

In Commemorating Jagan's Passing, We Recall His Modest Way Of Living

March 22 marked the 103rd birth Anniversary of Cheddi Jagan, popularly referred to as 'Father of the Nation.' Every nation has a soul. Guyana's soul is more than its 750,000 plus physical bodies. It is a whole sea of innate traditions, customs and mores that binds us together as believers who have kept the faith in men like Cheddi Jagan whose inspirational life work continues to provide hope for the nation.

The question may justifiably be asked; why commemorate the birth anniversary of a man who would have passed away 24 years ago and who so many young people know little or nothing about? The answer to the question lay in the fact that while many young people may not know much about Cheddi Jagan there are hundreds of thousands out there who, for one reason or another still feel some connectivity to his thoughts and ideals. Small wonder why they vote every five years for his party.

Two decades plus have gone by since his passing, yet from the twenty-nine year old member of the Legislative Council who fought indefatigably for universal adult suffrage and his country's independence to Opposition Leader and fighter for free and fair elections then elected President, Cheddi Jagan has not faded away.

In commemorating Jagan's passing, we recall his modest way of living, his simplicity in language yet at times controversial but complex in his thinking. Thus far, no one has taken his place notwithstanding the fact that the era in which we live in today is different in some respects from the one in which he lived and struggled. The Cheddi Jagan Research Centre recently hosted a commemorative activity marking the 24th anniversary of Dr. Jagan's passing. It was a modestly attended activity mainly of people who knew and worked with him including well-wishers.

I was tempted to begin my contribution by welcoming all to a gathering the 'Old Guards' and 'Old Fashioned Marxist Ideologues' but decided against it lest I be perceived to be pandering to clichés used by Jagan haters. Throughout the Red House function, connectivity was obvious, not only with Jagan, but amongst the attendees as well. This was significant because it meant something was alive that brought the invitees together to reflect on Jagan's life and work.

An American writer called the phenomenon that seemed alive the 'ghostly trace of circuitry.' The relevance of Jagan's thoughts in today's context is evidenced by the world-wide prevalence of disease, emigration, poverty, environmental degradation, illegal trafficking of narcotic drugs and firearms.

As a visionary, Dr. Jagan advanced specific proposals to address those global challenges. Jagan shunned racial and political discrimination, corruption and extravagance. He removed two ministers because of acts inimical to the interest of government. Cheddi was a man of the people, a man of the world. He connected easily with developments around the world, interpreting and applying the lessons of those events, if needs be, on the basis of his personal and country's experiences.

When some abhorred his references to international events and demanded that he focus more on issues at home, Jagan called for balance. He recognized the interconnection and interaction between the national and the international. And for those who did not appreciate his internationalist approach he sought to educate rather than to alienate them.

Since his passing, precepts such as socialism has been replaced with partnership. Yet when we look around the world, we witness Bernie Sanders of America with his pro-socialist policies influencing

millions of young Americans and President Xi Jinping extolling the achievements of his One China, Two Systems State. In the meantime, the ideas that Jagan stood for are actively being investigated by academics and developmental economists around the world. They are turning more and more to the so-called outdated scientific method of investigation as a guide to analyze complex socio-economic developments in the world today. Jagan's ideas can also be found in the liberal arts curriculum of universities world-wide

Jagan was no fake socialist nor dye in the wool communist as some try to paint him. Neither was he dogmatic or slavish in his analysis. He was no opportunist, racist nor publicity seeking egotistical politician. And if there was any pragmatism in his theory and practice, it was not in pursuit of his personal interests, on the contrary, it was because for him, practice is the criterion of truth.

Dr. Jagan was no idealist wallowing as it were in some esoteric world. His mission in life was to help his people not himself, and to save civilization as exemplified in his call for a New Global Human Order. Jagan was not the perfect politician, he admitted his mistakes.

In 'The West in Trial' Dr. Jagan referred to 'a fatal mistake' he made in February 1964, by not allowing President Nkrumah's emissary to make an announcement at the airport prior to his departure that Burnham had agreed to a power sharing agreement. Dr. Jagan preferred that the announcement be made after a meeting between he had with Burnham.

Again in October 1996 following remarks he made which were misconstrued as racist at a meeting with the Guyanese community in Toronto, Canada Dr. Jagan recanted from his position that; "I do not know what I have to apologize for, I said what I meant to say." Soon after, he issued a public apology.

Dr. Jagan was a dialectician. He possessed the intellectual perspicacity to encourage his colleagues to make adjustments to the party's strategy and tactics offering alternative pathways for national reconciliation. This was exemplified in his proposals for a coalition government in June 1964; the policy shift in just two years from non-Cooperation and Civil Resistance to Critical Support in 1975 just after the elections in 1973 when the army seized the ballot boxes and when two PPP activists were shot and killed. Further, his call in 1977 for a National Patriotic Front and National Front Government; the formation of the Committee in Defense of Democracy (CDD) in 1978; the Patriotic Coalition For Democracy (PCD) in 1986, culminating in the formation of the PPP/CIVIC alliance in 1989 prior to the 1990 election are all testimony to Jagan's ability to be inclusive and tactically and strategically flexible.

Jagan's politics was not based ethnic tribalism nor race, He was committed to an all-inclusive platform as exemplified in 'winner does not take all' with one caveat; "We don't want to dominate nor do we want to be dominated" Dr. Jagan gave meaning to what he said and did as a professional dental surgeon, in his personal and political life and when he became president of the republic.

History produced Jagan and Jagan made his own history. From all indications, it is unlikely that he will disappear into obscurity. After all, "The traditions of all dead generations weigh like a nightmare on the brains of the living."

Yours truly,

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