

## Dr Cheddi Jagan and Janet Jagan – Guyana’s revolutionary leaders

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**Serving humanity gives the greatest satisfaction in life; and these two patriots were the best humanitarians that I have ever had the opportunity to interact with, writes Indra Chandrapal**

Why would a young woman of 17 years choose to become involved in politics? Shouldn’t she do the things all young women at her age would want to do? The answer is in the affirmative. However, the environment and the social consciousness of that particular young girl would not allow her to focus on the things young girls of her age desire.

It was the period in which the hippy movement, the bell bottom pants, the Beatles and the Vietnam war were very prominent. One particular photograph which hit all the newspapers were that of a small woman not more than 5” tall with a gun to the back of a very big American soldier. It was the struggle of Angela Davis and all those who chose not to go to war in Vietnam. It was a period of not only cultural rebellion but that of social upheaval. The status quo was that of the cold war and the gradual dislocation of colonialism in different corners of the world.

Guyana, was not spared in its quest to have its independence, if it could not be won with guns then it had to be won by political machinations. This was a recipe for the disintegration of a once proud nationalist movement to that of ethnic conflict and destruction which stayed with the young nation since then.

These were the ideas which were spinning in the head of this 17-year-old who knew that different classes of people live differently. The ruling class lived in grand style while the working class, the peasants and all other groups lived in abject poverty. They were not brought from Africa and Asia to have a good life. Rather their task was to ensure that the colonial interests were protected and enhanced. Their role was to produce wealth and if they could not endure then they were left to die in despair.

When the differences are so glaring it is only natural for you to have a rebellious spirit because you are reminded as long as you are awake that you do not matter because of your status in society.

Whether it is your race, religion or gender did not matter because everyone was in that melting pot. This was the reality in which we lived and I as part of that reality was not content to enjoy the things which girls of my age enjoyed. I wanted to be a part of any change which sought to end the status quo.

Being a member of the poor and powerless evoked a lot of anger in me because of the conditions in which we live. No electricity, a mud dam, poor housing, no proper health care, not enough resources to provide families and their offspring with much needed commodities for their well-being. Not having shoes or books or monies to buy sanitary were the realities of everyday living.

Was I justified in getting angry or wanting changes? Of course, yes! So based on what I have alluded to I felt it necessary to give of my time and energies to help in the struggle for change.

I knew others had made changes and I wanted to be in a movement that wanted to change the status quo for the betterment of the poor and powerless. So, I joined the Progressive Youth Organization where we taught the young people about the history of revolutionaries, we taught them patriotic songs and we encouraged them to educate themselves and to be disciplined in every aspect of their life. I was highly motivated and chose to join the People's Progressive Party and the Women's Progressive Organization at 19 years of age.

My hero and heroine were Dr Cheddi Jagan and Janet Jagan – two revolutionaries who provided leadership to the working class and the underprivileged in society. They were household names and it was because of the role they played when sugar workers were massacred at Enmore Estate which was considered as the cradle of resistance against the plantocracy.

This was the place where I grew up and from a very young age, I heard about what had taken place. How can you forget their story when everyday you have to pass next to the Estate to fetch a bucket water on your head from a Dutch well which was about half a mile? How can you forget when every year there was a commemoration organized by the PPP on June 16<sup>th</sup> in honor of the workers? Our parents will give us a rice bag and tell us to sit in front of the mass meeting so that we are in full view of our parents.

That was how I saw Dr. Jagan and Mrs. Jagan for the first time. The first time I spoke to Dr. Jagan personally was when I was asked to chair a public meeting where he was the main speaker. That was a terrifying moment for me because it was the first time, I was speaking at a mass gathering and it was no easy feat for me or for any one who has to do it for the first time. He made it so easy for me by saying that he was terrified as well and that I will get over it.

It was around the same period that I met Mrs. Jagan as well. I was asked to organize a meeting of women by the Party Organizer and she came to our home to meet the women. After she finished speaking, I

realized that this was my calling in life. I wanted to work with people especially women and help them to educate themselves so that they will ultimately improve themselves and that of their families.

Those two events which I have referred to were the precursor for what was to come. I was asked to go to the Party Headquarters to do a job interview. I passed the test and that was the beginning of my political journey.

I got my first job at 21 years of age and got jailed for 1 week along with 3 other sisters when I was 22 and left Guyana 3 weeks after I served my sentence. My offence was lying down on a bridge with other women including my sisters to prevent members of the then government from entering a school compound to have the meeting. A fierce fight took place where some of the officials were manhandled and they were forced to leave the venue because the meeting was called off.

I was sent overseas to study political science for 9 months because Dr. Jagan said “Indra you are wasted at the switchboard you need to go and study” Thus began my political life with my two mentors and my hero and heroine. Will I do it over again if I get a chance. The answer is YES! Serving humanity gives the greatest satisfaction in life; and these two patriots were the best humanitarians that I have ever had the opportunity to interact with while they were alive.

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- Dr Cheddi Jagan and Janet Jagan – Guyana's revolutionary leaders - Liberation <https://liberationorg.co.uk/comment-analysis/dr-cheddi-jagan-and-janet-jagan-two-revolutionaries-who-led-the-working-class-and-the-underprivileged/>