

Myth and Reality -The Two Guyanas

by Janet Jagan

When I read some of the print media or look at some of the TV stations, I see two Guyanas, one pure myth and fiction, and the other reality.

When I read Stabroek News, for example, read the sharply slanted stories and the three or more pages of outrageously biased letters, I just have to wonder. When I look at the markedly one-sided, distorted information coming out of at least three of the TV stations, it gives cause to wonder wherein lies the truth, or more specific, is anyone interested in the truth?

When I meet people or go from place to place, I see another Guyana - so different from the pictures the media promotes so assiduously, with almost frightening hatred and malevolence. I often wonder if it is like this all over the world, or is Guyana unique in the bitterness, offensive and frequently disgusting words and attitude one sees, mainly propagated by the distortions of the media.

I move along the railway embankment, built by the PPP/C, and can see, even if I take off my eye glasses, going up on both sides of the road, mostly lower income houses that start small, but grow as the owners save money for improvements or extensions. I've lose count as I go by, there are so many. I go into one of the new development areas and see many, many new houses going up or just completed - both middle and upper income houses. But I read that all the people were moving out, no future in Guyana, nothing to stay for. So why are all these people building new houses? I think everyone would be surprised at the total number of houses built in government housing schemes and outside.

I look out of the window at Freedom House on Robb Street, Georgetown and see five, yes five, huge buildings going up -- 3 and 4 storey structures. But I hear that business is bad, no investments!

I go by the country and city markets. Business is brisk, hundreds buying and selling. But what are they selling? It looks like most of the sales are of locally produced items - beef, pork, chicken, mutton, many varieties of fish, pumpkin, bananas, rice, sugar, peanuts, pasta, great varieties of fruits, any amount of provisions. Carts are selling locally produced snacks - channa, shave ice, candy, phularie, patties, pine tarts and so on.

But Guyana is falling apart - a lost country - no future according to the letter writers and the news broadcasters. But isn't it true that fish and shrimps are being exported, that pineapples and other fruits go to Trinidad and Barbados and our rice and sugar, furniture and timber, etc. have good markets overseas?

I go to the Public Hospital. What a change has taken place! My friend is in the open ward. It used to be a calamity of uncleanliness, broken beds, broken windows, unpainted for years etc. But now, the open ward - free for patients - looks pretty good. Even the beds look comfortable. The sheets are clean, the walls are painted.

Having read so much about migration of Guyanese, I would have thought that Water Street and Regent Street would be short of customers - but no way - it's busy, busy, busy. Someone is spending money and it's not a few but many and some are certainly making good money.

Reading incessantly about migration, it dawns on me to look at who of my friends and associates have migrated. I start by looking at my friends and close acquaintances. Am I alone, an unusual person? All of a sudden, as I list my friends, I note that eight with whom I am close happen to be returnees. I never regarded them as returnees, just friends. All have returned at some time or another over the years, from living in North America.

Then I start thinking about acquaintances, people I see off and on, and without going deeply into the matter, I find seven names, all but one a returnee from North America, one from UK. Am I the only one who knows so many returnees? I doubt it. The miserable letter writers, mostly from USA, (how many use their real names?) write endlessly in Stabroek News about how awful it is in Guyana, and press this migration issue.

But isn't it a fact that there has been greater movement of people all over the world - from country to country? Doctors from UK go to Canada; Canadian doctors go to USA, and Indian doctors go to Guyana. Guyanese go mainly to North America, for many reasons: better jobs, higher standard of living (if they're lucky) joining families, looking for a different life style, adventure, slipping out of a broken marriage, fear of crime (and they bump into much crime on the streets of New York), and so on. Migration isn't limited to Guyana, by any means!

There are two Guyanas - the one we live in which is growing better every day, but obviously, with faults. So what is perfect in this world? There is another Guyana, the fictitious one created by the politically ambitious, the politically bitter opponents who "wanabe," the perennial grumblers, those with chipped shoulders and the plain enemies of change, the clones of the CIA intriguers of the 60's.

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