

CHEDDI JAGAN

Born March 22, 1918 Died March 6, 1997

(Married to Janet Rosenberg)

It was Monroe Gilmour's email of the 3 April saying:

"Hi Phyllis, How are you? This is a fascinating story about Guyana in South America I knew nothing about! (We don't even know about our neighbours here in the US of A!) A Hindu-Jewish first couple in South America! Love Monroe."

Here, Monroe, is a map of your neighbour:

This got me thinking. I remembered that Cheddi Jagan sent greetings to Natal Indian Congress (NIC) conferences in the early fifties.

An Indian name all the way from Guyana! Was he a second generation indentured labour from India?

Here is an article illustrating this great man from a website dedicated to him and his wife Janet (www.cheddi.org):

"The year was 1918, when on March 22, in a rural village in Guyana, the remarkable life of an ordinary sugar worker's son began.

His name was Cheddi Jagan, and before his time was over he would change the course of his country's history by first struggling to liberate it from British colonial domination, then by waging a 28 year long struggle for the restoration of freedom and democracy, and finally by ascending to the Presidency as Guyana's first democratically elected Head of State.





Footprints

“Alongside Dr. Jagan in all these struggles was his American born wife, lifelong friend and political partner, Janet, who left the USA for life in Guyana where she remained until her death on March 28, 2009

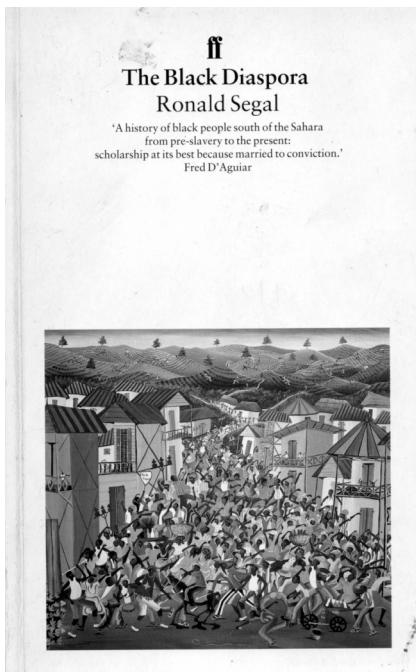
“They were the founders of the country's first mass political movement and unquestionably the leading political figures in the history of Guyana for over the last 66 years.

“Through their tireless efforts, the small country of Guyana experienced a wealth of benefits, social advancement and economic prosperity.

“As international figures they are well known for their fight for peace and freedom around the globe. **Dr. Jagan's ideas on globalisation and debt relief, as well as his proposals for a New Global Human Order, were adopted by the United Nations General Assembly on November 14, 2002.** As such, he deserves credit as a major figure in modern history.”

I sought help from Ronald Segal's writings which I encountered in my research for my book on the 156/7 treason trialists - “156 Hands That Built South Africa.”

I remembered that Segal had written profusely about the black diaspora and his book (“The Black Diaspora”) included a section on British Guyana, the home of Cheddi Jagan!



And here he is on page 189: (I do suggest you read “Racial Politics in Guyana” from page 186 before you start on our icon.)

Excerpt from Black Diaspora:

“Cheddi Jagan, whose father was a ‘driver,’ in command of cane-cutting gangs on a sugar estate, was lifted above the expectations of all but a very few local East Indians by the effort of his parents. Sent to Queen’s College in Georgetown, the leading secondary school, he left in 1936 for further education in the United States, where he worked his way first through Howard University in Washington, D.C., and then through the Northwestern University Dental School in Chicago.

Footprints

“By 1942, when he received his degree in dentistry, he had come to regard himself as something of a Marxist and was involved with Janet Rosenberg, whose own more determined opinions were closer to the line of the Communist Party.

“In the summer of 1943 they married, and Janet followed her husband to Georgetown, where she soon won over his parents to the strangeness of having a white daughter-in-law. Her training as a nurse was useful to him in the dental practice he established, but dentistry was not the preoccupation of either. Along with others, they formed the Political Affairs Committee in 1946, to prepare for the launch of a political party that, equipped with the theory of “scientific socialism” would unite black and East Indian workers in confronting colonial rule.

“For the elections of 1947, the first since 1935 and with a much less restrictive franchise than had then applied, the Committee fielded three candidates. Of these only Cheddi Jagan had been successful, in a constituency where support from the large East Indian component of the electorate was augmented with a black vote mobilized by the black school teacher Sydney King. Using his platform in the legislature to assail the dominance of the sugar and bauxite companies in the colony, Jagan attracted a mounting popular following.

“In April 1948, discontent among the sugar workers surfaced in a widespread and protracted strike. In June, five workers were shot dead by police during a demonstration on the Enmore estate. The Jagans led a huge protest march the sixteen miles from the estate to Georgetown. The time was fast approaching for the launch of a political party, and the prevailing view in the Political Affairs Committee was that a suitable black should be found to hold a high position in it as confirmation of its interracial commitment.

“Linden Forbes Sampson Burnham, whose father was headmaster of a Methodist primary school, had gone to Queen’s College and won the sole government scholarship for university education in Britain, where he had received his law degree from the University of London in 1947. Much affected by the racism he encountered in Britain, as Jagan had been by his own experience in the United States, he had become a political activist, serving as president of the West Indian Student Union in 1947 and indicating a loosely socialist affiliation.”

You can continue reading until page 291.

You should know that our country honoured Chedi Jagan as indicated in the article below (from a Georgetown newspaper, CMC dated Tuesday, May 10, 2005) under the heading:

South Africa honours Cheddi Jagan

“GEORGETOWN, Guyana - South Africa has posthumously honoured Guyana's late President Cheddi Jagan with its highest national award to distinguished international personalities - **Order of Companions of O R Tambo**.

The award is named after the longest-serving leader of the African National Congress (ANC), President Oliver R Tambo, who is credited with playing a major role in the growth and development of the international movement against apartheid in South Africa and racism generally.

The O R Tambo award in gold to Dr Jagan for his "exceptional contribution to the struggle against racial oppression and colonial exploitation", was presented at the weekend in Georgetown to his widow and former Guyana President Janet Jagan.

It was first received by General Secretary of the ruling People's Progressive Party (PPP), Donald Ramotar, from South African President Thabo Mbeki at a ceremony in Johannesburg last month when a similar award was also presented posthumously to two former icons of the Non-Aligned Movement - India's first Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru, and Indonesia's founding President Sukarno.

In accepting the award at the PPP headquarters, Freedom House, Janet Jagan, who was unable to attend the official ceremony in South Africa, said that she was quite pleased to accept what was a recognition of Cheddi Jagan's struggle for independence and democracy, linked to the international struggles against racism and oppression.

Late former Jamaican prime minister, Michael Manley, was also posthumously awarded the Order of Companions of O R Tambo in South Africa, last year.

Manley, who died in 1997, served as prime minister from 1972 to 1980 and again from 1989 to 1992.

The elements of the OR Tambo award, given for "**active expression of solidarity and support to South Africa**", include a walking stick entwined with a golden snake, as well as a neck badge and a miniature and lapel rosette."

“The World Guide (1999) A View from the South” gives the statistics of the island – printed below:

STATISTICS

DEMOGRAPHY

Population: 838,000 (1996) **Annual growth:** 0.6% (1980/1996)
Estimates for year 2000: 900,000 **Annual growth to year 2000:** 1% (1994/2000) **Urban Population:** 35.9% (1996) **Children per woman:** 2.4 (1996).

HEALTH

Life expectancy at birth: 64 years (1996) male: 60 years (1994) female: 67 years (1994) **Infant mortality:** 60 per 1,000 (1996)
Under-5 child mortality: 83 per 1,000 (1996) **Safe water:** 61% (1990/96).

EDUCATION

Literacy: 98% (1995) male : 99% (1995) female: 98% (1995)
School enrolment : Primary total: 112% (1990/95) male : 113% (1990/95) female: 111% (1990/95) Secondary: male : 56% (1990/95) female: 59% (1990/95)

COMMUNICATIONS

100 newspapers, 491 radios, 40 TV sets and 53 main telephone lines per 1,000 people (1994) **Books:** 4 new titles per 100,000 people (1992/94).

ECONOMY

Currency: 140.5 Guyana dollars = \$ 1 (1995) **Cereal imports:** 50 metric tons (1994) **Food import dependency:** 7% (1994)
Fertilizer use: 302 kgs per ha (1994) **Development aid received:** \$ 88 million (1995) \$ 106 per capita (1995) 19.2% of GNP (1994).

HDI (rank / value) 104 / 0.649 (1994)

For those thinking that indentured labour was the sole domain of Natal, refer to page v of “Girmit Tales” by Neelan Govender (launched jointly with “More Footprints that Shaped our World” by Naidoo, on March 21, 2009):

“The Indian Indenture system started from the end of slavery in 1834 when thousands of Indians were transported to various colonies of European powers to provide labour for the (mainly sugar plantations), under the indenture system.

“ Between 1842 and 1879 a total of 525 482 Indians emigrated

to the British and French Colonies.”

Interestingly, *The Whitby* sailed from Port Calcutta for British Guyana, arriving in Berbice on 5 May 1838 – a full 22 years before indentured labourers reached Natal.

It is important that the study of indentured labour be undertaken in its global footprint. But this is our story of Chedi whom we salute. We thank him and Janet for their solidarity and their work for peace.

Phyllis Naidoo
 4 April, 2009
 Durban

Indian indentured labour importing colonies

Name of Colony	Number of Labourers Transported
Mauritius	453,063
British Guiana	238,909
Trinidad	143,939
Jamaica	36,412
Grenada	3,200
St Lucia	4,350
Natal	152,184
St Kitts	337
St Vincent	2,472
Reunion	26,507
Surinam	34,304
Fiji	60,965
East Africa	32,000
Seychelles	6,315