

Makandal Daaga. . . A True Visionary

An Example to the Youth



one's understanding of oneself and one's environment and subsequently using this knowledge to act positively. A true visionary, Makandal Daaga organised NJAC in order to bring to realisation the people's dreams of a new and just society. That is, a society in which there is people power, whereby the masses determine how the nation's wealth will be utilised. To bring about this transformation, the Chief Servant proclaimed that the people needed to have political, cultural and individual consciousness.

However, due to the lack of ideological development of the masses at the time Makandal Daaga and NJAC embarked on a public education campaign. Public education resulted in the corner blocks, schools and meeting places of the working class masses being transformed into centres for learning. Through the extensive distribution of books and NJAC's

"We are saying that we want an education that is relevant...we want an education that is relevant to our cultural values, an education that tells us who we are and develops our sense of identity; we want an education that can give us a sense of the collective so that we can work with the togetherness we need to build a nation; we want an education that helps our people, African and Indian, to understand each other so that there can be true Brotherhood ..." Makandal Daaga.

The statement above is an excerpt of a speech given to a mass public meeting on Sunday 26th November, 1972, by the Chief Servant Bro. Makandal Daaga to thousands packed in at Palms Club, San Fernando, for NJAC's All South Rally. Thirty three years after, the message is still relevant, line for line. Such were the thoughts and ideals of a youthful Makandal Daaga and the young and vibrant leadership of the National Joint Action Committee throughout the 1970s. NJAC, under the leadership of Makandal Daaga, was able to mobilise the youth throughout the country but also instilled in them a level of consciousness that resulted in them demanding change at all levels in the society.

Youth Consciousness

Consciousness can be understood as

many newspapers the masses began to understand what their rights were and started to demand social change.

As a result of this ideological focus, the masses answered the call of the Chief Servant when he stated that the only way for the people to take the struggle for justice to a higher level required that they mobilise themselves and act. Therefore, under the banner of NJAC the people of Trinidad called for control of the commanding heights of the economy; for control of the banks, the petroleum industry, the sugar industry and all the sources of wealth that were still owned by foreign interests.

Youth Today

Today the National Youth Action Committee is motivated and inspired by those developments made by NJAC under the leadership of the Chief Servant Bro. Makandal Daaga throughout the 1970s. This is because looking at the ideological transformation that the society made under NJAC, it shows that given proper orientation and consciousness the youth can be a force for positive change and development. This is strengthened by the fact that youth played an important role both in the leadership and membership of the organisation throughout the period.

The history taught in schools unfortunately omits the contribution of Makandal Daaga and so most of our school age readers may find it interesting to note that 35 years ago youth their age kept the people's movement alive at points when it seemed lost. Our counterparts in tertiary education can also appreciate the fact Makandal Daaga himself a former President of the UWI Students' Guild Council led a significant number of students from UWI St. Augustine into the leadership of the movement. Furthermore, if our youth were taught their history, our brothers and sisters on the blocks would know that during the seventies, the blocks acted as schools for ideological learning whereby all the literature needed for development was read. The education of our fellow youth living by the blocks was key to NJAC, which is evidenced by the fact that the Chief Servant first mobilised his hometown of Laventille.

The Way Forward

NYAC strongly believes that we the youth can learn from the past lessons of our brothers and sisters. This is so because in the seventies, youth mobilised thousands of people of all ages, classes and professions on issues that pertained to the national agenda. This at a time when the masses felt powerless to effect change on a national scale.

Analysing our nation today, we as youth realise that we face many obstacles to our development ranging from racial misconceptions, unemployment, differing economic levels and for some of us poverty. However, when we compare the present situation with that of 1970, we realise that the youth can emerge with a positive agenda for national development, even in the face of adversity.

At NYAC we uphold the view that along the guidelines of true people's power, the NJAC principles of mobilisation, consultation and participation must be instilled into the psyche of our future leaders. This way we can ensure that the vision of Makandal Daaga and NJAC which was forged in the 1970s of a new and just society could emerge.

**Prepare and Protect
the Youth**