

# Reflections on a Visit

By Dolly Z. Hassan

WHEN THIS YELLOW AND BLACK DECORATIVE BROACH was given to me, accompanied by the words, "I want to thank you," I clutched it firmly and held the moment. My mom later told me, "I'm surprised he has time to think of small details."

Many of us who knew Dr. Cheddi B. Jagan were not surprised. He was firm and stern – yet sensitive and warm.

## In the Wilderness

I never had the privilege of meeting Dr. Jagan in Guyana. But, in the 1980's after two letters of mine were published in the Washington Post and the Washington Times on the erosion of democracy in Guyana, I received an encouraging note from him, and was instantly inspired. At that time, to take away from the monotony of teaching at Howard University (where, incidentally, Dr. Jagan studied), I founded and chaired a non-partisan group, SOS Guyana, dedicated to the struggle for human rights in Guyana. Our position was that we wanted FAIR and FREE elections in Guyana, nothing more or less.

Occasionally we met with different groups from Guyana visiting D. C. Dr. Jagan's announced visit to D.C. stirred no great excitement. The 1980's was a frustrating decade for Guyanese. The PNC dictatorship tightened its noose on the nation and had an intimidating effect on Guyanese both at home and abroad. Increasingly most people were frustrated and some even angry at Dr. Jagan. "Is Jagan gat the place so," was a common refrain which "Harry" echoed when I called him to inform him of the visit and of a meeting with Dr. Jagan. Begging was not my strength. I had no energy to respond when the chorus was "you are wasting your time."

## Fighting On

We waited until the last passenger trickled out but Dr. Jagan was not on the flight. I went to telephone booth to call the Association of Concerned Guyanese in Canada from where Dr. Jagan was departing. As the phone was ringing, there was a tap on my shoulder, and there stood Dr. Jagan. An ordinary man – yet I was overwhelmed. He is known to have that paralyzing effect on people. He had missed his flight, but last minute reshuffling put him on a later flight and he made it.

By arrangement Dr. Jagan was to stay at our modest apartment. A two-bedroom apartment with one bathroom, it was not, some people thought, the best accommodation for this man who shaped the history of Guyana. But from what little I knew of him, I knew he would be comfortable even if it were a mud-hut.

Dr. Jagan was late for the get-together of about the thirty individuals at our apartment. We stopped at Howard University for a meeting which filtered down to about seven members of an opposition group. The argument was heated – and we were trying,

or so we thought – to "rescue" Dr. Jagan. We told him that we were having a dinner for him and his supporters were already present waiting for him. He scolded us for interrupting, "No, no, no." I would rather stay and talk about this thing here." This is why some people say Dr. Jagan was naive. At that time, we felt that he was wasting his time. We were angry at him. Did he really believe, we thought, that his opponents would change their minds? Why waste time? Now we know we were naive. The person who spends time convincing his supporters instead of his opponents wastes his time. That was my first lesson.

## His Own Man

At home, our guests began to arrive one by one. It was obvious that they were also struck by Dr. Jagan's personality. But their frustration was evident too. After an update from him, the floor opened for questions. "People don't want to hear about communism nowadays. You gat fo change." Harry blurted. Dr. Jagan was used to that line. He simply shot back, "It doesn't matter which group you support. Just fight for democracy – that's all. Ask for fair and free elections. If you do that, it's enough for us." Harry fell to his chair in silence.

At the end of the meeting, guests began to leave one by one. A few inconsiderate ones stuck around, despite the messages sent through our body language. Dr. Jagan sat and endured the tedious schooling from those of us who had abandoned Guyana, from those who thought we were more "savvy" about politics. But, though he politely listened, his expression revealed another vision of a better world. When the last guest left, he finally retired for a few hours sleep.

His strength of character dominated not only his politics but also his personal life. His brother, we understood, was not very well, and we planned to drive Dr. Jagan to see him the next day. We thought that it would be nice (since we were certain that Dr. Jagan was too busy to be concerned about little things) to buy a *get-well* card. We gave the card to Dr. Jagan so that he could sign it and hand it to his ill brother. We were pleased with ourselves for having done a good deed. But Dr. Jagan put down the card – almost in disgust – and made a dismissive sound. We were all embarrassed but again we learned another lesson. Do your talking and talk from your heart – don't use the tongues of the Vincent Peales of the world and don't get sucked in by commercialism.

## Good-bye, Teacher

During the quiet moments with us, Dr. Jagan urged us to keep our fight for democracy going. He stressed the importance of unity and wished us well. He understood how difficult it was to muster support at a time when everyone felt cheated and defeated. He knew he was right, and he knew right would prevail. When he waved good-bye, I wondered how a man could have endured so much.

We still had to grow up. We were still learning. As we started home, we discussed and joked about his hat. Somewhere—because of my inattention – his hat got misplaced. It was clear that the hat

carried a deep sentimental value to him – he told me that it was from Russia. I called just about everywhere to try to track it down but in vain. Sensing our embarrassment, he never mentioned the hat again.

I promised myself that I would have it replaced but, alas, time crept up on me and a decade and a life went by. Another lesson!

As I look at this decorative hand-made broach, I am sure that there is a story woven here. I have worn it but twice, so afraid I am that I am going to lose it – and lose my tiny brush with history. ■

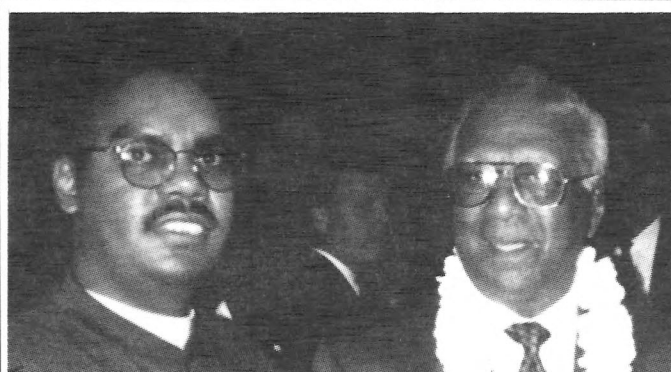
## The Jagan Family The Guyanese Nation

*We Mourn Your Loss And Sympathize With You*

From Dr. C.C. Lucky

**Lucky-Care Medical, P.C.**

108-04 Liberty Avenue  
Richmond Hill, NY 11419  
718 323 6588



## Farewell

Our Beloved Leader, Cheddi

Our Deepest Sympathies  
To The Family Of The Late President Jagan

Navin Phagu, Family & Staff

*Phagu Signs & Awards*

122-01 Rockaway Blvd. South Ozone Park, NY 11420  
718 323-1848

# PRESIDENT CHEDDI B. JAGAN

## Death is not the End . . .

When our ocean of tears would have dried, when his ashes would have settled,  
when we all would have turned to busy ourselves,  
the seeds he planted would blossom and his name would live on.

For it is said that *good men must die but death cannot kill their names.*

To the First Lady Janet Jagan, to all other Members of the Family of Our  
Beloved President, and to the People of Guyana,

let us not mourn the loss  
but celebrate the life of a decent man and a hero of epic proportions.

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