

Shri P. Gopinathan Nair

Recipient of Jamnalal Bajaj Award for Constructive Work-2005

Born: 7th July, 1922 B. Sc., University of Travancore

Shri Gopinathan Nair joined the freedom struggle at a young age and, even while he was a student, he participated in the Quit India Movement. In 1944, he organized the Trivandrum Student Settlement, an Ashram Hostel and national student centre, in which 35 selected college students with an attitude for service lived and worked in a disciplined way in all activities of the Constructive Movement. During 1946-47, while he was in Shantiniketan, Nair observed Gandhiji in Calcutta fasting in protest against the communal fury which was raging there, and was amazed at the manner in which the hostilities between the Hindus and Muslims melted away. This incident motivated Nair to give up his research work and to plunge into the field of constructive work. As the chief tattwa pracharak of the Kerala Gandhi Smarak Nidhi, he organized many centres and conducted study courses for students and Tattwa Prachar workers. The special contribution of Nair to Gandhian Constructive work was a unique programme of Camp movement encompassing the entire village and involving campers in a conscious effort to study and understand the life and message of the Mahatma. In this movement, hundreds of such camps were organized for over 15 continuous years from 1952, and a very large number of constructive workers were trained to carry out social service like road construction, village latrines, Bhoodan and Gramadan work, work relating to prohibition, etc. These camps created a revolutionary perspective of the Gandhian constructive programme among large sections of the people. It paved the way for inculcating a new value system and the creation of a new social order.

Nair was one of the early Bhoodan Yojana workers of Kerala and was one of the organizers of Vinobaji's Padayatra which ended in a Sammelan at Kalady. Similarly, Nair organized a camp at Meladi in Calicut district to prepare workers for the difficult work of Gramadan and motivated his workers to take up Vinobaji's challenge to persuade middle class people to accept the concept, and thereby 50 Gramadans resulted. The Gramadan work was followed up by development programmes like Khadi and village Industries, debt-relief work, agricultural development through Gramasabhas, fair-price shops, etc.

Another major activity of Nair was Shanti Sena work for promoting peace and harmony and reduction of communal tension. In this regard, mention must be made about his efforts to peacefully combat Naxalite violence in the Kilimanoor area in 1970, his Peace Committee work during the Hindu-Muslim riot in and around Tellicherry, his work in the Bangladesh Refugee camps in 1971 with the help of the Mukthi- Bahini for creating a feeling of understanding and friendliness for India, his work with a group of Sarvodaya workers in 1984 in the Punjab and his meeting there with prominent Sikh and Hindu leaders, and the yeoman's service rendered by him as part of the Kuttanad Peace Project during 1971-1976.

Mention must also be made of Nair's work to spread the concepts of basic education and Acharyakul in 3 districts with the help of prominent educationists and cultural leaders in Kerala. Nair also organized prohibition campaigns in several areas and was the convenor of the Cow Protection Committee in Kerala at a time when Vinobaji had taken up the anti-cow slaughter campaign. He was the Chairman of the Sarva Seva Sangh in 1989.

Nair has been recognized by scholars as a dependable authority on all aspects of Gandhi-Vinoba thought. He has written a large number of articles and introductions to over fifteen books on Gandhiji.

When a Godhra-like situation developed in the village of Marad in Calicut district in 2003-04 which snowballed into highly inflammable communal discord, the Chief Minister of Kerala chose Shri Nair as the mediator to solve the issue. Shri Nair moved to centre-stage with confidence and arrived at a speedy settlement to the astonishment and joy of everybody.

The work done by Nair during the last 60 years in the Constructive Movement is remarkable in its variety, intensive in its scope and expansive in its coverage, and was calculated to propagate with commitment and sincerity the ideals of Mahatma Gandhi. The impact of his work is not only confined to Kerala but has touched several other States because of his association with the Sarva Seva Sangh, the Gandhi Smarak Nidhi, the Gandhi Peace Foundation and other Gandhian institutions.

