



Mr and Mrs S. V. Hashe slaughtering a chicken for a celebration after the lifting of her banning orders.

**It's Doc Bikitsha's finger on your pulse**



**Ma Hashe — true child of Africa**

I DEDICATE this column to that unsung Black heroine, Mrs Viola Mathari Noyila Hashe, who was compared to India's Ghandi at her funeral. A fiery campaigner against passes for Black women, the only women advisory board member of Dobsonville, and a pioneer trade unionist, who was buried yesterday at Dobsonville Cemetery.

I thought I would see hundreds and hundreds of young, old and beautiful factory workers and members of the National Garment Workers Union present at this funeral. They weren't there in the expected numbers and Mrs Hashe was a pioneer fighter for their cause. The Lord be praised, three top officials of the union were there to pay their respects for all, it is hoped. Mrs Lucy Mvubelo, Mrs Sarah Chicha and Mr P. Mashinini.

To know Viola's magnitude, one would have had to be around in those tempestuous early 50's right up to the middle of the 60's, when this daughter of the Gabashanes exploded into the Black workers scene, with the dedication and determination which justified her being compared to Ghandi. She fought for the betterment of factory workers and Black women with the ferocity that a tigress has for its whelps. Death be not proud.

She was born and bred in Randfontein's old location, and a truer beauty and politician we'll never find again in the West Rand, unless nature pulls one of her tricks. She was big and fighting during her time and heyday. Always in the thick of it with others in the struggle.

And I, in my meaninglessness, remember her well. Some of us grew up under her shadow in Montshioa Street. In those days, when a reporter merged with crowds at Freedom Square in Western Native Township or the Trades Hall in Pritchard Street, she was always there in bantam cock fighting trim.

It brings to mind some of the greats: living, banned or gone. Lest the younger ones forget to tell it to their mountain in future — Mrs Hashe rubbed shoulders with Mrs Albertina Luthuli, Mrs

Lilian Ngoyi, Mrs Mary Moodley, Mrs Bertha Mashaba, Mrs Ruth Matseoane, Mrs Mary Rantho, Mrs Rahima Moosa, Mrs M. Naidoo, Mrs Sophie Williams, Mrs Violet Weinberg and many others. The young ones can forge for them in "graveyards" libraries as we put them in newspaper language.

My praise for her will not suffice. Let me sound her merits with the tongues of others. Mr P. Mashinini of the Sangwu, gave a speech. The Recreation Hall where the service was held was packed to the doors, as drum majorettes cooled their heels outside in the bleak weather.

He knew her for 22 years when he was an ordinary factory-hand in Johannesburg. She was then a typist under Mr G. Makhabeni, one of the founder members of the Garment Workers Union in 1928. Veteran journalists will remember Mrs Hashe's impeccable turn-out: in and out of office. In 1955, after Makhabeni's death, the big question was who would succeed him on the union's chair.

Mr Mashinini was then up the ladder and shop steward. He ably told how there was division between the male and female sections of the then existing trade union. A tearless audience took it all in, for at this funeral of Mrs Hashe, song after song pervaded. She loved song, poetry and the arts. Took part in them too.

In 1956, to the amazement of sceptics and unbelievers, Mrs Hashe succeeded Mr Makhabeni as general secretary of the union. And one of her first actions was to merge the female and male bodies into the South African National Clothing Workers' Union.

"She was a rare woman. Other women have the tendency of gossiping, but she was above that. She did not gossip and it was us men who instead plotted against her. We ended up calling her 'Ma' and I'm here to speak about her goodness. Let her be spared criticism at her funeral," said Mr Mashinini.

Today the movement is 23 000 strong. This is due to her pioneering efforts and selfless dedication to the Black worker in this country.

I have selected tribute for this column. Other speakers who don't appear here must rest assured that Mrs Hashe is on the wave length all the time.

The next speaker was Mr Chapman Mavi, a retired school teacher from Randfontein. He knew the late lady from youth to maturity. He even taught her husband, Mr Sydney Hashe.

Old Chappy was at his poetic best. He summed up



Mrs Mabel Balfour, a close associate of the late Mrs Viola Hashe, speaking emotionally about their experiences together. Pictures: HAROLD FIGLAN

Viola's career with the quotation — "I came, I saw, I conquered." It grieved him to see this "honeybunch" enclosed in a coffin. She was a beautiful combination with Sydney. Mr Mavi played around with names and spiced it with a verse from Paul to the Corinthians on "If you have no love..."

He even shook the mourners with a defiant "God is love. She has accomplished her mission of love on earth, and who can be dubious of her entry into Heaven, where God is love?" He went further to cudgel our brains with the journey of Christian in "Pilgrim's Progress," where this character enters the gates of New Jerusalem and defiantly tells the gatekeeper: "Write down my name, Sir."

So had Viola Hashe done at the end of her sojourn on earth.

Mrs Lucy Mvubelo, present general secretary of Sangwu (South African National Garment Workers Union), spoke in Xhosa to pay intimate tribute to a woman she had worked with for many years. Since October, 1963, when she was served with banning orders, Mrs Hashe was locked away from the outside world.

"We went together to the outside — 'emakhayeni' to organise workers. It is a pity we workers are not recognised as a body in our country. But with Viola, I have learnt to respect more than just the person. She had an inner self which was beyond description in goodness, dedication and hardwork. She was a true daughter of Africa," said Mrs Mvubelo.

At the end of her speech, Mrs Mvubelo appealed to the members of the union in the crowd to remember her with the singing of their special song, Hymn 308. The people took it with feeling, and it's then that I saw tears trickling down men's craggy cheeks.

Perhaps the most poignant and sorrowful part of the service came when Mrs Mabel Balfour, an old campaigner with the late Viola, spoke. She was dressed in traditional Xhosa black and white. She was barefooted and age told on those cheeks that used to be chubby with fight and zeal.

She told how they worked together from 1944. How they marched to Pretoria with them in 1958 against the

issue of passes for our Black women. Their subsequent jailing. How in 1960 at 2 am "Police woke me up with my three month old baby and took me away. The cops told me Viola was waiting for me in the car, which later lead to lock-ups in Newlands, Marshall Square and Pretoria Central Prison. I came back with Viola and found my baby holding on to chairs on his first tottering steps."

Tracing their association during those troubled days, Mrs Balfour had the audience spellbound with her crisp, no-regret tone. A job had been done or was being done, that's all. After her speech, which left many sadder than they came, she went and sat behind others on the dais. Not lost in thought, but watching with her sharp eyes.

Mr Alexander Gabashane, on behalf of her family,

traced her genealogy. She was the third daughter of Lodi, a regal looking mother on the Gabashane side. She was named "Mathari" from that female ruler of the Kgatlas called "Mathari wa Kgatlang". He appealed to the Hashes and Gabashanes, maintaining close relationship even after Viola's death.

Randfonteinians came in full force to pay their last respects to a woman who had bought glory to Didi and the West. A woman described as "not only fit to grace the halls of fame of Roodepoort alone, but the whole of South Africa."

In later life Mrs Hashe did not enjoy good health. Many of us did not see her. And I feel somehow bitter that not many of the younger factory workers were present at this funeral. Only time will tell her worth.

"Requiescat in pace"

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