

# DEAR COMRADE CHEDDI

By Gary Girdhari

*Too soon, too soon  
our banner draped for you.  
I would prefer  
the banner in the wind  
not bound so tightly  
in a scarlet fold –  
not sodden sodden  
with your people's tears. . .*

*Dear Comrade  
if it must be  
you speak no more with me  
nor smile no more with me  
then let me take a patience and a calm –*

*. . .  
Now from this mourning vanguard moving on  
dear Comrade, I salute you and I say  
Death must not find us thinking that we die.*

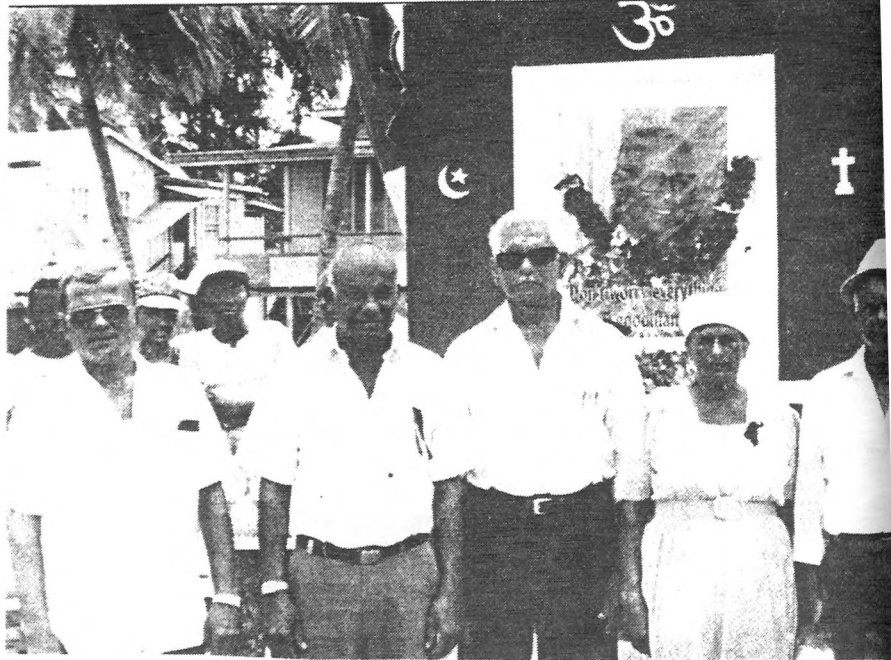
Martin Carter.

I DID NOT LEAVE ON SATURDAY 8 MARCH 1997 AS I WANTED TO. Instead, I landed in Guyana on Monday March 10 1997 around 4:30 PM in the evergreen, bright and therapeutically warm weather, passing a military formation pensively at attention on the Timehri airport tarmac. Thus, I missed the historic state funeral and live tributes to the dear departed Cheddi Bharat Jagan.

As soon as I reached Georgetown and had a brief period of rest, my eyes became glued to the television screen and I was profoundly amazed at the incessant messages of sympathy, condolences and tributes respectfully bestowed to Dr. Cheddi Jagan. I also viewed repeat footage of the official state proceedings and listened spellbound to the glowing tributes and homage from the many distinguished personages, notably Sam Hinds, Bishop George, Basdeo Panday, Moses Nagamootoo, Cheddi Joey Jagan, Desmond Hoyte, Rupert Rupnarain, Feroze Mohamed and many others, including members of the Christian, Muslim and Hindu religious denominations.

Throughout the entire period of mourning, protocols and official ceremonies, there was utmost order and discipline that appeared self-sustaining. People, coming from all parts of the country and from all walks of life, paid their respects. They braved the intense sun and rain, walking, bicycling or driving for miles, in order to be part of the historical moments.

The funeral cortege moved along the East Coast road toward Berbice amidst people solemnly waving, tears and sorrow from villagers opening up their hearts, throwing rice and flower on the mortal remains of this fallen warrior. On two occasions, the rou-



Relatives of the Enmore Martyrs

tine was halted – once at Buxton where the people implored a temporary stay of the procession so that they could supraliminally and earnestly pay due respect to a man beloved by one and all, and secondly, at the Albion viewing which caused the cremation to be postponed because of the overwhelming number of citizenry demanding their last glimpse of the people's leader.

*En route*, the procession stopped at Enmore for a short interval. It was at the ENMORE MARTYRS FUNERAL in 1948 where Jagan is reputed to soliloquize to commit himself and unreservedly plunge into the political arena:

***“. . . I could not restrain my tears. There was no turning back. There and then I made a silent pledge – I would dedicate my entire life to the cause of the struggle of the Guianese people against bondage and exploitation.”***

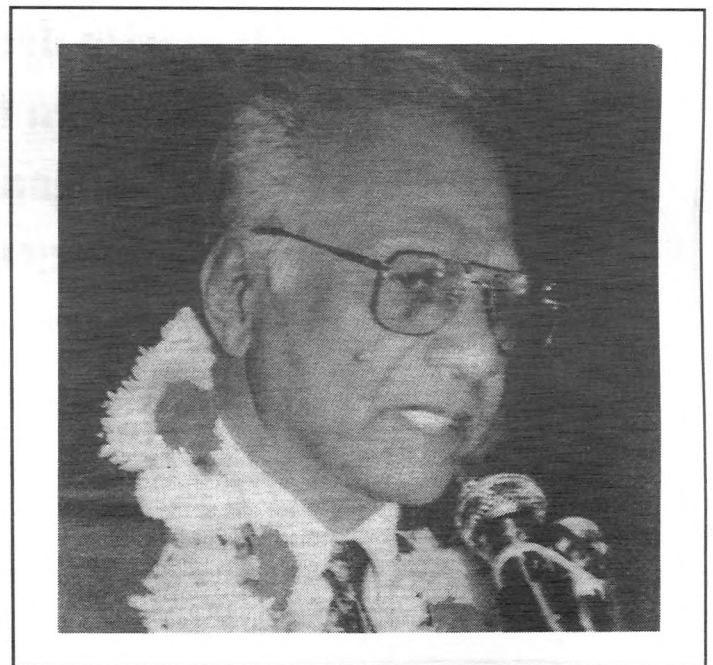




Photo: Lal Samwaru

### Teaming Numbers Awaiting The Final Moment At Babu John

THAT MORNING OF THE CREMATION, TENS OF THOUSANDS OF people – the largest number of people ever assembled in the history of Guyana – wended their way toward the Port Mourant site of *Babu John* (Cheddi Jagan was born in Port Mourant Estate from humble sugar estate workers). People, young and old, from all strata traveled by cars, trucks, bicycles and on foot.

The atmosphere was calm and movement was purposeful. People spoke in subdued tones. The Police, crew of the ferry and organizers, to their credit, performed Herculean tasks above and beyond the normal, in efficiently managing the flow of traffic in an orderly manner that was absolutely amazing, especially having never experienced such huge numbers of people.

At Babu John, the sea of people swelled. The sun was brilliant and the wind was gusty and balmy, fanning our cheeks and augmenting the graceful swaying of the fronds of the coconut palms in the distance. The military accompaniment and formalities were like clock work, the approach of the funeral procession sublime and majestic amidst absolute quiet except for the marching music. Movements, self-regulated, were minimal, save for the press and photographers of which group I was unashamedly a part.

At this time also the sunny sky gradually gave way to clouds and a light drizzle. At the actual cremation site were a few attendants – the A.D.C, military personnel and officials – the widower Janet, the two children and grandchildren of Cheddi and Janet Jagan, spouses, brothers and sisters of Cheddi and other relatives.

RALPH RAMKARAN DELIVERED A DEFINING EULOGY, FOLLOWED by sermons from the Hindu, Christian and Muslim communities – a tradition that Jagan initiated and promulgated at national and/or official functions – a kind of equal opportunity for all religions. The rain continued in weak refrain and, as the pyre was ceremoniously lit by Joey and Nadira, its downpour increased in intensity as if to match the ferocity of the raging flames, wanting to obliterate the consuming fire and save the mortal remains from further destruction. Some opined that such tears from above was a divine omen; and stories will undoubtedly be told long after of this event-

ful coincidence.

There was a VIP tent for the distinguished people; but the majority of the gathering were either standing or squatting on the 'grass-roots' carpet of bare ground, incredulously quiet, stoically absorbing the heavy downpours. Emotions were welling up noticeably restrained – no in the crowd openly cried, except the grandchildren who were in visible emotional states of unrestrained tears, hugging their parents for comfort. Not a word of discord was ever uttered. One has to be there and have the full experience to totally grasp the mood of this most auspicious occasion. The facial expressions are difficult to describe – sad, blank, perplexed, puzzled, doubtful, mystified, lost and, occasionally, with forced reciprocating smiles.

As the consuming flames reached a peak, the rains ceased. There was a slight murmuring of voices. Slowly, the people started to retrace their footsteps, still with the indescribable expressions, but most deliberately delayed an exodus, probably hoping that the finality would not come.

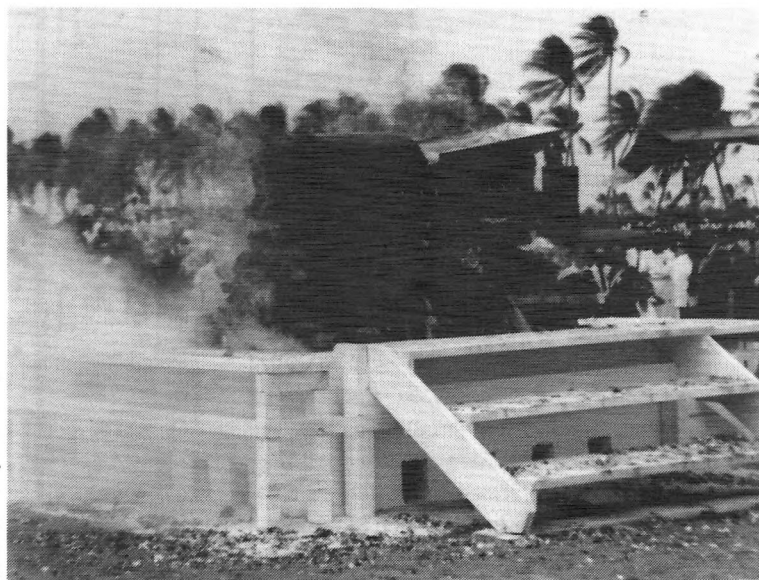


Photo: Gary Girdhari

### The Final Hours