

Smt. Krishnammal Jagannathan

Joint Recipient of Jamnalal Bajaj Award for Constructive Work-1988

To overcome the difficulties confronting a Harijan, and that too a lady, in the caste ridden society like ours and to attain a position of stature is not an easy task. But Smt. Krishnammal Jagannathan has achieved that rare feat. Brought up in an environment in which she received the help of a Gandhian female doctor in her young days, Krishnammal not only completed her graduation but also went on to acquire teaching qualifications.

Her marriage to Shri Jagannathan has been a real union. Keeping constant company to her husband, Krishnammal took part in every notable Sarvodaya Movement, including the Total Revolution initiated by Jayaprakash Narayan. She played a leading role in carving out an effective alternative to the communist technique of violent peasant struggle in terms of the Gandhian technique of Satyagraha and fast. On many occasions, like the Valivalam Satyagraha and the Bodhgaya fast by ignorant Harijan ladies, Krishnammal was able to show that the Gandhian alternative can even become viable.

During the last 35 years, she has dedicated herself almost solely to the cause of the landless Harijans. She worked with patience and courage and moved from house to house, organising the landless Harijan labourers and motivated them to put up non-violent resistance for recovering the land illegally held by landlords and various temples and monasteries. The work was particularly concentrated in the Thanjavur District of Tamil Nadu and Bodhgaya region of Bihar. She is probably the only female worker in India who has steadfastly worked for the solution of the land problem, both from the point of view of acquiring land for the landless, and, developing the acquired lands further in an integrated manner.

Although a firm believer in the Gandhian and Sarvodaya ideology, Smt. Jagannathan is also very practical. This is evident from the fact that, when she realised that getting the lands by way of donation and merely distributing them among the landless was not enough and was also a slow and unreliable process, she devised a workable alternative for better results. This device consisted in purchasing the land from the landlords with the help of Bank loans and, after distributing them equitably among the landless Harijans, organising the latter for co-operative cultivation and integrated development. The efforts being made by LAFTI, an organisation started by her to put the alternative device into action are regarded as a noteworthy step in social engineering.

Krishnammal has had no permanent home. Her identification with the poor masses, especially Harijan women, has been complete. It is no surprise then that Krishnammal has become the Dear' Akka' to the common people in Thanjavur and other places.

By conferring on Smt. Krishnammal Jagannathan the Jamnalal Bajaj Award for outstanding contribution in the field of Constructive Work, the Trustees of the Foundation feel happy in honouring a woman who boldly confronted social adversity to attain liberation for her and pioneered innovative ways for bettering the condition of the landless Harijans.

