

Biography of Mrs. Beverley Steele
Ms. Anastasia Winnsborrow

Today we applaud and felicitate our sister Mrs. Beverley Steele for her outstanding service to literature, education, Indian and Grenadian History, Heritage and Culture in Grenada.

Mrs. Steele was born in Jamaica during World War Two to Harriett Rose Valencia Smith and George Ferguson Hill, both members of Jamaican families whose origins are obscured by the passage of lots and lots of time.

At about 5 years old, Mrs. Steele's uncle took as his bride a lady from a Jamaican Indian family, and there her adoption into the 'Children of India' began.

Her Uncle's very handsome Indo-Jamaican nephews were now her uncles that she admired! The most handsome was Glen, but she loved them all. And Gang was the Patriarch always to be honoured, spoken of with reverence, and cared for in his old age. His young nieces and nephew became Mrs. Steele's childhood friends and although she was aware of the differences in the families, it did not matter.

She attended the Immaculate Conception High School in Constant Spring, St. Andrew, Jamaica between 1952 and 1959 where her experience of India was enhanced through friendship with schoolmates who were the children of merchants, recently from India. She remembers thinking how similar their homes were to hers, except for a subtle Indian flavour expressed in the decor.

When she entered the University of the West Indies, Mona Campus in 1964, Mrs. Steele was immersed in a University culture that embraced both the similarities and differences of their Caribbean reality. It was in her Freshman week that she met two Trinidadian Indians who became life-long friends, and who introduced her to their friends. In no time at all, Mrs. Steele was in the middle of an Indian posse on Campus!

During the five years she spent at UWI earning first a Bachelor's Degree in Economics and then a Masters Degree in Sociology, the seeds of Indian Diasporic experience planted through family connections and school friendships took root and flourished, mainly thanks to these friends. At UWI she joined both the Hindu Society and the Muslim Society, and was warmly welcomed by all. She was there at the inception of the very popular, and still continuing, Radio Programme, INDIAN TALENT ON

PARADE, started by and featuring her friends Krishna Deonarine, Wahid Omardeen and Polly Ramkissoon. Mrs. Steele was there to see the first Diwali Celebrations held on Campus, to which the Jamaican Indian Community was invited. She was there when the kitchens started to cook vegetarian meals for the Indian students faithful to their religious dietary restrictions.

Mrs. Steele's friends took her to be Pujas in Kingston and to worship at the mosque in Spanish Town. With her friends she visited families of Indian descent several places in Jamaica, the most memorable being a visit to an area in Westmoreland that had been settled mainly by Indian contract workers and their descendants. They were greeted as celebrities by the old folks who were hungering for contact with others of their ancestral culture. How Beverley and her friends were admired in their bright elegant Saris!

Mrs. Steele married a Grenadian, Mr. William Steele in 1969, and migrated to Trinidad. It was a joy for her to be surrounded by a culture she had up to then only sampled! What a pleasure to be a part of such a varied society!

She pursued her passion for education and contributed to the lives of others, as a lecturer in Sociology at UWI's St. Augustine Campus. Her Indian students were anxious that she experienced first hand some of the elements of Trinidadian-Indian culture she had only read about. She also enjoyed the weddings of her friends with all the splendour of Indian Weddings in the Trinidad Community, along with other experiences in Indian communities in Trinidad ranging from cricket matches to Indian movies, and Indian performers on stage in San Fernando.

Their first child was named Savitri, and the second Kahlil. As Mr. Steele was from Grenada, they decided to return to his homeland in 1973 to make their home. She was very fortunate to continue her career with the UWI as the Resident Tutor for Grenada and Head of the Grenada Centre, which opened up her experience and knowledge of what happened to the people from India who came as contract workers to Grenada.

Mrs. Steele was able to visit Indian communities in Grenada and talk to people about their lives and their knowledge of the survival of Indian culture in their community. She remembers particularly the lady in Red Mud who used to dance Indian Folk Dances, and teach others and a lovely old gentleman who played a violin for an Indian Folk orchestra.

Mrs. Steele started a PhD featuring cultural survivals in the Indo-Grenadian Communities, that she discontinued as a result of other responsibilities. Thankfully, her efforts were recognized when in 2005, she was awarded by Her Majesty The Queen the appointment to the Most Excellent Order of the British Empire - Commander of the British Empire, for her services to education, by the Government of Jamaica a Medal of Honour in 2007, and in 2010, by the University of the West Indies when she was awarded the Honorary Doctor of Laws (LLD). She is a published author of two History books, "Grenada - A History of It's People" and "Grenada at Wartime", and many scholarly publications on Indians in Grenada, and other themes.

As a result of her expertise on Indo-Grenadian history, Mrs. Steele was invited to be founding member of the Indo-Grenadian Heritage Foundation and worked with them to mark anniversaries and highlight the contributions the sons and daughters of India had made throughout Grenada's history to the building of this country. She enjoyed teaching the section in the Grenadian History Course at TAMCC which dealt with Indian Immigration to Grenada, how the contract workers integrated into Grenadian society after their contracts were completed, and the contributions they have made through the ages. She was always deeply moved when students would come up after class to thank her and tell her how much the knowledge of their heritage meant to them.

Mrs. Steele remains one of the strongest authorities in Grenada on Grenada's history. Whether the topic is Indo-Grenadian history, national wear, women's issues, family life, heritage and culture, politics or Grenada's wars, she is a sought after resource. We applaud her for the research and the studies she has done towards developing these expertises, and for sharing her learnings in her published books and articles that will remain with us in perpetuity. For all your valuable contributions Mrs. Steele, we sincerely thank you - for enriching our lives and positively influencing the development of our people and nation, we are grateful. Let us put our hands together in a resounding applause for Mrs. Steele.