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## **COMMENTARY AND OVERVIEW OF CONTRIBUTIONS ON THE LATE PRESIDENT, JANET JAGAN**

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**F**rom analytical perspectives, the late President of Guyana, the Honourable Janet Jagan (1920–2009), could be considered as a catalyst who generated transformation and change in the social, political, and institutional structures of Guyanese society. She and her late husband, the former President Cheddi Jagan (1918–1997), will always be remembered for their relentless struggles to liberate Guyana from the burdens of an oppressive colonial system. Without her indefatigable zeal and dedication positive changes would have been inexorably slow. Hence, she should be highly commended for her efforts in accelerating the removal of an entrenched colonial system that was detrimental to the welfare of the majority of Guyanese. In her quest to remove the barriers that prevented change, Janet Jagan demonstrated formidable strength and character to overcome the numerous challenges she encountered. Interestingly, after her passing many of her detractors praised her for her genuine efforts and dedication.

Throughout her more than 50 years of meritorious service to Guyana Janet Jagan was actively involved in a broad spectrum of causes, activities, and organizations. She was steadfast in her beliefs that all Guyanese should have equal access to justice,

liberty, education, equality and rights. While she committed herself to improving the welfare of all Guyanese she, nevertheless, focussed her attention on championing the causes of women. As early as July 12, 1946 Janet participated in the formation of the Women's Political and Economic Organization. She later launched the Women's Progressive Organization (WPO) on May 27, 1953. Evidently, she was ahead of her time in advocating the rights and potential of women, and was selfless in her dedication to improve their socioeconomic conditions and education. Here it is worthwhile to emphasize that one of the mandates of the WPO is to ensure that more women are allowed into more programs that can help them financially and educationally.

Moreover, Janet Jagan could be credited as being instrumental in raising the political consciousness of not only women, but also members of all ethnic groups. She was a co-founder of the People's Progressive Party in 1950, and encouraged the involvement and participation of all ethnic groups. Over the years she was persistent in her efforts to forge and maintain racial unity. Her outlook on inclusivity demonstrated that she was intolerant of all forms of victimization and discrimination. This could be ascertained from her early article on the psychology of race prejudice which is included in this Special Issue of the *Journal of Indo Caribbean Research* (JICR). Before she was married to Cheddi Jagan, she was of the opinion that "*prejudices are a social creation rather than an instinctive aversion.*" She also emphasized the point that the different races have equal capabilities.

The other articles in this Special Issue serve to facilitate a broader understanding of specific contributions by Janet Jagan. **Sridatt Lakhani** provides an insightful analysis that establishes Janet Jagan as a pioneer among women in Guyana. In his well-

documented and scholarly article, he opined that, "*she was a history maker earning credits as a woman of a number of firsts.*" Janet Jagan's commitment to the nation-building process is further highlighted in the next article by **Lawrence Rodney**. In an analytical essay, very useful perspectives are presented on how the factors influencing Janet's political orientation may have led her to advocate for progressive changes in Guyana. Rodney identified the "*broad parameters that served to sustain her politics.*" The following article by **Indranie Chandarpal** enriches the content of this Special Issue with a concise account of Janet Jagan's contributions in Guyana's National Assembly. In addition to an evaluation, several appropriate quotations are used to emphasize statements and remarks by Janet on a range of topical issues, including adult suffrage, women's issues, independence, constitutional change, health and welfare, and peace and development. The role of Janet Jagan on the issue of development is addressed in the following article by **Rajendra Rampersaud**. In an informative discussion Rajendra emphasizes Janet Jagan's struggles to ensure people's right to development and concludes that, "*her contribution to ensure fair and equitable development, and access to socioeconomic resources is second to none in the Western Hemisphere.*" Janet Jagan's multifaceted role is further highlighted in the article by **Laxmikant Manroop** and **Parbudyal Singh**. The authors critically analyzed Janet Jagan's leadership during times of political and labour crises in Guyana, and concluded that her leadership, "*was vital in securing valuable workers' and women's rights.*" The next article by **Frank Birbalsingh** considers whether Janet Jagan was a friend or foe of Guyana. In an incisive analysis the author advances the conclusion that, Janet Jagan's achievements were extraordinary because of "*her qualities of single-minded devotion to duty and brave defiance, and tenacity against her enemies during half a century of unbroken effort to improve the lives of Guyanese.*" The concluding article by **Ralph Ramkarran** provides an almost

perfect summary on the overall legacy of Janet Jagan. As someone who is very knowledgeable and familiar with the contributions of Janet Jagan, Ralph surmises that she is, "*quite easily the greatest Guyanese woman ever.*"

This Special Issue of JICR, similar to the one that I edited on the life and legacy of the late President, Cheddi Jagan (Lakhan, 1997) is presented as a non-technical monograph for the general readership of JICR. In editing each article, efforts have been made to maintain coherency and clarity, without sacrificing the personal writing styles of each of the contributors. Readers can be assured that the articles included in this Issue have not been preferentially selected. Although the articles are of varying scope and generality, they are not intended to be an exhaustive account of the life and contributions of Janet Jagan. Far more remains to be written, especially when one considers that Janet Jagan was not only a mother, but she was also actively engaged in a number of roles, including that of a political activist, a trade unionist, an author, an editor, a government minister, a deputy speaker of the Legislative Council, and the Prime Minister and President of Guyana. Hopefully, another monograph will elaborate on other aspects of the life and legacy of the gifted Janet Jagan. Without doubt, she was an extraordinary woman with a visionary approach to progressive social and economic development.

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