

Khurshid Sattaur - the patriotic side of the tax boss



“ The future of our country depends on us who cherish what is ours and are committed to working to improve it”

Many see him as the tax man, a man whom many would probably rather not come into close contact with because they see him as synonymous with paying up taxes. But there is the other side of him, a very religious, humble and dedicated family man.

Born on the East Bank Essequibo village of Vergenoegen, on October 31, 1957, Sattaur told Sunday Times Magazine, he was born into a ‘privileged family’ of six; two boys and two girls.

His father Jamaal Sattaur was a public officer, a stock verifier in the colonial days which required him serving in various districts across the country, so Sattaur and his siblings would have experienced life in several areas across the country including Linden and Mahaicony.

Those were glorious days, he recalled. “People really looked after us and looked out for us. No one looked at race and colour in those days. Everyone lived together and looked out for each other. We were very closely knitted.

He expressed sadness at the suspicions that exist among Guyanese today noting, “People need to understand Guyana wasn’t the way it is, it was the rioting of 1964 that damaged people’s psyche but we continue to cherish our friendships that were built in those days.” He recalls Kwan Saw Mill being a prominent landmark in Vergenoegen and highlighted several prominent Guyanese who grew up in the area also but noted that because of inadequate maintenance, on a recent visit to the area, he observed the building that was once his home was falling apart.

Because his father was a public officer they were provided housing accommodation and recalls, “we were pampered. People respected us not because of who we were but because my father was a public officer. Public servants were very prominent people who were given very high respect and I think this is what caused me to join the public sector.” He joined the public sector in 1979, following in his father’s footsteps, in the office of the Auditor General “working closely with Mr. Farnum and then Mr. Goolsarran.” The exposure was rewarding, he admitted.

He attended mostly the public school but for a period he went to Walkers Under 12 School that was located on Barr Street, Kitty. Later he went on to Queen’s College. During this time the Sattaur family lived in Bel Air.

It was clear from our conversation that he leaned towards his father’s profession, not because his mother Morgina was a housewife or anything of that sort, “she was always hard at work taking care of all of us (the siblings were born months apart of each other) but my father showed us what patriotism was. He lived a life that encouraged us to be Guyanese and to want to serve our country,”

Sattaur said.

People in those days were not migrating as they are today and Sattaur's notion is that most families would have migrated over time, which is the main pull factor for migration, and not necessarily economic reasons. "People want to be close to their families.

I am thankful that my father did not see the need to migrate, and so we did not have that pull to leave." Sattaur himself was a re- migrant in 1993. He had migrated because he did not see Guyana moving forward at the time.

After completing his studies on a scholarship in the United Kingdom he migrated for a short period to the Caribbean and then to the UK. "This is where I was actually given the opportunity to practice as a full- fledged professional accountant," he said.

But after he realised that "Guyana was the place to be because of its peacefulness, natural beauty, wide and expansive landscape, colonial architecture, religious tolerance", among others, he returned and continued his service here. He said his experience in the UK made him more effective when he returned.

Since 1983 when he joined the Inland Revenue Department, Sattaur's name has become aligned with the revenue authority.

From assistant commissioner, head of Inland Revenue Department, he moved to Commissioner-General when the Guyana Revenue Authority was formed in 2000. He has since been at the helm of the GRA and has seen it though some challenging times, to a place where transparency continues to be the focus.

"I am extremely sensitive about corruption. It pains me that people would choose to go against what I stand for ... it harms the country, you create hardships for people who need to improve their lives," he said with strong expression.

His religious belief guides his life and work: "I encourage people to recognise that in serving their country they are serving fellow humanity. You are put in a position to make a contribution, to improve the lives of Guyanese and that I believe is a sacred duty I have." Sattaur, a staunch Muslim, said he believes that his teachings and beliefs led him to the GRA to carry out this service.

"It provided me with the best opportunity to serve my country," he said. The revenue boss has no immediate plans to retire. But when the time comes it might be well spent right here in Guyana.

He lauded the efforts of his staffers who he said have rallied round him and has contributed to the various successful programmes and reform measures the authority was able to institute over the years, resulting in annual revenue increases.

Because of his dedication to work and the general round- the- clock nature of his job, the revenue boss says he has little time for socialising but the time he has he ensures he shares with his wife Salima and his children Riyad, Imran, Arif, Safiyyah, Saajidah and Fiyad who he wish would

follow his footsteps and serve their country.

I tried to capture his attention recently to get to know him better and even during this time, when he is supposedly on leave, he could not resist work- related calls. He is always accessible.

“ The future of our country depends on us who cherish what is ours and are committed to working to improve it” He said it is sad that government invests so much in its human resources then the knowledge and skills are taken to serve other countries.

“That is why I have worked hard all my life. I want to see my country develop.

If we don't heed the call to stay here and embrace our development programmes, it won't happen and the longer we take to come back or commit ourselves to our country, the longer it will take to move forward.” He reminds Guyanese that it is “important to understand the balances in life as the currency achieved in this world is not what counts in the next.”