

***In the Eye of the Storm:  
Jai Ram Reddy and the Politics of Postcolonial Fiji***

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**Introduction**

This book by Professor Brij Lal is an excellent account of contemporary political history of Indo-Fijians with some glimpses of wider political events covering the past 50 years or so. The book is not really a biography of Jai Ram Reddy as Lal admits; more so it is a political history of his time with Reddy at the centre-stage. The book covers historical events more widely than seemingly necessary if it were to encapsulate events pertaining to Reddy's contribution to Fiji's Politics. The narratives do not quite focus on Reddy's life, although he is shown in a good light among politicians.

This book is far more boldly written than many of Lal's earlier works. Some of the arguments forwarded here are cogent and appropriate. In particular, Lal's account of political manipulations by the powerful Alliance in the early days of independence is courageous and forthright. The descriptions and documentation of political manipulations of the colonial power-brokers and agents in sidelining Indo-Fijians from the realm of governance of the country are valuable additions to the literature. Apart from some over-statements and oversights, the book brings to light many events that had not been documented before. Foremost, the political discourse and events, particularly those related to the Constitutional reforms and the 1999 elections are covered broadly in this book, although not quite fairly all the way. Some of the detailed descriptions of the 1999 national elections and surrounding issues including related political discourses are valuable contribution to the literature. Most valuable and relevant of those are the issues relate to Reddy's political undertakings during his lifetime as a bigwig of Indo-Fijian politics.

In this regard this book is an unparalleled contribution to history and

literature.

On the whole the book is a tribute to Jai Ram Reddy. It highlights his contribution to Fiji and the tribulations and injustices faced by the Indo-Fijian community.

Some of the statements on Reddy's work and stature as presented in this book may actually be overdone at many places. In view of and in keeping with the traditions of documenting political history through biographic discourse, it could be hugely negating or even conflicting (Couser, 1998; Oakley, 2010). Couser (1998) argues that with collaborative life writing especially ethical concerns begin with the production of narrative that extend the relation of the text to the historical record of which it forms a part. Therefore, such writings need to be written with utmost care and fairness to all those mentioned or referred to in the context of events and discourse.

Statements such as the following could be a case in point where biases show up quite obviously: 'Had Reddy not gone with Rabuka, Labour would have played the issue to the hilt, portraying Reddy as a treacherous man who had left his political friend in a lurch, stabbed Rabuka in the back. "Stabbing in the back" is a familiar refrain in Indo-Fijian politics.' (p. 671).

Some may even find the expressions of praises for Reddy a bit asymmetric and in some places on the verge of exaggeration. Many of Lal's assertions are not without biases and omissions. At some points they may even be embarrassing, particularly for Reddy who is not only respected for his astuteness but also for his intellectual stature. I am sure many of the people mentioned in the book, implicated or incriminated for certain political outcomes would have liked to defend themselves had they read through the pages or were they alive today. I shall point out some of these instances and issues in the book where possible, particularly those assertions that are erroneous, misplaced and disputable. I shall delve a bit deeper where Lal's interpretations are typically unfair to those persons who are not alive to defend themselves. I feel Lal did not apply the rules of ethics and fairness in many such cases to maintain objectivity.

However, Lal so rightly points out in his book's preface, quoting Patrick French who argues that the aim of a biographer 'should not be to sit in judgment, but to explore the subject with ruthless clarity to the calm eye of the reader.' Lal has demonstrated his open-minded 'clarity' to a large extent but falters at various points particularly where he exercises his 'sympathetic understanding' overwhelmingly.

It needs to be pointed out, particularly where he has or seems to have overstepped the line and breached the code, presumably with impu-

nity. Professor Lal has been a close associate of Reddy since early 1990's and has worked together with him towards the review of the 1990 Constitution from 1993 to 1997. As such Lal's impartiality in matters of Constitution and politics in Fiji becomes doubtful. As a consequence of his association in the production of the 1997 Constitution Review Commission Report, he was a strong advocate of Reddy's pre-election co-operation with Rabuka's SVT. Precisely for this reason, one may debate whether Lal's view of the 1999 National Elections would remain neutral. And on the same grounds, doubts may arise about the validity of his views as fair documentation of history. No matter how attractive Lal's work appears, the question of fairness may remain a matter of substance.

Professor Lal is a historian of significant stature and has acquired an insatiable penchant for documenting history and events in Fiji. His numerous books and articles are testimony of his contribution. However, the obvious misgivings in his writings should not be let to pass without scrutiny. This review brings out some of those issues and instances that need verification and academic scrutiny.

In my observation, instances of lack of analysis are obvious in the discourses and commentaries at many places.

### **Inductive Implications and Conclusions**

Jai Ram Reddy's life story is no doubt brilliant, punctuated with painful instances of helplessness and anger. The introductory chapter starts with a kaleidoscopic spark on Reddy's journey to Arusha, Tanzania. The start could not be any better. It reads brilliantly. The introduction covers a fair span of Reddy's political, professional and personal life to provide an overarching narrative. The opening paragraphs of the chapter also mark the closeness of Lal to Reddy's political life. The book portrays Reddy's political stature and contribution as unparalleled. This review does not challenge that position *per se*. In fact a lot of Lal's account of Reddy's life contributions to politics hold ground but many of his descriptions of events and assertions have significant gaps.

In a broad statement about Reddy's political ideas in the preface of the book Lal argues the following:

The essential course Reddy attempted to chart for his people and his vision of their place in the larger scheme of things was intrinsically right. That it failed to ignite their imagination and caused them instead to desert him and all that he stood for is a matter for legitimate debate and discussion, but there is now a gradually gathering consensus across the political spectrum,

even among his erstwhile opponents, that had it succeeded, Fiji would almost certainly have been spared the agony and turmoil it was later to encounter in its troubled journey towards the 21st century (p. XVI).

What does one understand by these lines? In the context of electoral process, I would assume it refers to the NFP-SVT coalition in the 1999 elections in which SVT had won 8 seats of the 71 and NFP none. If we were to analyze the election results closely, Reddy's idea of co-operation was not totally rejected as Lal puts it. About 32% of Indo-Fijians voted or supported NFP and Reddy's style of leadership. It was the first elections under the new AV system where the majority of the seats were won by the Fiji Labour Party, Fijian Association Party and Party of National Unity (FLP/FAP/PANU) coalition. This was a technical victory for the Fiji Labour Party. The results reflected many complicated and intertwined problems and issues, first about the system of elections and secondly, the voting pattern and divisions among the people.

Indeed the results of the 1999 national elections reinforced the fear amongst the Fijians that the 1997 Constitution would erode their rights to govern. The result showed strong disproportion between primary support for political parties and the number of seats won by them in Parliament. This was a devastating outcome for a new system being tested in Fiji. The extent of the disproportion was stark, which drew flak against the system of voting proposed by the Constitution Review Commission of which Lal was a dominating figure (see Frenkel, 2000 and 2001 for discussion on the AV system of voting). The NFP, which Reddy led received more than 15% of the total votes but did not win any seat in the Parliament. The SVT, which was the ruling party led by Rabuka also lost out badly. The NFP received an overall 32% of the total Indo-Fijian votes, which ranged from a high of 42% to a low of 22% across Indian communal constituencies. With such margin of votes the contest between the FLP and the NFP yielded outcomes identical to the First Past the Post system. Overall, the FLP received a total of 108,017 votes out of the total 345,156 votes.<sup>1</sup> That is, the FLP received 31.3% of all ethnic Indian and ethnic Fijian votes combined but won 36 (53%) out of the 67 seats accessible to the two communities, a technical victory, which should not be concluded as Lal does in the book.

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<sup>1</sup> This excludes votes of the mixed ethnic groups (General Electors) and the Rotuman community.

Amongst the Fijian parties the SVT received 38% of Fijian votes (20% of total) but had won only 8 seats in Parliament amounting to about 12% of the parliamentary seats. These results require a little bit more analysis then offered by Lal.

But ask any good political or electoral analyst anywhere, on this outcome, the response would be that 32% votes is a winning proportion for popular support, and by any measure 32% of votes from a community is a significant proportion. So the question is: how can this be argued to be something that did not ignite the peoples' imagination? Lal's statement seems to be an indictment on the people, which is not quite correct. People (voters), a lot of whom were uneducated at the time, were torn between many things. One overwhelming factor was the glittering promises of the People's Coalition (see FLP Manifesto 1999), which was too attractive to the ordinary minds to ignore. In addition to this, the issue of 1997 Constitution was not really taken to the people in a convincing way (for which the media can also be held to account). I assume not enough attention was given to the amended Constitution as a matter of sensitivity to the Fijian people, who would have felt lost out in the process of the Constitutional reform. These sentiments actually went against the SVT among ethnic Fijian voters.

People in today's Fiji, particularly those of Indian descent give enormous value to multi-racialism and cooperation. SVT-NFP coalition losing the election in 1999 should not be concluded as rejection of multi-racialism and cooperation. Arguing that it is only now being appreciated in hindsight after the 2000 coupe is not quite tenable.

Lal's argument that Reddy received Rabuka's audience at the time of the 1987 coups and that he was observant instead of getting angry, fails to make sense. Lal argues that Rabuka was polite and respectful throughout the exchange when he might have been expected to explode. The question is, why would anyone be expect to do otherwise? Why should a wrongdoer get angry when asked not to continue with his injustices? Rabuka was guilty of inflicting injury to Indo-Fijians by executing the coups and allowing mobs to attack them in their homes and on the streets, including imposing religious restrictions soon after the coups of 1987.

It is true that the world order at the time was very different and Rabuka had no compelling reason to listen to Reddy. But isn't it an accepted tenet of democratic conduct that Rabuka had a moral obligation to hear out what Reddy had to say as the leader of the Indo-Fijian community? But those were the days of dictatorship. The issues is: why should people still be so indebted to Rabuka's serenity? The fact remains that those with brute power and those who benefited from that power, includ-

ing Ratu Mara, had the moral obligation to engage the Indo-Fijian leaders in the resolution of the Constitution and more importantly engage in providing security and protection to the community including their participation in the governance of the country.

Of course at the time, the security institutions of the state were engaged in doing the opposite – intimidating and harassing the people who were defenceless.

The threat of more violence, asymmetric violence as an alternative to what actually happened at the time, is also misplaced. It is true though that a leader like Reddy was at the helm of the Indo-Fijian community at a critical time. Reddy did a lot during Fiji's post-coup political evolution, but saying that things could have easily gone wrong, implying more violence at the hands of extremists, does not make any sense.

On hindsight, Rabuka should in fact be held responsible for all the wrongdoings. One must note that violence is not a monopoly of any one group anywhere on the planet. In Fiji it would be totally unfair to ask Indo-Fijians to live at the mercy of thugs forever. Readers would perhaps want to know who were these 'untested, impatient hands' and how could Rabuka and the gang have allowed these people to exert violence and continue to rule. I personally feel quite uneasy about such this conclusions.

Lal also argues that, Reddy's conciliatory and understanding approach, his ability to look further than his personal hurt and anger, was fundamental to the political transformation that took place in Fiji in the 1990s. If this refers to the relative peace of the 1990s, then this is an understatement of the problems that plagued Fiji in the 1990s. Fiji had continued to suffer its share of social and economic problems during those times when slow progress was being made on Constitutional reforms. There were other organizations, such as trade unions and student and youth movements like the Fiji Youth and Students League, that also contributed enormously towards the democratic struggle in Fiji, which Lal makes no mention in his text. These organizations were directly engaged in taking the issues to international forums. There were also many individual politicians, and academics engaged in the struggle and helping Reddy's effort at resolving the problems, which Lal, domiciled outside Fiji either was not aware of or deliberately fails to mention. The role of such groups leaders ad individuals in mobilizing support against discrimination and racism in Fiji were enormous during the 1990s about which Lal seems oblivious.

Although the slow progress on the political reforms was not Reddy's or that of any other Indo-Fijian political leader's making, the

course of events could have been much different if there were more unity among the leaders. The burden of this disunity was borne by the Indo-Fijian community.

In the introductory chapter Lal states:

... in contrast with Mahendra Chaudhry, who effectively succeeded Reddy as the leader of the Indo-Fijian community, and to whom he will invariably be compared in the future, could not be greater. Chaudhry was a tough, tenacious leader, not one to flinch from a fight, a trait widely admired among his supporters at home in the tradition of confrontational politics nurtured in the cane belt of Fiji (p. 21).

Chaudhry's tough image was not confined to the cane belt areas as the argument implies. This was Chaudhry's nationwide depiction, which Lal's statement misrepresents. Chaudhry's tough image was also admired greatly by former residents of Indian descent residing in Lal's own domicile Australia and those in New Zealand, US and Canada. Lal fails to mention this anywhere (except in one place) in his 734 pages of narrative. Former Fiji residents now living in Australia, New Zealand, United States and Canada have significant electoral influence in Fiji. Indo-Fijian households are in regular contact with them since most of them, directly or indirectly, contribute to their welfare.

On another point however, Lal does make reference to the Indo-Fijian diasporic community as having influence on the electoral outcomes in Fiji, as quoted below:

But also interesting was the receptiveness of the message among the Indo-Fijian diasporic community, principally in Australia and New Zealand. Many had left Fiji after the coups of 1987 and had never forgiven Rabuka for carrying out the (sic) or Reddy now for working with him. There is a deep unforgiving streak in the Indian psyche which is difficult to explain but which is real. Grudges can be held for decades, even generations. Labour's strident anti-Rabuka rhetoric struck a chord with them. They contributed in various ways to Labour's cause but mostly through fund raising. NFP's former supporters overseas were, by contrast, more detached from the developments back home, less passionate about the cause of their former party. Labour was also able to tap into the resources of the Australian Labour Party, especially advice about the distribution of preferences.

Lal's statement - that 'there is a deep unforgiving streak in the Indian psyche which is difficult to explain but which is real' - would apply to only the supporters of the Labour Party and not NFP supporters, one may begin to believe from Lal's statements. The facts are otherwise. A lot of Indo-Fijian who left Fiji after the coups, left under difficult circumstance; many suffered poverty, humiliation, rejection (by their own families) and forced circumstantial separation. A majority of these people did not have the luxury of carrying foreign passports as the educated classes often do. Displaced people often remain bitter about their predicament for long periods of time unless their conditions improve relatively well to the pasts they leave behind. Lal does not explain why NFP's former supporters overseas were different from FLP supporters.

Lal's argument that 'Had the Rabuka-Reddy political project succeeded, Fiji would almost certainly have been spared much of the agony and trauma it encountered in the years ahead', seems presumptuous. Arguments such as, '[S]o while the Chief and the Indian could not connect; the Commoner and the Indian did', also reflects poorly on Lal's understanding of politics in Fiji.

There are many serious statements Lal makes throughout the book with conclusive connotations that show poor judgment and misconceptions.

Much of the sugar politics and the pre-coup events are described well in the book. However, some insinuations of characters may need verification.

Chapter 1 of the book covers Reddy's family in fair detail. The details of Reddy's young life are interesting, in fact captivating. The high caste pride of his ancestry is interesting and provides some reflections of his character. This Chapter also provides details of the racial divide in Fiji's politics and how it emerged from the broader divisions to the finer ones on the basis of factions within the Indian community. This chapter also describes the roots of division and dominance in Fijian politics.

Chapter 2 provides details of the problems between the key personalities: S.M. Koya and Reddy. Koya had the huge shadow over Reddy in the early days of NFP after independence. While the book attempts to depict a Mr. Clean image of Reddy, many who were partakers in the politics of the era do not think so. A lot of people believe that Reddy was partly responsible for the life-threatening divisions that occurred in NFP. However, it is true that after the 1997 bitter divisions, Reddy made enormous efforts to bring Koya back into the party fold. But divisions in politics often do not fade away as quickly as they get created.

'Sunset at Noon' is probably the jewel of the book; it deals with the most difficult moments of Reddy's life, and the life of the nation. Lal's descriptions of events mixed with Reddy's expressions and stories of the time are quite touching.

The rest of the Chapters have their share of issues and problems that the reader may come across and some may even be troubling. There are instances where the book falters in providing a fair and neutral account of the events but the starkest of them appear in Chapter 9 where Lal describes the communal division among Indo-Fijians.

Lal's account of the Former NFP parliamentarian Karam Ramrakha is one of the most outrageous communal insinuations in this book. His description of Fiji Indian politics is a far-fetched insinuation of gutter politics in contemporary Fiji. While what he describes may have been true during Ramrakha's time, I have my doubts about such innuendos actually having significant effect on voters' decisions, definitely not to the extent in 1999 or later elections. I would assume a lot of these were spun around as banter to create light moments at the time of tension during the polls. I believe people today (and in 1999) are (were) far less concerned about these narrow divisions. Lal's insinuation that the north Indian appeal helped Mr. Chaudhry (or FLP) win the election, is a bad, 'out of touch' analysis. May be as a north Indian, Lal is exploiting the luxury of making such wild statements with impunity to appease the subject of his project. He goes on to generalize his analysis by arguing that Indians were chiefly divided on these lines; he states:

Cultural and religious groupings affected political affiliations too. In the 1990s, it was said, for instance, that people should vote for the Fiji Labour Party and Mahendra Chaudhry because it was time for a "North Indian" to be leader of the community which in the past had been led by a Gujarati (AD Patel), a Muslim (Siddiq Koya) and a South Indian (Reddy). Appeals to voters on cultural and religious lines are a common, if not publicly admitted, feature of politics in the Indo-Fijian community.

Even if these appeals were uttered, my experience in party politics from 1992 show that these were not seriously attractive propositions for voters to consider changing their inclination; at least not among the Indo-Fijians I dealt with. But this does not mean communal appeals do not exist at all. In the end, however, if one goes by Lal's communal conclusions, one wonders whether the communal appeals were common to all Indians or was it mostly intrinsic to north Indians.

## Omissions and Gaps

There are omissions in the book that need to be identified, at least on instances that are troubling. As pointed out earlier, a book that is supposed to present historical events must do so fully and fairly. Books like these are expected to provide neutral and complete picture of political history, not slanted or partial accounts of events. This review picks issues rather indicatively, not exhaustively and juxtaposes them for comparative analysis.

Lal argues that working with Reddy was a much better option for most of the leaders among Fijians. In support of this he points out that Ratu Mara would have worked with Jai ram Reddy rather than Chaudhry. To present the viewpoints, he states the following:

The two were 'beginning to be friendly towards each other,' Mara recalled in 1993, whereas with Mahendra Chaudhry, the other Indo-Fijian leader, 'I could never call each other friends right from the very beginning.' When asked by journalist Joe Nata with whom he would rather work, Chaudhry or Reddy, Mara replied: 'With Reddy without hesitation' [p. 8].

The fact that Ratu Mara worked with Chaudhry during and after the 1999 elections, do not explain things fully (which Lal points out later in his endnote of the related Chapter). Reddy definitely is a more amenable personality and easier to work with than many others, including Chaudhry. But politics is not just about working with ease, it's about getting the desired results. Mara had started working with Chaudhry from well before the 1999 election and abandoned Reddy totally during 1999 elections.

There is no absolute truth in politics and so a writer needs to be more careful in drawing conclusions from a far end as he does here and many other places in the book.

For serious issues such as these and on several matters relating to Chaudhry's victory in 1999, Lal should have put Chaudhry to bring out his side of the story, which he chooses not to. Many of Lal's arguments would have probably still stood out to be true, but making conclusions without the benefit of the 'view from the other side' is not the correct way to document history. There are (were) other dominant protagonists in FLP and within NFP that Lal should have included in his discourse to expand his narrow conclusions.

Early in the book, Lal quips: 'Indo-Fijians are now belatedly recognizing their mistake in not rallying behind the new power-sharing ar-

rangement.' It is true that many Indo-Fijians who voted for Chaudhry or the FLP would have regretted this on account of the coup, the violence that followed and the humiliation. But the fact remains that many Indo-Fijians who voted for FLP and Chaudhry also believed in politics of consociation. FLP demonstrated working with a much larger and credible group of indigenous Fijians than NFP. This fact has escaped Lal.

There is a abundant literature on politics of consociation around the world; this literature does not support the thesis forwarded by Lal showing a pattern that voters cast their votes overtly reflecting such values. Consociation is a two way affair in politics and assuming that Indo-Fijians had an obligation to abide by it does not really make clear logic.

Nonetheless, the bold attempt Reddy made at expressive consociation in 1999 was worthy of praise and consideration as an excellent political strategy. It would have definitely proven its worth later and possibly in the era after 2006.

For cooperation to work, the expression of consociation must be founded in the system and the society's values itself (see Lijphart 1977 for general discussions and Lamour, 1997, and Robertson and Sutherland 2001 for Fiji specific discussions). Further still the provision of the Constitution (or the electoral system) must bring the idea of consociation to the individual on the ground who seeks to be elected and the people as a whole. People subjected to violence and humiliation would not just fall for consociation. That is a credible reason why it just did not click at that time.

On that ground alone the 1997 Constitution grossly failed to produce results as expected. People's collective actions determined outcomes, not the constitution itself. But that is not to say that it would not have ever worked in favour of consociation.

Further on, Lal writes:

.....people fell for the slogan that the 1997 Constitution would not bring food to the table and Reddy's more abstract appeal for moderation and introspection and about the need to build the foundations of a new future, fell on the deaf ears of a people wanting instant satisfaction of their needs, and that Labour (FLP) was the party to deliver it.

This assessment is true, since people often desire real gains from the system, not intangible ones. FLP's manifesto was very appealing to the people who were suffering economic deprivation for long vis-a-vis SVT's agenda of marginalizing them since the early days of the 1987 coups. Were people just responding to the situation in 1999, of which no doubt

the results proved costly for NFP and a little later for the whole country, as George Speight's army worked into the Parliament.

The book describes at length various political events, all leaving Reddy unscathed and as a political master. On instances such as that described regarding 1984 by-election in Lautoka, Lal needs to put issues to perspective. Take for instance:

Reddy's absence from the campaign trail, and as president of the party no less, came in for criticism. Former NFP president, R.S. Goundar, said he was 'aggrieved and surprised' that Reddy had not given 'open and unqualified' support to the party's official candidate.' Reddy rejected this as 'absolute rubbish.' He said he had been in New Zealand when a meeting in Sigatoka made the selection. The Youth Wing had approached him several times, but he had 'decided to keep himself completely out of the controversy.'... In any event, the fight was 'an internal party problem and he should not take sides because each camp was within the party.'....." [p. 298]

It is obvious that when a political party is fighting an election the leader must throw his weight behind the official candidate. And on this instance, Mr. R.S. Goundar and others who argued on the matter against Reddy were right. Then there is the revelation by others who backed other parties, notably Satendra Nandan in his autobiography, *Requim*, that Reddy had given support to other parties against NFP's own candidates. Including these data would detract from projecting Reddy as a hero and a political saint.

The walk out from the Parliament by Reddy was indeed a sad occasion in NFP history. I still remember the anger I had felt seeing the newspaper report where Reddy was escorted out of the Parliamentary by Parliament security. Many professionals I associated with felt that the boycott decision was the right one. However, the Party MPs abandoned Reddy. The statement - 'Party leaders come and party leaders go, but the party must go on' - was one of the deciding moments for NFP's post 1977 history, showing that indiscipline (and back-stabbing) was rampant in the party. But it remained Reddy's responsibility to oversee the leadership of the party. Instead, he completely abandoned the Party and retreated into his shell, signifying a mark of supposed aristocratic background. Lal refused to dissect Reddy's leadership or lack of it, in the period 1984-87. In contrast he passes judgments on many others including S. M. Koya.

On grooming new leaders from within NFP, Reddy's sincerity may be put to acid test. Lal believes that Reddy had love for Chaudhry, espe-

cially after all the pre-1994 elections and bitter electoral contests. The following from Lal:

Chaudhry wanted Reddy's political blood, but well into the late 1990s, Reddy still spoke, to his closest friends and colleagues, much to their dismay, of the Labour leader as his natural successor as the leader of the Indo-Fijian community, not any aspirants within his own party. Harish Sharma recalls a conversation this way. Reddy had asked him, since he (Harish) would be retiring from politics at end of the parliament's 1994 term, to resign as his deputy sometime in 1997 to give him about eighteen months to groom a successor. "I can't think of a better person than Mahendra Chaudhry", he told Sharma. Sharma replied, 'Give me time, but I will resign.' Three or four days later, Chaudhry made the headlines by accusing Reddy of selling out the interests of the Indian community by agreeing to one fewer Indian communal seat during the negotiations for the 1997 Constitution. Reddy was outraged at the untruthful allegation (see later discussion). When Sharma went to Reddy's Opposition office the following morning, Reddy said, "I know why you are smiling" when Harish asked, "Do you still want me to resign?" [pp. 16-17]

Lal completely overlooks new leaders of the Party Reddy was looking to for leading the party during and after the 1999 elections. Names such as Attar Singh, Biman Prasad, Jagannath Sami, Pramod Rae, Raman Singh and many others, including academics, hardly appear in Lal's discourse. I think Reddy was quite sincere about some of these personalities as future leaders. Lal barely mentions any of them in his 735 page book. But he states that the 1999 election candidates were of high calibre, which Reddy had persuaded to join the party about whom he writes:

The eclectic 1999 line-up was, arguably, the finest the NFP (or Labour, for that matter) had ever presented to the electorate. 'At the end of the day,' Reddy remarked, 'the quality of government will be decided by the quality of its members.' The team also had regional and cultural balance as well. These things matter among Indo-Fijian electorates. There were South Indians, North Indians, Gujaratis, Muslims, Sikh. For the first time in the party's history, three women were given what was generally thought to be 'winnable seats.' On this issue, Chandra Reddy had a large hand in persuading her husband to cast his net more widely.

## Conclusion

Coups and political instability has cost Fiji enormously during the past 30 years. Indo-Fijians initially, joined in increasing numbers by indigenous Fijians, continue to leave Fiji for greener pastures abroad. Lal points out that almost one hundred twenty thousand, mostly Indo-Fijians, left in the first twenty years after the coups. Indo-Fijian population has dwindled to around a third of the total from over 50% in 1986. One question is whether this trend would allay the fears of the indigenous Fijian people about being outnumbered and dominated politically, if indeed these were the overriding motivating fears leading to political instabilities. Lal argues that these fears have diminished as Fijians realized that they are the outright majority and will never be outnumbered again. He further argues that it was that 'realization together with Reddy's patient, persistent approach that opened up the way for dialogue on the constitution and other matters'. The question for the Indo-Fijians is whether brilliant leaders of Reddy's stature would still be needed to calm indigenous Fijian fears or would smaller, less significant leaders among Indians suffice to provide leadership.

The challenge of building leadership becomes ever more difficult as educated people continue to leave the country. Lal rightly argues that the race issue lies just beneath the surface and the language of violence and retribution used to be freely used. But race issues were critical to be dealt with. Lal writes: 'Dealing with the question of race, negotiating its treacherous bends and boundaries was one of the most intractable problems Reddy faced in his political career.' Would this continue to be the case in the future or have things changed now completely. Would politics of consociation work in the future elections? Would Indo-Fijians be allowed to assume significant government positions in future? And more importantly would the idea of 'ethnicity' and ethnic nationalism fade away or continue to influence electoral and national outcomes. May be these are some of the important issues Professor Brij Lal may wish to address in his next book.

For the time, is Lal's book the last word on Jai Ram Reddy, no doubt a leader of immense stature? I suggest that Reddy's lasting contribution to development of Fiji, carving Reddy a name in history, would not be his years from his Senator days to 1987 elections, or even to taking NFP to a position of strength in the Parliament in the 1990's. His real contribution would be that which emerged after the Reeves Commission Report was released. But whether Reddy was alone in providing this leadership, or

whether there were other critical factors in moulding his approach and stance, is yet to be researched and written on. One critical, and possibly history-making, event which Lal misses completely in his appreciation of Reddy, is the joint meeting of NFP and Labour parliamentarians, together with a small group of academics, held at the Parliament Complex immediately after the Reeves Commission Report was tabled. This, and the developments to the date of the adoption of the Constitution, needs thorough documentation by researchers passionate about history and facts.

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### Author

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