

## **Before the Light Fades: Reflections**

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### *Abstract*

*In a forty-year career of teaching and writing in several universities, in seminars and conference presentations, I was asked questions about the academia and my experience of it. My advice was sought by early career researchers about the ladder to success, specifically the reasons for my success which might have some relevance for their own careers. I was asked about developments in my own fields, where I had found them when I entered the academy and where they are now. I answered these questions as best as I could at the time and then promptly forgot about them until a chance encounter with some first-year students brought them up again. Thinking that the questions raised broader issues which might have relevance to students elsewhere, especially in the Pacific islands, I decided at the end of my career to commit my thoughts to paper with the hope that other academics who have left the academic treadmill might similarly share their experience.*

conducive to research and thinking are absolutely vital but they are now in very short supply everywhere. Distractions abound and world has become a very crowded place. In Fiji, a culture of coups over the past two decades has corroded the spirit of critical enquiry. Censorship and, even more insidious, self-censorship, are the order of the day though predictably denied by those at the helm. There is a well-founded fear of retribution from those riding the gravy train and other hangers-on. They want compliance and acquiescence, not critical dissent and debate which are the essence of democracy. The best and the brightest do subjects that will improve their chances of emigration. The quality of education in Fiji's primary and secondary schools has declined abysmally over the years. Teaching is no longer seen as the noble profession as it once used was, but as a stepping stone to something else, a career in administration perhaps. The culture of reading, even at university level, leaves much to be desired. The fact that nearly fifty per cent of USP students are likely to fail a basic English test tells a very sorry story. And students graduate from university without any understanding of the fundamental underpinnings of their disciplines. This is probably to be expected but it makes the task all the harder.

There are no shortcuts to success. You are starting with virtually nothing. You will have to read widely, in your own field and outside. Read the masters. Pay attention to their style. Language is important. Publish in the top journals in your field. If you are in the Humanities, an early book is important that registers your presence in the field. And books at regular intervals will not go astray. Aim to be the very best you can be. It is a tough ask, I know, but there is no other way. The challenge is difficult but not insurmountable. If I could do it coming from a poor unlettered family in remote village in rural Vanua Levu, surely others can too.

*Q: You have been a very successful scholar and writer who is widely read and admired. What particular challenges face those who wish to be successful?*

A: I cannot give a precise answer but suggest some factors which may be relevant. The first thing to say is that the road has not been easy, and it is not any easier now although one might have expected otherwise. Reading, writing, reflection, solitude, an environment

*Q: Do scholars from developing countries such as our region of the Pacific have an ethical responsibility to give something back to their societies?*

A: Scholars have primary responsibility to advance the cause of knowledge. That is what is expected, demanded, of them by the

system of university appointments and promotions. You will not succeed if you don't grasp this brutal truth. The university is an institution which runs on paper, the more of it the better. I realized this early, especially when I decided on a career first in the United States and then in Australia. The rules of the game were clear and clearly articulated and understood. But after I had paid my dues and rose through the ranks, established myself, I could afford to take chances, bend the rules a bit. And I did. I was less constrained by convention. When I started my writing career, I was conscious of the need to follow the 'approved' style of scholarly writing and presentation. The authorial voice had to be edited out. The royal 'I' or 'We' in the written text was frowned upon. Everything had to be contextualized. Things of that sort. Gradually, with growing confidence, I found my own voice. It took time but in the end I got there and I am now completely comfortable with how I write, at home with the rhythm of my style.

We also have an ethical responsibility to the place and people we write about. We fulfill that responsibility in a variety of ways. I have always tried to have my work published in Fiji. Two books I offered to the Institute of Pacific Studies at the University of the South Pacific, *Girmitiyas: The origins of the Fiji Indians*, and my biography of AD Patel, *A Vision of Change* were both rejected because by their definition I was not a Pacific Islander. The archives of IPS will bear me out on this. I did manage to publish my *Chalo Jahaji* and *Crossing the Kala Pani* through the Fiji Museum. Two volumes of the research papers of the Fiji Constitution Commission which I edited, *Fiji in Transition* and *Fiji and the World* were published by USP's School of Social and Economic Development. And my *Turnings: Fiji Factions* through the Fiji Institute of Applied Studies (after it too had been turned down by IPS). All these books were favourably noticed.

But now, the challenge to make one's work accessible is made easier by the advent of the internet. I seized the opportunity and made sure that my books and monographs were available as free downloads to readers in Fiji and elsewhere. Snobs sniggered at electronic publishing but it did not matter. I had already put enough runs on the board where it counted. I should also say that I never

intended to leave Fiji permanently. In 1983, I sought a year's leave of absence to take up a year's appointment at the University of Hawaii, but it was turned down. Later I wrote to Vice Chancellor Savenaca Siwatibau about a prospective appointment in the Humanities but did not even receive a reply. I applied for the position of Vice Chancellor of USP but was unsuccessful despite the backing of three regional governments. So, the desire to serve, to give something back, has always been with me. My advice to early career researchers who might be so motivated is to establish themselves first, have solid academic credentials behind you so that you have an international academic passport and cannot be patronized or messed around.

*Q: Should scholars be involved in politics, risking objectivity and fair mindedness?*

*A:* This question is an old one that historians and others have been asking for a very long time. On the one side is the very austere, puritanical view that scholars should not muddy their hands by getting involved in political discussions and other controversies, should not take sides in public debates, should maintain their dignified distance. This way they protect their reputation for objectivity and impartiality. This is not a position I share. On the contrary, I believe that scholars have an obligation and a responsibility to participate in public debate, to use their knowledge to illuminate public discourse. I live within, not above or outside, my history. I cannot be indifferent to what happens in my country or to my people, to humanity more broadly. When the first military coup took place in Fiji in 1987, I joined the forces of protest and argued that the coup was a pyrrhic victory for Fijian nationalism, that it was clear from history as I knew it that dictatorial regimes have a short-shelf life. And I was mindful of Lord Acton's dictum that power corrupts and absolute power corrupts absolutely. That was an important part of the problem in Fiji, I suggested (in my *Power and Prejudice The making of the Fiji crisis*). At the time, this was seen as a self-interested explanation designed to de-legitimize the indigenous Fijian cause, casting aspersion on the motives of the coup plotters who were all noble heroes, but now everyone recognizes the fundamental truth of that assertion. For a while,

some saw the hand of the CIA behind the coup, but I poured cold water on it straightaway as a principal reason for the coup, seeking the root of the Fijian crisis in the dynamics of Fijian history.

On another subject, I relied on my knowledge of labour history and the history of servitude to argue that indenture was a complex narrative, that indenture was at once an enslaving as well as a liberating experience, a limited detention rather than a life sentence. Once unpopular, this view has now gained common currency. I should say that intervention in the public arena has also enriched my understanding of the ebbs and flows of history. But the pursuit of discomforting truths exacts its price as well, as my own example illustrates. Be prepared to put up with heat if want to work in the kitchen. Be prepared to walk alone.

*Q: How has the field of Indian indenture history changed in the forty or so years you have been researching and writing on the subject?*

A: The study of Indian indenture has gone through several phases. The early writing on it was essentially an exercise in administrative history, delineating legislation and policy that governed the system. The indentured labourers themselves were nowhere to be seen in the text; they were almost incidental to the story being told. The subject was substantially a part of imperial history. Indian historians saw indenture as an issue in Indian nationalist struggle, as a blot on the name of India that had to be removed. So, indenture became cannon fodder for the cause of Indian nationalism. In the 1960s and 1970s, as debate opened up in the United States about the nature of the slave experience and as the situation of overseas Indians in the former 'King Sugar' colonies deteriorated and as debate about which ethnic or cultural group had prior claim to the ownership of the symbols of the state heated up, history of indenture entered a new phase. Indenture was slavery, nothing more, nothing less, we were told. The Indian people and their forebears had made immense sacrifices in developing their nations and, therefore, they deserved a proper place at the table of national affairs; they would no longer be content with merely crumbs from the table. The ideology of grief and grievance still permeates the historical discourse in some circles but it no longer is as

fashionable as it once was.

This politically charged view of history with a purpose and a clear agenda within a singular overarching narrative later gave way to an approach emphasizing the lived human experience of indenture, moving towards social and cultural history. Hence the emphasis on such issues as gender, religion, family, festivals, accommodation and resistance. The *giritiyas* were accorded a greater measure of agency in making their own history. The interesting thing is that this history was being written by the descendants of indentured labourers themselves as they sought to understand their own history; it was history up close and personal. But this generation of scholars is now passing from view or followed, if followed at all, by a younger generation with different concerns and agendas 'performing' scholarship in a range of postmodern ways. They are much more interested in using history as a tool to understand their own predicaments and predilections in a narcissistic kind of way. 'Truth' in this approach is malleable, subjective, dispensable. Blogsites proliferate reaching thousands undreamed of by earlier scholars. The storyline matters, scholarship less so, fueling the ideology of victimhood I mentioned earlier: for instance, manipulating the fundamental truths of history to demand compensation from the British government: an emotionally comfortable cause but fundamentally flawed and, in truth, futile. Reverence takes precedence over reason and research. Indians are portrayed as brutalized victims of a heartless system, with no voice and no agency. This version of events may be emotionally soothing, but it is far from the truth. We are moving historical scholarship into the realm of heritage studies, to its enormous detriment, I would suggest.

The celebrations that accompanied the centenary of the end of indentured emigration in 2017 created fresh interest in indenture history across the indentured diaspora. Dedicated websites carried a whole range of material that connected the diaspora in new ways. Information was shared about history, politics, popular culture, social developments, photographs, biographies, fiction, news about conferences and workshops. Among the most important of the new websites were Girit Global facebook group, Fiji Girit facebook

page, and Global Girit Institute website. This welcome development, one hopes, will be a prelude to more serious engagement about the subject.

While all this goes on, I think it is time to move beyond girit to examining its impact and ramifications after indenture ended. How did leaders of the Indian communities in different places negotiate the question of the political rights of their people with other communities? How did social and cultural forms develop and adapt to the new environment and new identities emerge? For far too long these important questions have been put on the back burner but they have now acquired a degree of urgency. Equally important is the question of the diaspora of the 'Twice Banished,' that is, Indian diasporic communities in western countries (Australasia, North America, United Kingdom and Europe), their connection to their original homelands, to the ancestral motherland, questions of attachment, points of convergence and divergence, their relations with other diasporic communities. In other words, indenture and its legacy should be explored as a theme in world history. One might call it the globalization of girit history.

*Q: What do you think about the relevance of this history to contemporary Indo-Fijians?*

*A:* Most Indo-Fijians are completely innocent about their history which is another way of saying they are ignorant of it. They lament this lacuna in their knowledge but in fact do nothing about it. There is no demand for it to be included in the school curriculum. Pragmatism steady-as-she-goes, don't-rock-the-boat, approach is part of the Indo-Fijian DNA. Judging by the experience of other places where Indians have settled, such as in the Caribbean, a time will assuredly come when the people would want to know about their past beyond the easy fare offered by websites and amateur documentaries, but by then it will be too late. I don't think my pessimism is misplaced or exaggerated.

*Q: What lessons have you learnt from your study of Fijian history? Where are we now in our understanding of the Fijian past?*

*A:* We have not been honest with ourselves. We have always used comforting slogans rather than confront uncomfortable truths of our history. The colonial government propaganda called Fiji a 'Three-Legged Stool', denoting balance and harmony among the three principal ethnic groups, Fijians, Indo-Fijians and 'Others,' each making its own equally valuable contribution to the nation: Fijians provided the land, Indo-Fijians their labour and Europeans capital and skilled expertise. But there was no 'balance' in the interests and aspirations of the three communities. Nor were the three communities homogenous. Part-Europeans (as they were called) differed in material respects from the Europeans. Although greater in number, they were represented politically by European leaders. Until late in the piece, their children were not admitted to European schools such as Suva Grammar. An old jingle reminded the Part-Europeans of their place in society: 'Local born, locally bred, big in the feet and thick in the head.' Fijians were divided by class interests and by regional affiliations. Throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century, western Fijians struggled to find their appropriate place in the Fijian sun (as in the demand for a separate western confederacy). And Indo-Fijians were divided by religion, regional origins and between those descended from giritiyas and those who came as passenger migrants (from western India). But the colonial model made no allowance for this. In truth, the comforting 'Thee-Legged Stool' metaphor comforted the colonial officialdom and gave it a measure of legitimacy as the impartial arbiter of the conflicting interests of the three communities.

In the post-colonial period, Fiji paraded itself as the very model of a vibrantly functioning multiracial democracy to the developing world, a beacon of hope to the world as Pope John Paul II put it during a fleeting visit to the country (he did not say the way the world should be). Yes, elections were held, the bureaucracy functioned reasonably efficiently, and the judiciary was independent, but the fundamental challenge of nation-building remained unresolved, shelved. Race and racial considerations permeated the sinews of national decision making. Politics was organized along racial lines. Elections became racial censuses. The stability of the nation was predicated upon the assumption that the

verdict of the ballot box would be observed only as long as one group kept winning. The moment that group, the indigenous Fijian elite, lost in 1987, a military coup was unleashed to restore the status quo. Sitiveni Rabuka, the coup leader, was hounded subsequently for unleashing a coup culture on Fiji but he was in truth doing what the Fijian establishment wanted done. To use a catchphrase current at the time, Rabuka was the bullet, his traditional leaders and political leaders were the gun.

For that reason, no enquiry was ever held into the cause of the coup because then some of the leading lights of the day, especially in the Fijian hierarchy, would have been implicated in the sordid affair. Again, that reluctance to look within in case you discover the chasm inside the centre. The privileging of race in public life above everything else meant that Fiji was not a cohesive nation bound together by the common threads of shared interests and concerns but a diverse collection of competing ethnicities each pulling in different directions. What was good for the goose was not good for gander. Fiji has paid a very high price for the myopic vision of its leaders.

We haven't learnt from our history. No enquiry was held into the Speight putsch. Who were behind it, who drove the agenda, provided the intellectual firepower for the cause, who financed it? Was intra-Fijian rivalry a part of the larger narrative? We know nothing. No enquiry was held into the cause of the 2006 military coup. Coup leader Frank Bainimarama's claim that it was not a coup but a 'clean-up campaign,' that he acted to save the nation rather than his own bacon went unchallenged. Bainimarama is being hailed as a hero by many, especially Indo-Fijians, but will the edifice built by this one man survive his departure from the political stage? Is it not better to have the rule of law rather than the rule by one man? Some have called for a proper Truth and Reconciliation Commission to look into Fiji's recent past, but the idea has been rejected out of hand by those at the helm. The old adage holds: those who don't learn from the mistakes of history are condemned to repeat them.

*Q: Where do you stand on the Insider-Outside controversy that has*

*persisted in Pacific Islands Studies?*

A: This is a fruitless controversy manufactured to protect the vested interests of self-interested gatekeepers in the academia. Being an insider is not a matter of ethnicity, nationality, place of birth, gender or class. It is a matter of the quality of imagination, insight and scholarship you bring to bear on your subject of research. Being an insider may confer some advantages. You may have access to sources of information that others might not have. But this advantage is not, by definition, inaccessible to outsiders, nothing that careful scholarship and sensitivity cannot overcome. The past is a foreign country to all of us, as David Lowenthal reminded us a long time ago. Let me give some examples. No scholar has written more insightfully about 19<sup>th</sup> century Fiji than Peter France: and he was a British colonial civil servant by profession; David Hanlon on the 19<sup>th</sup> century history of Pohnpei also comes to mind, as do older scholars such as Jim Davidson and Harry Maude. And I can think of many 'insiders' whose works display no particular 'insider' insights at all. There is one other point that needs to be made. Defining who is an insider and who is an outsider is becoming increasingly difficult. Many Pacific Islanders now teach and research in metropolitan universities in Australia, New Zealand and the United States. Are they insiders or outsiders?

Associated with this controversy is the notion of academic imperialism, that outsiders show no concern for sharing the fruits of their research with locals, that they mine local resources for the benefit of their own careers. This is valid up to a point as this is a universal phenomenon. But many governments in the Pacific Islands have a system of issuing research permits to foreign researchers and they can and do charge fees or require the deposit of theses and books in return for granting access. These days, e-presses either make their publications available free (such as the ANU Press) or charge a small purchase price. Be wary of those who advocate the insider/outside binary. It is best to avoid this shibboleth altogether.

*Q: Your latest - last? - book is titled 'Levelling Wind.' What is that*

about? Is that how you see the overarching theme of Fiji's history?

A: That is how I see the modern history of Fiji. It can also be seen, to varying degrees, as the theme of many developing societies as they grapple with the forces of globalization. Perhaps it is an inevitable part of being modern. I see the crumbling of the old order but not its replacement by a new one. We are in a state of in-betweenity. Let me take the example of Fiji's two main groups to illustrate what I mean.

The Indo-Fijians first. Indenture was the first and the main leveller of hierarchy among Indo-Fijians. The institutions, mores, practices, rites and rituals of the old world could not survive the crossing of the 'kala pani' and the indoctrinate rigours of the plantation regime. Caste, such an integral part of Indian society, went because its strictures could not be observed nor enforced, as did intricate forms of worship. Marriages took place across caste and religious lines, Occupational differentiation disappeared. A new language emerged, *Fiji Baat*, along with a new egalitarian ethos and pragmatic world view in an environment that was limited and limiting. But as old times began to go, so did the world they had created to give their lives meaning and purpose. The new world, responding to new challenges is moving closer to a westernized model in public culture and private behaviour and social practice. I have no doubt that in the next few decades, Indo-Fijians will become more like the Indo-Caribbeans, separated from the language and culture of their forbears and more comfortable in western cultural and linguistic idiom.

Similar levelling forces are at work among the iTaukei. Chiefly privileges and prerogatives have already largely disappeared or are on their way out. The abolition of the Great Council of Chiefs in 2009 by Frank Bainimarama through a decree marked the end of an era. Its demise was quietly mourned but there was no public protest. Many Fijians celebrated finding their own place in the sun. By the early 21<sup>st</sup> century, all the paramount chiefs had passed on and no one emerged to take their place. Many were embroiled in local disputes and personal controversies to register a national presence. It is telling that some of the highest chiefly titles,

such as Vunivalu and Tui Nayau/Lau, have remained unfilled while others are variously contested. Fijian political unity, which was a feature of much of the 20<sup>th</sup> century is now of blessed memory. A large part of the reason for this is the decline in the population of Indo-Fijians, now about 32 per cent of the population. The fear of Indian dominance which cast such a baleful influence over Fijian public life in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, is gone. And the dominant Fijian leaders of the last two decades have been of non-chiefly background: Sitiveni Rabuka in the 1990s and Bainimarama since 2006. The idea that the business of Fijian leadership is the business of chiefs, as Ratu Sukuna so ardently believed and which other Fijian leaders embraced, is gone forever.

Education has been the main leveller of hierarchy in both communities. School curricular and examination questions did not recognize or reward privileged background. For much of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, primary and secondary schools were principally race-based by design (among Fijians) and default (among Indo-Fijians). Traditional Fijian elders preferred their children to be educated in a Fijian milieu to preserve Fijian culture and language; this was less of an imperative among Indo-Fijians. Queen Victoria School, the premier Fijian secondary school, was primarily for sons of chiefs and others well-connected to the Fijian establishment. But all that changed in the last years of the 20<sup>th</sup> century as more and more iTaukei moved to urban areas (where now more than fifty per cent of them live). Now, many so-called Indian schools in urban areas (Jay Narayan College, Suva Sangam, Mahatma Gandhi Memorial) have substantial numbers of Fijian students, with profound implications for social and attitudinal changes in the future.

The opening of the University of the South Pacific in Suva in 1968 further levelled old hierarchies and distinctions. Until then, only a small number of students were able to receive tertiary education, all overseas. Fijian students who made the grade had to be approved by the Fijian Administration. The most brilliant Fijian student of them all, Rusiate Nayacakalou, did not get a Fijian Affairs Board scholarship despite his stellar academic record and had to go to New Zealand on a Morris Hedstrom scholarship. He was not of chiefly background. The new local university opened up

unprecedented opportunities for students from poorer homes. Tertiary education ceased to be a novelty, a preserve of the wealthy and the well connected. Now Fiji has three universities, accelerating the process of change.

Technology played its own part, especially for the indigenous community. For much of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, information reaching the Fijian villages was filtered through channels approved by the Fijian establishment. Mobility of the people was restricted by regulation. Traditional elders were the gatekeepers of information and knowledge. But things changed after the advent of radio in mid-1950s. Videos came in the 1980s, television in the 1990s along with the internet. Now even the remotest villages in Fiji are connected to the world through emails, Facebook and a variety of chat channels. These gave people direct, unmediated access to the world enabling them to see and decide for themselves. The days of the old gatekeepers is truly over. To use the truism, Fiji is an island but in the physical sense alone.

*Q: It has been said that you are a man of the 20<sup>th</sup> century who does not understand the dynamics of the present time.*

*A: 20<sup>th</sup> century is my period both personally as well as professionally. I was born then and spent the better part of my life in it. My family connection goes to the earliest years of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. My indentured grandfather came to Fiji in 1908 and died there in 1962. I remember him well and his stories of his time. Both my parents were born in Fiji as were we all. Fiji formed and deformed our lives, and at one level I tried to understand how a people emerged from the darkness of indenture to forge a new society. That was one challenge that fascinated me. When I grew older and went to university, I got interested in the efforts our leaders made to construct an edifice for the nation with a multiethnic population which, because of particular historical circumstances, had diverse and frequently divergent hopes and aspirations. On one side was the effort to create a non-racial political culture through a common electoral franchise, and on the other an equally adamant effort to create a racially compartmentalized political culture through a communal roll. For a while, I myself became directly involved in*

forging a new political culture for Fiji through my membership of the Reeves Constitution Commission. I was a part of the history I was writing. It had a certain emotional and intellectual immediacy to it. I don't have the same personal involvement with the Fiji of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Its future is of less concern to me. And my priorities have changed as the shadow has lengthened. More than ever before, I am now merely an interested bystander, distant and perhaps even disinterested in the present and future of a country which was once our home but no longer is. There must be a statute of limitation on how long a human being can continue to suffer and agonize over which you have no control, can do nothing about!

*Q: If you were to put on your thinking cap and peer into the future, how do you think Fiji society will look, say, two or three decades from now?*

*A: I don't know, but one thing I can say with absolute certainty is that Fiji twenty or thirty years from now will be nothing like the Fiji of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. We can already see the seeds of future changes. The demographic transformations that began in the late 1980s and 1990s, saw iTaukei already nearly sixty per cent of the total population; that proportion will only increase as time goes on. Indo-Fijian population, now around a third of the total population will continue to decline through emigration and lower birthrate. With this transformation will disappear the fears and phobias of the past, such as the politics of representation, race-based affirmative action, and so on. The political concerns and agendas of the future will be driven more by indigenous concerns than they have been in the past. Fiji will be much more enmeshed in the modern world than before. National boundaries, the preoccupations of nationalist politics, will cease to have the role and relevance they have had in the past. Fiji was once an integral part, indeed leader, of the Pacific islands' regional architecture. But in future, it will seek to transcend it for a larger role on the international stage as the leader of smaller developing island states as it has already started to do. There will be a fundamental change in the economy of the country: sugar, once so dominant will decline in significance and replaced by tourism and remittance economy. It is already happening now and it will only accelerate with time.*

*Q: How do you see the future of the Humanities in Fiji?*

A: Let me take the discipline I know best, History. I don't see a bright future for it. One statistic that is really depressing is that no Indo-Fijian from Fiji has done a doctorate in History since I did mine in 1980. That is forty years ago! Three iTaukei students who did their doctorate with me have moved on to other things, and one has died. One Indo-Fijian who attempted a doctorate with me faded away. So the question arises: where will future university teachers of History come from? What kind of history will be taught in our schools? What of the next generation? This declining interest in History is not peculiar to Fiji, but it is more acute there. Each generation must act to interpret and preserve the historical memory of its people and pass it on to future generations. That responsibility is being abnegated.

Where history is taught, it is taught in a cannibalized fashion in such 'disciplines' as 'cultural studies' and 'development studies.' History is a handmaiden to other concerns and agendas, instrumentalist in purpose. Archival research is disdained as obsolete and imperialistic especially by those who have never spent time in the archives, are unfamiliar with the protocols and procedures of historical research. Novices 'interrogate' documents rather than read them with sensitivity and care and often against the grain. What is said can often be just as important as the silence between the sentences. Some French philosopher wrote about the 'chill of the archives.' Having spent a lifetime in them, I celebrate the 'thrill of the archives.'

The current environment in the academy is not conducive to historical research either. Research in the applied social sciences is given priority over the humanities. Grant dispensing agencies fund those projects which yield practical results or have directly policy relevance. Curiosity-driven research is fast becoming a thing of the past. These days, academics move from project to project funded by external agencies. The kind of career I was able to carve out for myself, working on subjects that interested me, funded by myself or from small departmental funds, with scant regard for its relevance to others, year after year for forty years, is a thing of the

past. Who, these days, will fund a research project on the origins of the Fiji Indians, on Fijian politics, on the history and culture of the Indian diaspora? That is a pity because subjects not considered relevant or has practical outcomes but which are nonetheless important, will remain unexplored.

A current trend is for people to resort to documentaries, blogsites and webpage and the social media generally to broadcast their views and concerns. There is obvious merit in this because access to information and its dissemination is available to everyone: democratization of information and knowledge. All this is well and good but there are problems. Much of what is propagated through these sources is not new knowledge but selected and often inaccurately reproduced versions of existing knowledge, often out of context. By the time their inaccuracies and distortions are detected and exposed, the caravan has moved on to newer pastures. Bloggers often have axes to grind, causes to pursue, points to score. Nuance and subtlety are given short shrift. And the posts are unrefereed, their accuracy unchecked by peers. But these things are read more often than books and scholarly articles. Time is often cited as the reason for this. For someone of my background and vintage this is a problem; and I am often accused of being out of touch with reality, worse, elitist. I realize the conundrum but I am a pen and paper man, remnant in my own lifetime.

*Q: : As you put your pen down and look back, what are your thoughts?*

A: I hope I have been able to open a window or two on our past through which those who follow me will be able to see further and with greater clarity. History, after all, is a long unending conversation between the past and the present. I no longer share the carefree optimism of the time when I began my journey. We dreamed of the possibility of change and progress through rational discourse and the force of ideas. The sacred texts taught us that 'Truth Triumphs in the End.' It may one day, but most certainly not in my lifetime. We espoused the values of democracy, the rule of law, freedom of speech, the brotherhood and sisterhood of humanity, but these will remain merely words on paper for my native country where one

form of dictatorship has been succeeded by another. I realize as I look back that all my life I have fought for lost causes. I am down but unbowed. Win or lose, I stood up for what I believed in and lived for. That is a good enough legacy for me.

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