

Smt. Snehlata Nath

Recipient of the Award for the Application of Science and Technology for Rural Development – 2013

Born: December 27, 1965

Smt. Snehlata Nath has been working in the field of eco-development, livelihood and sustainability among tribal people of the Nilgiri Biosphere Reserve. At the same time, she has inter connected these to bring progression in the lives of the community while preserving their traditional way of life.

Smt. Nath is one of the Directors of Keystone Foundation which was established in 1993. She believes that environment care and pro-active involvement of the adivasis, addressing their needs through their own knowledge and experience and providing livelihood opportunities is the key to development of the tribal communities.

To address these concerns, Keystone Foundation initiated work across eight centres in the forested tri-junction of Kerala, Tamil Nadu and Karnataka. The idea was to initiate activities related to eco-development which enhance the well being of the community and promote biodiversity. Projects against cash crop culture (i.e. tea and coffee) and to encourage organic farming (to promote millets production) for the consumption of the tribal families is one example.

Smt. Nath and the team of Keystone focus on the core aspects of ecology and economy like developing appropriate technology for mountain systems, biodiversity and indigenous communities, forests, water and land, livelihoods, green enterprise and environmental governance. Some of the need-based, traditional and appropriate technologies designed and introduced by the Foundation have eased the drudgery of the villagers and helped in producing good quality and value-added agricultural and forest produce locally.

These inventions and adaptations include fruit/amla cutter, wax melting unit, wax sheet maker, solar wax extractor, honey filter, honey extractor, seed drier, soap press, soap mixture, soap making equipment, solar tunnel drier, solar tent, introducing mid-rib cutting technique to drain honey, beekeeping tools-swarm catch net, conservation and sustainable honey harvest practice, pollen removing technique, millet de-stoning machine, millet de-husker, solar powered water pumping system, etc. This has also promoted employment locally and increased opportunity for labour thereby stopping migration to urban areas.

To reach out to the community, Keystone Foundation's centers in the Biosphere Reserve promote capacity building, product and market development, community self reliance, value addition, income generation and fair trade practices. The Production Centre Development are centres or village units which are support systems of the Foundation. Here, implementation and research go hand in hand. Smt. Snehlata Nath strives to combine ecologically sensitive development with rural enterprise. Today tribal communities have formed their groups and are managing their operation successfully through the units with the guidance and supervision of Keystone's technical and marketing team. The plan of action for the future regarding these rural technologies is to build an in-house facility to manufacture these as per orders.

Natural resources like honey and bees wax have been transformed by the application of these technologies. The tribal people are involved in forest collection and women are now trained in value addition activities like manufacturing bee wax soaps, lip balm, organic fruit jams and pickles, etc. which are promoted and marketed under the brand name Last Forest. Other livelihood activities of the villagers include organic farming and enhancing crop productivity, preparing traditional medicine from forest gatherings, soap making, revival and promotions of indigenous crafts viz.

Toda embroidery, Kota pottery, Kurumba paintings. The women are empowered and actively participate in the overall socio-economic development of their community.

Keystone Foundation has helped villagers and farmers to promote soil and moisture conservation and organic farming practices. Projects provide insights into the ecology of forest fruits, resin yielding trees, cultivation of nutrition rich crops, water, wetland and mountain ecosystems. The conservation program is implemented through the area resource centres where communities take on the role of monitoring the quality and changes of their ecosystem. Keystone Foundation, with the support of the tribal people have also collected and preserved indigenous, traditional and rare seeds of the region by forming a seed bank.

The Foundation, over the years has provided extensive training to various villagers, NGOs, government departments, etc. on several topics ranging from sustainable honey harvesting practices, beekeeping, value addition of Non Timber Forest Produces (NTFPs), organic farming to ecologically sustainable harvesting of NTFPs, Forest Rights Act for indigenous communities and advocacy. Training in Management (accounting, stock keeping) and business dealings is also conducted for the benefit of villagers.

All the activities are focused on local manpower development and capacity building. Keystone has reached and impacted 5000 families of the 9 tribal communities across 89 adivasi hamlets with the help of a young and cohesive team of 50 volunteers and 35 staff members comprising professionals and local and adivasi people. Smt. Nath also works through NGO networks in Chhattisgarh, Odisha, Rajasthan, Maharashtra, Meghalaya, Andhra Pradesh wherein similar work is initiated. The work is concentrated only on adivasi/tribal communities across these areas. Ramakrishna Mission specially recognised her for her outstanding contribution towards making a difference in the society.

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Smt. Vidhya Das

Recipient of the Award for Development and Welfare of Women and Children – 2013

Born: May 22, 1959

Smt. Vidhya Das, through Agragamayee, has been working, since over 25 years, in the areas of policy advocacy, socio-economic and human rights of the tribal people, natural resource management, formal and non-formal education, awareness generation and skill development involving tribal people's participation and mobilisation. She is fighting for the rights and empowerment of some of the most downtrodden, tribal communities residing in the backward areas of Kalahandi, Bolangir, Koraput, Rayagada districts of Odisha. Agragamee is known for its unequivocal stand for the rights and justice of the tribal, dalit and other underprivileged and exploited communities.

One of the most successful efforts of Smt. Vidhya Das has been her mobilization of tribal women to demand rights over minor forest produce. Through her close involvement she has been able to mobilize and inspire tribal women to undertake a sustained and systematic struggle on this issue, which eventually led to a policy change at the State level, ensuring that the rights for minor forest produce were handed to the Panchayats in all the tribal areas of the State. This resulted in the historic broom revolution which transformed the lives of the tribes.

The understanding and vision of Smt. Das on the socio-economic factors of exploitation and the need for freedom from the economic dependence led to the formation of Ama Sangathan, the most successful tribal women's organization in Odisha. It is a federation of tribal women's organizations which has been able to enter into the State and National market for agricultural and minor forest produce from the tribal regions. It provides employment to more than 100 tribal women. The women have learnt the technology for value addition and food processing and are supplying pulses for the mid-day meal program of the government in Kashipur block. Ama Sangathan's entry into the market has enabled them to eliminate exploitation and keep a check on monopoly of the petty traders. The model for collective enterprise with tribal women's collectives are being taken up by different government organisations as also voluntary organisations.

Smt. Vidhya Das's persistent and painstaking efforts have encouraged around 5000 tribal women of 200 villages, across 5 districts to organize groups to address issues of discrimination, exploitation, corruption and violation of basic human rights. Her efforts to create awareness on the governmental programs and services available to the people have led to women demanding accountability of the schemes.

Anti-alcohol movement in 12 Panchayats in Rayagada and Kalahandi districts has led to the closing of the liquor breweries in these areas.

Smt. Das's efforts for leadership development amongst the tribal women has resulted in the members of Ama Sangathan representing tribal women in State and District level Advisory Bodies, including the Joint Forest Management Committee, Tribal Advisory Counsel. Tribal women have also successfully contested elections at local level occupying positions such as Block Chairperson, Sarpanch and Samiti Member.

She has mobilised tribal women in 60 villages to protect, rejuvenate and revitalise the commons. More than 5000 acres of upland commons have been reclaimed by women's groups in 120 villages which now provide income and firewood support for the women of these villages.

Smt. Das has helped tribal farmers adopt natural farming methods for cultivation. This has helped reduce soil erosion by eighty per cent and has significantly improved soil fertility.

In the field of tribal education, not only has Smt. Das been able to mobilize women to ensure that girls get an opportunity to go to the school, but she has also made systematic and sustained effort to mobilise resources for educating the tribal children in 210 villages in the tribal regions of Odisha. The models of language and methodology of teaching mathematics developed by her are being

followed in different primary schools via various voluntary organizations in the State. 5000 tribal girls and boys now have access to primary education and higher education due to the efforts in implementing non-formal education by Smt. Vidhya Das and her organization. 600 tribal girls from villages with zero literacy have been able to have qualitative primary education from the Agramee Schools.

Smt. Das is recognised for her numerous books and publications. She has extensively written on tribal socio-economic issues in local and national newspapers, and social science journals to draw national and international attention to the injustices against tribal people. Some of the books published are Human Rights, Inhuman Wrongs; Chronicle of a Struggle; Stories from Beyond, Food Security reports from Tribal Orissa.

Smt. Vidhya Das is Advisor to the Supreme Court Commission on Right to Food. Since her appointment, in 2006, she has brought several irregularities on the issue of right to food to the notice of the Commission. Smt. Das in 2000 was specially recognised with the YWCA Role of Honour for her unstinting work.

A strong line of leadership within the village community has been created. The villages are made self reliant with the application of capacity building, sustainable and low cost technologies, market linkages.

For over twenty five years Smt. Vidhya Das has directed her energy and efforts so as to enable the tribal and rural women and folks to attain better life and livelihood with dignity.

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Mr. Jean-Marie Muller

Recipient of the International Award for Promoting Gandhian Values Outside India – 2013

Born: October 21, 1939

In 1972 Mr. Jean-Marie Muller took the initiative to create the MAN (Non-Violent Alternative Movement). Its mission is to put forward the specific contribution of non-violence in the everyday life, education and social and political struggles. MAN promotes the principles and the methods of non-violent strategy, to support a positive resolution of the interpersonal, intercommunity or international conflicts. By thinking, acting and training, MAN thus seeks to promote justice and freedom. Mr. Muller reaffirms his conviction that humankind will not be able to meet the challenges that the world presents today if it does not follow Gandhi's intuitions, as he invites us to revisit our inheritance and our historic traditions, and to become aware of our compliance with the reign of violence, kept in place by their own culture.

Professional life and official missions

A professor of philosophy until 1970, Mr. Jean-Marie Muller left teaching to dedicate himself full time to the study of non-violence and its promulgation in his writings, demonstrations and speaking. For almost 50 years, he has been a spokesperson and facilitator of the Movement for a Non-Violent Alternative, which he founded in 1974. In 1983, the French Minister of Defence asked Mr. Jean-Marie Muller to conduct a study on non-violent civil defence. This study was published in 1985 by the Foundation for National Defence Studies under the title "La Dissuasion Civile" (Civil Deterrent).

In 1984, Mr. Jean-Marie Muller participated in the creation of the Research Institute for the Non-violent Resolution of Conflicts (IRNC). He is the Director of Studies at the Institute. Between 1985 and 1992, Mr. Jean-Marie Muller was a lecturer at the Institute of Political Studies at the University of Lyon where he taught a course on the strategy of non-violent action.

He writes regularly for the quarterly Non-violent Alternatives.

Conscientious objection

In 1967, Mr. Jean-Marie Muller was an officer in the reserves. During this tenure he was asked to be a conscientious objector. After the refusal to the authorities, he surrendered his commission to the Ministry of Defence. On January 8th, 1969 Mr. Muller appeared in court in Orleans and was given a three month suspended sentence, a fine of a thousand francs and the loss of his civil rights for five years. In this process Mr. Muller expressed his willingness to assume his civic responsibility through non-violent civil defence.

In 1982, he participated in a consulting committee created by the Prime Minister to provide a report on the feasibility of a new law on conscientious objection. Among the reforms that were ultimately adopted was the possibility of reservists obtaining legal status as conscientious objectors.

Public Activism

In June 1970, Mr. Jean-Marie Muller undertook a two-week hunger strike with Jean Desbois to protest the sale of sixteen Mirage military planes to the Brazilian military regime. This action had a big impact on public opinion and received the support of numerous movements and celebrities.

In 1973 he participated in the Peace Battalion in the Pacific to protest French nuclear testing.

In October 1978, Mr. Jean-Marie Muller participated in a hunger strike for four days with Lanza del Vasto, Jacques de Bollardiere, Jean Toulat, Jean Goss and four farmers from Larzac to inform the public and the authorities about the extension of the military camps planned at the time in Larzac, Francois Miterr and visited them and pledged his solidarity.

In August 2012, he participated with 40 other people in Paris in an international for the abolition of nuclear weapons.

Travel, meetings and training

Mr. Jean-Marie Muller has participated in many meetings and seminars, delivered lectures and has facilitated many training sessions throughout the world to promote non-violence.

Mr. Jean-Marie Muller participated in the World Congress of Peace Forces in Moscow in October 1973. During his stay in Greece in March 1975 he lectured and attended meetings on non-violence.

In 1988, he participated as Consultant to a Mission to Nicaragua to develop non-violent approaches with the Sandinist government. This mission was an initiative of the Peace University of San Jose (Costa Rica).

In September 1990, Mr. Jean-Marie Muller was invited by the Lebanese organization Cultural Social Action to Lebanon where he participated in the first training session of social educators in Lebanon.

Mr. Jean-Marie Muller in April 1994 when in Washington D.C met the Haitian President Jean-Bertrand Aristide along with various politicians in exile from Haiti in order to facilitate a non-violent resistance in Haiti against the military regime of General Cedras.

Mr. Jean-Marie Muller participated in the Resistant to War International in Porec (Croatia), held every three years.

In December 2004, Mr. Jean-Marie Muller travelled to Colombia to speak at an international seminar organized by the city of Bogota on the theme "Non-violence and civil resistance as instruments for reconciliation". He addressed on the theme "Option of non-violence in social and political struggles" at the World Social Forum in Brazil.

In 2006 in Amman, Jordan, Mr. Jean-Marie Muller facilitated a training session on non-violence for Iraqis working to promote human rights in civil society and travelled to Jordan to conduct training sessions in non-violence for Palestinians, Iraqis, Syrians and Lebanese.

In 2012, Mr. Jean-Marie Muller travelled to Lebanon where he facilitated a training session at the Arab University for Non-violence.

Work and travel to promote and update the philosophy of Gandhi

Mr. Jean-Marie Muller was introduced to non-violence by Lanza del Vasto. He spoke many times at meetings or summer schools at the Ark in La Borie Noble (France), at the Gandhi colloquium Lanza del Vasto, A Genius for their Time in Toulouse in 2006.

In 1977 Mr. Jean-Marie Muller met Loknayak Jayaprakash Narayan during his visit to India. In 2001, Mr. Jean-Marie Muller travelled again to India to visit Gandhi's Ashram in Ahmedabad.

On December 5th 2011, Mr. Jean-Marie Muller spoke at the Sorbonne during the Colloquium Gandhi in the Contemporary Globalization, organized by Fabrice Flippo.

Mr. Jean-Marie Muller has written numerous books on the philosophy of non-violence, the strategy of non-violent action, the culture of non-violence, the civil non-violent defence, the civil peace intervention, as well as on the right and duty of civil disobedience. In 40 years Mr. Jean-Marie Muller has considerably contributed to the history of non-violence through his books on the Mahatma, as well as his many lectures on Gandhi throughout the world.

Mr. Muller's writings and publications portray constant discoveries of many powerful truths and his active experience. Some of his writings and publications include:

- The Gospel of Non-violence (L'Évangile de la non-violence)
- The Challenge of Non-violence (Le défi de la non-violence, 1976, translated into Spanish)
- The Meaning of Non-violence, translated into Italian, Spanish, Arabic, and Kurdish
- The Strategy of Non-violent Action
- To Het Rid of the Military-industrial Complex
- Gandhi, A Craftsman of Non-violence, in collaboration with other authors

- Gandhi, the Wisdom of Non-violence
- Understanding Non-violence
- The Principle of Non-violence, a Philosophical Itinerary, translated into Portuguese and Italian
- Gandhi the Insurgent, the Epic of the Salt March, translated into Arabic and published in Syria
- Non-violence in Education, translated into English, Spanish, Brazilian and Arabic
- Gandhi, Sage and Strategist of Non-violence

In 1987, Mr. Jean Marie Muller visited Poland and met with the main Solidarnosc leader. His book "Stratégie de l'action Non-violente" is translated in Polish.

Mr. Jean-Marie Muller was also the adviser and proofreader of Guillaume Gamblin when he published The Strength of Autonomy – Gandhi: A Precursor of Degrowth?

Two actions led by Mr. Jean-Marie Muller and the MAN are currently leading actions on the major issue of concern to the world, viz.

1 Nuclear disarmament, and more particularly the campaign for a unilateral nuclear disarmament in France

1 The struggle for peace and justice in the Middle East and more particularly in Palestine

By referring to the philosophy and action of Gandhi in his work, in training and education to non-violence and the strategy to non-violent action, Mr. Jean – Marie Muller enables the people and the groups he meets, to get involved in non-violent struggles throughout the world.

It is upon Gandhi's experiments with non-violence and his commitment to truth that Mr. Jean-Marie Muller built a soundly coherent philosophical architecture. Mr. Jean - Marie Muller is a living legend and a great scholar with practical nonviolent action experience.

Contact details

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