

Satendra Nandan, *Requiem for a Rainbow* (Pacific Indian Publications, Canberra, 2001)

Requiem for a Rainbow is, in the words of the author Satendra Nandan, 'my story and how I went into Fiji politics through my study of literature and how I came out of the dark, derelict tunnel to teach and study literature again'. It is indeed the story of a storyteller. And Satendra Nandan is a storyteller par excellence.

Nandan has, very ably, weaved politics, personalities, poetry, events, outcomes, and bits of history, all to form a very readable autobiography. It is not complete; as he himself says, there are the larger stories, and there are smaller stories, all yet to be told. For this story, there is a larger purpose. It is to draw a picture of modern Fiji as seen by a politician, an academic, a writer, and a participant, albeit minor, in the events which have been unfolding in the country since the 1980's. The stories end before the mayhem of 2000. But still, in them, there is a lot which one can find parallels with for post-2000 Fiji.

The story of a participant is always fascinating. And coming from Nandan, the reader can almost become a part of the setting itself. Like Nandan speaking in the Parliament, with his usual wit. Or describing his hush-hush exit from Fiji ('The only politician I had told of my departure was Dr. Timoci Bavadra' – and he had planned to leave for weeks). Or the state of the confused nation itself, typified by FLP-NFP Coalition's Member of Parliament Edmund March's tale a day after the first 1987 military coup:

One Saturday morning, Edmund arrived at the PM's house, our prison: we were astonished and amused to see him. It seems the night of the coup, Honorable Edmund cried and went to sleep. Next morning it dawned on him that why wasn't he interned with the others. Apparently nobody had noticed his absence and this was disturbing for any politician. He rang the Army to tell them of his whereabouts but no one came. The following morning, when he was buying bread, he saw the wife of a High Commissioner and told her he was Edmund March, the Coalition's only Chinese MP. The woman refused to believe him. By midday he was getting restless and worried. So he made his wife ring the Army Headquarters to tell the officer-in-charge that Honorable Mr. March was still free and should be arrested forthwith. He was told to get dressed and the soldiers were coming to take him to his colleagues. Edmund, it seemed, according to his version, put on his parliamentary suit and waited until late in the evening and only then a couple of soldiers came and brought him to the PM's residence Strange are the ways of politicians.

And politics, Nandan could have equally added. The National Federation Party voted against its leader Jai Ram Reddy when he decided to boycott Parliament in 1984. Reddy went on to aim to destroy his successor, and in the process, the party itself - 'Jairam was encouraging us to join the Labour Party And vengeance would have been Jairam's'.

In the *Requiem*, Nandan talks passionately about the place of his birth, about his studies, about his trips, and his encounters with important

people in the academia and outside. In his story one also reads the story of 'one bleeding, unhealing wound' called Fiji.

Nandan writes of honor, trust and betrayal: only weeks after the second coup, while his colleagues were waging a peaceful resistance against military rule, Nandan the politician, who had pledged to serve his constituents, quietly went up to the military barracks seeking to get his name removed from the list of persons who couldn't travel out of Fiji so that he could leave Fiji. The military promised to remove his name, but 'you couldn't trust the words of these so-called soldiers; afterall, they had taken an oath of allegiance to the Queen and the elected Government of Fiji and had staged two miserable coups'.

Nandan's is a good story. Those who are familiar with Nandan's work will no doubt be able to place the book and the stories in relevant contexts, though there is always the danger that the uninformed reader will tend to see Fiji revolving around Nandan during the five or so years of Nandan's political life in Fiji. But this is typical Nandan.

As the back cover blurb by Oxford University's Jon Mee quite appropriately states, the story is passionately told; it has the warmth and good humour which have delighted readers of Nandan's previous books. *Requiem for a Rainbow* certainly is a very welcomed addition to the very small body of literature on Fiji, by people with Fijian roots.

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