

An understanding of the relationship between Cheddi and Janet.

They were extraordinary in their similarities, a point that can be missed when viewed through obscurantist racial, national, cultural and religious lenses. They were both extraordinarily attractive physically. Both were born into societies from which they were excluded on religious and cultural grounds. They both possessed profound and critical intellects. And both managed to overcome the strictures and limitations that their respective societies placed on them. One could sense the profound chemistry in their relationship and the reason for their singular pursuit of freedom and human dignity for everyone. They returned to the English colony of British Guiana soon after they met and married. Immediately, they mounted challenges to the colonial status quo by organising the most dispossessed: the sugarcane workers and she the domestic workers. This catapulted them to the leadership of the nationalist movement.

Janet Jagan's life is defined by its struggle for freedom against all barriers to human dignity: those of coloniality, race, class, culture, gender, etc. She sacrificed much in her quest, relinquishing her American Citizenship in 1947 and being declared persona non grata by the United States Government in the fifties and sixties. Her successes have much to do with her fearlessness. She declares in the documentary that "nothing much frightens" her. She is not bound by orthodoxy or convention. When asked, for example, about the possible reaction to her whiteness by the electorate of Guyana, a country in which 95 percent of the population is either East Indian, black, or mixed, she expressed surprise: "People do not see white when they look at me." It represents her successful transcendence of racial boundaries in a country that is driven by racial conflict. It is erroneous, therefore, to characterise her as a white Jewish American, as does the documentary. She has transcended normalised and fixed labels of identity to become truly the "Mother of the Country" in her homeland: the Republic of Guyana.

Throughout her life, her family ties remained strong. She reconciled with her father who died during the period when she was restricted from travelling by the British. Tellingly, the only regret she uttered in the entire documentary was that her father and husband never met. Today, Janet Jagan is no longer an anachronism. While in office, the relationship between the government she headed and the United States was friendly and cooperative. And while she was reluctant to label herself, her daughter in law, Nadia, made the observation that she was "more Guyanese than most." Perhaps she has become the epitome of what all Guyanese should be. And certainly a beacon of hope for the United States. She is a woman who not afraid to think the unthinkable.

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