21 May 1952, p.9; *Rand Daily Mail*, 22 May 1952, p.5; *Rand Daily Mail*, 22 May 1953, p.9; *Rand Daily Mail*, 24 May 1952, p.9; *Rand Daily Mail*, 1 December 1953, p.10; *Rand Daily Mail*, 7 December 1953, p.5.

179 *Rand Daily Mail*, 20 March 1942, p.5.

180 *Rand Daily Mail*, 21 October 1942, p.7.

181 *Rand Daily Mail*, 29 April 1961, p.3.

and Indians.’¹⁸²

Public meetings

Sigamoney was indeed visible at many social and political events as a speaker at public meetings.¹⁸³ These public meetings were important for politicians during Sigamoney’s time because that was where the president of the South African Soccer Board, Stevan Baker, stated in 1938: ‘ ... Blacks come into closer contact with their European friends.’¹⁸⁴ The following year, H. Ernest, a speaker at a tennis gathering where Sigamoney was present, stated: ‘We are hoping to have the Europeans participating in the not-too-distant future.’¹⁸⁵

From his early days in the Transvaal, Sigamoney interacted with local politicians across the ‘racial’ divide and met Lady Dalrymple in 1929.¹⁸⁶ That year, Sigamoney spoke at the welcoming of Sir Kurma Reddi, the Agent General for the government of India.¹⁸⁷ The Sigamoneys also hosted, amongst others, the future Kenyan governor, Sir Evelyn Baring and his mother, Lady Cromer.¹⁸⁸ Sigamoney had certainly gained popularity in local communities and was amongst the guests at the reception dinner of Valangaiman Sastri.¹⁸⁹ Sigamoney was also invited to speak at the Indian Girl’s Club Bazaar.¹⁹⁰

Sigamoney was often called upon to deliver talks on areas that was outside the range of his expertise, such as literature.¹⁹¹ He also shared a platform with William Tsotsi, who was later the president of the All-African Convention (AAC).¹⁹² In 1938 Sigamoney spoke at the Non-European Librarian Conference held at the Bantu Men’s Social Centre in Johannesburg—alongside Miss G. Opperheim of Bloemfontein, H.E.I. Diomo, Dr Ray Phillips, Dr D.M. Esselen, and B.W. Vilikazi.¹⁹³ Other notable public figures with whom

182 *Rand Daily Mail*, 8 July 1961, p.4.

183 *Rand Daily Mail*, 8 August 1932, p.10.

184 *Cape Standard*, 31 May 1938, p.10.

185 *Cape Standard*, 26 July 1937, p.5.

186 *Rand Daily Mail*, 4 April 1929, p.4.

187 *Rand Daily Mail*, 14 May 1930, p.14.

188 *Rand Daily Mail*, 20 July 1961, p.9.

189 *Rand Daily Mail*, 8 January 1929, p.12. Sastri started an Indo-European Council, of which Sigamoney was Secretary and Professor JM Watt was president, *Rand Daily Mail*, 4 April 1929, p.4.

190 *Rand Daily Mail*, 3 June 1930, p.13.

191 *Rand Daily Mail*, 11 September 1934, p.6.

192 *Rand Daily Mail*, 27 June 1938, p.4; *The Torch*, 8 January 1952, p.2. The AAC was established in 1935, largely under the influence of Davidson Jabavu, with the purpose of formulating a response to the government’s Native Bills.

193 *The Bantu World*, 5 February 1938, p.4.

he shared social spaces included Margeret Ballinger (first president of the South African Liberal Party), John David Rheinallt-Jones (founder and director of the South African Institute for Race Relations), A.I. Minty, Alfred Xuma (president of the African National Congress), Uys Krige (Afrikaans poet), and Jan Smuts (South African premier).¹⁹⁴ In 1953, Sigamoney seconded the toast to Sir Syed Raza Ali, the Indian Counsel-General.¹⁹⁵ He was thus positioning himself, until his death, around influential individuals whom he could count on for support against white oppression. He therefore 'praised J. Modlin of the City Health Department for finding homes [for evicted blacks in Newton, Johannesburg]:'¹⁹⁶ The 1950s was however a time in South Africa's history when forced removals of people were beginning to cause the disintegration of communities. Sigamoney was not left untouched by this, and stated: 'There is nowhere for some of [us] to go. [We] cannot afford to buy in Lenasia and there are no houses for rent there.'¹⁹⁷ According to an archaeological assessment report, Lenasia is located on an area of about 35 km from Johannesburg. The surrounding property was owned by a German national named Lenz. He acquired the property but had settled there much earlier. Eventually, he sold it to the government for housing development. Mahommed Jajbhay, Bernard Sigamoney, Mahommed Abed, Ebrahim Dadabhai, and Advocate Minty formed the Transvaal Indian Organisation, which was tasked to persuade Indians to move to the area named Lenz.¹⁹⁸

General

Bernard Sigamoney involved himself and others in a wide range of organisations and issues. He challenged the right of commercial elites to be the only voice of local communities.¹⁹⁹ Local people approached Sigamoney for intervention when the authorities attacked their personal dignity. In 1945 for example, a group of local vendors approached him to speak on their behalf when the Johannesburg municipality confiscated their wares.²⁰⁰ He worked amongst ordinary people and he sold white bread from his house in Sherwell Street,

194 *Rand Daily Mail*, 23 June 1936, p.16; *Rand Daily Mail*, 4 September 1946, p.4; *Rand Daily Mail*, 19 September 1946, p.5; *Rand Daily Mail*, 10 July 1948, p.5.

195 *Rand Daily Mail*, 12 December 1953, p.14.

196 *Rand Daily Mail*, 8 August 1961, p.9.

197 *Rand Daily Mail*, 21 November 1956, p.11; *Rand Daily Mail*, 29 August 1957, p.4.

198 Heritage Contracts and Archaeological Counselling, 2015, Archeological impact assessment for the proposed Anchorville Extension 12 township in Lenasia, Gauteng Province, Version 1, 14-15.

199 G. Vahed, "'Give till it hurts' ...", p.60.

200 *Rand Daily Mail*, 21 December 1945, p.7.

Johannesburg.²⁰¹ In 1959 Sigamoney commented to the newspapers about an unsafe quarry at Lenasia where a 17-year-old boy, Nadraj Thumbay, was killed.²⁰² He also sent newspaper articles and letters to the Johannesburg municipality, all about everyday crises, that affected the lives of ordinary citizens in the relatively minute Indian community of Transvaal.²⁰³

On other occasions, as mentioned earlier, he was in the company of high public officials and personalities.²⁰⁴ These included Jan Hofmeyer (minister of finance), H.G. Lawrence (minister of welfare and demobilisation), J.G.N. Strauss (Minister of Agriculture), Sir Shafa' at Ahmed (Aga) Khan (Indian high commissioner), A.I. Kajee (Indian businessman), J.D. Rheinallt-Jones, Alan Paton (author and politician), Dr Yusuf Dadoo (politician), Dr I.D. du Plessis (Afrikaans poet and novelist), and Dr Karl Bremmer (government minister).²⁰⁵ It is clear that Sigamoney knew how to transverse racial and class divides in his political life.

Conclusion

This article traced the history of Bernard Sigamoney, a man who was an early anti-apartheid sports resister, someone who strove for good South African–Indian sports relations, a school teacher, a Christian cleric, and much more. He was a family man with many children but never owned fixed property. Combined with this he was a community activist which resulted in him being ostracised by the state. His public political biography does not differ much from other black sportspersons during the era of segregation and Apartheid.²⁰⁶ When, during the 1930s, there was a surge in ethnic nationalism in South Africa, Sigamoney was referred to as a political friend by Solomon Senaoane, the Native Sports Organiser of the Johannesburg Football Association.²⁰⁷ Sigamoney knew 'no colour or creed or race or class ... only man and woman ... speaking the language they spoke centuries ago'.²⁰⁸ Sigamoney helped to conscientise the working class to become more politically orientated and active

201 *Umteteli we Bantu*, 8 August 1953, p.1.

202 *Rand Daily Mail*, 30 December 1959, p.3.

203 *Rand Daily Mail*, 12 September 1939, p.13; *Rand Daily Mail*, 2 April 1951, p.7.

204 *Rand Daily Mail*, 11 December 1945, p.4.

205 *Rand Daily Mail*, 9 August 1945, p.6; *Rand Daily Mail*, 12 January 1945, p.4; *Rand Daily Mail*, 4 February 1949, p.2; *Rand Daily Mail*, 4 February 1950, p.7; *Rand Daily Mail*, 24 May 1952, p.9; P Alegi, *Laduma! ...*, p.108.

206 B Willan, "Isaiah Bud-M'Belle: Sportsman, interpreter, spokesman", V Bickford-Smith & B Nasson, *Illuminating lives. Biographies of fascinating people from South African history* (London, Penguin, 2018), pp. 49–66.

207 *The Bantu World*, 8 October 1938, p.16; P Alegi, *Laduma! ...*, p.108.

208 P Abrahams, *The path of thunder* (Cape Town, David Philip Publishers, 1948), p. 143.

in their opposition.²⁰⁹

Sigamoney, however, remains a relatively lesser-known public figure in South African education and broader public life history than, for example, Dennis Brutus or other prominent activists who combined community activism with sports, and political and religious engagement. This was all during a period, the first half of the twentieth century, when a South African government stayed loyal to Britain and was obsessed by entrenching white political power and racial segregation.²¹⁰ During the second half of the century, white power and segregation were repeated by an Afrikaner-nationalist government. Sigamoney thus, according to the evidence presented in this article, could not escape being 'born in an optimistic 19th century but dying in a pessimistic 20th. ...'²¹¹ He maintained a Muscular Christian-like temperament throughout his public life and he condemned a 'liquor bill' passed in 1961, two years before his passing, which gave black youths access to the consumption of liquor.²¹² He also did not hesitate to reprimand the Indian merchant class in Transvaal. Other times, he was present at events such as the welcoming of Sir Reddi who attended a function of the Sarcarnet Tennis Club at the Carlton Hotel in 1929. This was an event organised by Indian silk merchants.²¹³

Bernard Sigamoney was a complex figure, as this article shows. A decade before his death, for example, he advocated large-scale white immigration: 'The European and non-European must become friends ... White people of South Africa are great and only fear overshadows their greatness.'²¹⁴ Sadly, shortly before he passed away, 'there were [still] no playgrounds, no sports facilities, no libraries, no accessible clinics as provided for white children, available for the Indian school children in the Transvaal.'²¹⁵

Future work could hone in on a more focused strategy by determining the political methods he employed at specific moments in history. He was after all a teacher with a multi-faceted life in which the following facets intersected: being a religious worker, trade unionist, scoutmaster, and also a boxing promoter of a champion fighter, Jimmy Dixon in

209 LJW van der Walt, "Anarchism ...", p.464.

210 S Terblanche, *A history of inequality in South Africa, 1652 -2002* (Scottsville, University of Natal Press, 2002), p.247.

211 F Fukuyama, *The end of history and the last man* (New York, The Free Press, 2020), p.4.

212 *Rand Daily Mail*, 13 June 1961, p.3.

213 *Rand Daily Mail*, 4 April 1929, p.4.

214 *Rand Daily Mail*, 1 January 1952, p.5.

215 *Black Sash News*, "The education ...", p.13.

1941.²¹⁶ What a narrative from Sigamoney's life teaches us is that sports and education are not separated from life.²¹⁷ There were still some public traces of him after he passed away in 1963. The South African Cricket Board of Control (SACBOC) introduced the Sigamoney Trophy for their inter-union matches in 1965.²¹⁸ The following year, an Indian awards and festival committee awarded Sigamoney a medal for his 'contribution towards non-white sport'.²¹⁹ In 1980, there existed a Sigamoney Road in Clairewood, Johannesburg.²²⁰ Indeed, by reconstructing a political biography of Bernard Lazarus Emanuel Sigamoney, the sports historian realises that the personal is political, and therefore the life and times of teachers are much more complex, with different facets intersecting and colouring one another.

216 A Desai, V Padayachee, K Reddy & G Vahed, *Blacks in Whites...*, p.60; FJ Cleophas, "A historical overview of the African People's Organisation's contribution to sport: January– June 1920. Part IV", *African Journal for Physical, Health Education, Recreation and Dance*, 19 (1), 2013, pp.196-197.

217 N Coleman and N Hornby, "Introduction", N Coleman and N Hornby (eds.), *The picador book of sports writing* (London, Picador, 1996), p.4; H Snyders, "Jimmy Dixon. A forgotten South African boxing career", *Bulletin of the National Library of South Africa*, 77 (1), 2023, p.29.

218 *Rand Daily Mail*, 4 December 1965, p.7.

219 *Rand Daily Mail*, 19 February 1966, p.27.

220 *Ilanga Lase Natal*, 11 – 13 December 1980, p.7.