

cific Islands Forum appear in the Appendices. Authors include Mark Borg, Rajni Chand, Trevor Cullen, Prangtip Daorueng, Ron Duncan, Nicole-Gooch, Jaap Jasperse, Paresh Narayan, Nazhat Shameem, Shaista Shameem, Charmaine Rodrigues, and Lisa Williams-Lahari.

The book will be a useful source of information for scholars and students although there are a few niggles. Most annoying is the lack of an index. Also, more rigorous editing would have removed minor errors. In some chapters, mention is made of useful websites but the reader must search to find them in the Appendices. The acronyms do not appear in alphabetical order, as should happen, and the binding of my review copy proved so insubstantial that pages fluttered to the floor on first opening.

References

Collins, Simon and Jeremy Rose (2004), 'City Voice, an alternative to the corporate model', *Pacific Journalism Review*, 10 (2), pp. 32-45. Also Venables, David (2002), 'Public Journalism', Judy McGregor and Margie Comrie, eds., *What's News: Reclaiming Journalism in New Zealand*, Dunmore Press, Palmerston North.

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Turnings: Fiji Factions by: Brij V Lal. 2008, Fiji Institute of Applied Studies, University of the South Pacific, Suva Fiji

As a student and academic, I have read Brij Lal's scholarly writing with interest for some years now. I find his commentary in social and economic debates succinct, thought-provoking and fresh. I picked *Turnings* up with interest, curious to see if a gentler voice resided behind the hard-line statements of political crisis and reform in Fiji and I was not disappointed.

The writings of Brij V Lal are a treat for avid readers familiar with the rural Pacific context. His first hand experience comes to life in the vibrant descriptions and animated characters of stories, which emerge from the pages in this small collection. His talanoa style is filled with poignancy, nostalgia and a truth that is both painful and real.

The influence of his own educational experience is clear and by his own

admission, the stories contained in *Turnings* are conversations about the Indo-Fijian village experience of his childhood. In Brij's writings, the voice of the diasporic-migrant Indian is strong in its dual-nil identity dilemma. Recurring themes that re-emerge in this collection include education, love, identity, political crisis, and migration. Three stories, *The dux of Nasinu*, *A gap in the hedge* and *Masterji* feature strong educational leaders and the realities of their rural lives. In *the dux of Nasinu*, a visionary teacher struggles with the expectations and demands of a conservative community.

Masterji, explores the effects of the coup on a small indo-Fijian community and in *A gap in the hedge*, we are reminded of the heavy influences of the colonial educational system. In this story, we gain insight into the author's own influence of classic British poets such as Wordsworth and Byron. *Masterji* tells the story of a headmaster and his commitment to his position in the community. It also tells the story of his wife and her frustrations. An additional layer of hard truth comes in the form of the 'outsider' voice and the physical abuse and intimidation by soldiers on the local community as they celebrate a religious event. Brij tells it like it is and the reality is stark and harsh when he says: 'This place is finished. Khalas sab kutch. We Indians have no future here.' This rings of the post 1987 coup emotions and he is relentless in his reminder of how that felt.

Marriage provides an insider's view of the complexity of arranged marriages in Fiji. It tells the tale of family politics and finding the 'right' partner for the 'right' reasons. It is insightful in its true to life depictions of familiar characters and personalities. 'Listening to her mother, Munni remembered why the family had been keen for her to get married in Tabia in the first place. She had been sent there on a mission to look for suitable husbands for her sisters. Teachers, clerks, policemen and men like that, in cash employment.'

Similar themes emerge in *A Change of Seasons*, with the main character, Vinay, discovering 'he did not have the one thing that every struggling family in the community prized above all else; a foreign passport... that damned foreign passport'.

Across the fence tells the story of love and duty. It is a gentle love story of a woman struggling with the responsibility of tending to her ailing husband while managing a small shop. In *Mr. Tom's country*, magic, witchcraft, sorcery, religion and the supernatural are revisited in the context of the village setting. The confusion and culture shock of the immigrant to New Zealand is personified in Kaka, who finds that 'Television both entertained and embarrassed... He couldn't watch the soapies with the entire family in the room. The scantily clad women, the open display of skin, the kissing, the suggestive bedroom scenes, the crude advertising (for lingerie, skin lotions) had him averting his eyes or uttering muffled coughs.'

An Australian Fusion introduces the reader to the trans-generational conversation; the older, angry Indo-Fijian voice countering the younger liberal voice of the new age generation. This is an important voice as it brings the indo-Fijian conversation full circle across generations.

The collection is relevant to anyone with an interest in the psychology of living in the Pacific. I recommend this book first and foremost as a must read for locals in Fiji as it provides an insight into the emotions and trials of the indo-Fijian rural experience. It makes a significant contribution to the dearth of literary works in the Pacific and immerses the reader in a reality that simply is. The opening sentence to the final chapter in the collection, *One life, three worlds*, summarises this paradox: 'To be an Indian from Fiji is to be a complex bundle of contradictions.' It is this complexity and multi-layered contradictions that Brij reveals. His stories come to life in the masterful painting of *Turnings* within the rural Indian community.

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Shedding Silence – An Anthology of Writing from Fiji Prisons

by: Mary Daya (Ed), Pacific Writing Forum, University of the South Pacific: Suva. 2008

The power of the pen is legendary and in common usage quite the cliché. There is a toss up of the conjoined phrases 'prison writers' and 'writers who are prisoners' in discussion on writings from prisons. The binary is itself the subject of many a work of fiction and alludes to some sense of a circumscribing of space, internal or from outside. The collection *Shedding Silences*, published by the Pacific Writing Forum (PWF) at the University of the South Pacific, is firmly grounded in writing by prisoners from within the newly spangled Corrective Services department in Fiji. It features prose, poetry, life stories, and journal accounts by 37 inmates. The writing program became part of the wider Yellow Ribbon Program (YRP) with workshops in various rehabilitative programs including creative expressions in painting.

The book is the result of over twelve months of intense writing workshops and mentorship provided by PWF program assistant Mary Daya. Without getting into the formal set-up and membership to the PEN Prison Writing Program that was founded in 1971, the PWF program has achieved all the ideals of the global monolith. PEN believes in the restorative and rehabilita-

tive power of writing, by providing inmates with writing teachers, mentors and readership. According to the PEN website, 'The program seeks to provide a place for inmates to express themselves freely with paper and pen and to encourage the use of the written word as a legitimate form of power'.

This exercise of power is evident in the works in *Shedding Silences*. It is easy to be patronising or dismissive of such programs as a feel good exercise in demonstrative social agency for those outside the system. The work done by Daya in providing inspiration beyond just skilled teaching is evident in the writings. There is an easy lyrical quality to the poetry in the collection that is indicative of impact of her tutorship given that her own preferred writing area of expertise is prose. The polish is there too in the prose pieces with some evocative life stories and journal entries, as well as impressive forays into recounting myths and legends.

Daya writes in her editorial note of the creativity and freedom presented in writing to those who '...do not have a right to own a key to a door'. The collection has that haunting quality of the incarcerated. There is the presence of eyes that peer into the dark beyond steel grates. Ears tuned to the slightest sounds, like that of a slow dripping tap across the courtyard, or the sound of silence in solitary. The opening piece of the collection is the poem 'Wasted Time' by Alesi Tawake, and it sets the mood of firmly prescribed life behind bars with the poet's realisation that 'everything is gone/even my pride...when I face/myself...I am alone...' But there is always that quest for freedom. No where as universally expressed as in the childhood memories we all have of kites. Alfred John Holmes pays homage to his Flagstaff childhood and the windy season from May-September, when kite flights and kite fights were an initiation into ways of the city in his prose, 'Kite Running'.

There is that singularity of purpose in the words that these writers chose, and for the most part, they concentrate on sparse words, to express these haunting qualities. As you read the book there is a sense of walking across a desert of concrete and steel when by magic a bright flower springs upon. As welcome as an oasis or the mirage of rain misting across a harbour, and then the disenchantment sets, but not always despair. As in an expression of the value of 'A Spoon Redefined' by Aseri Talai as he does not '...own a kitchen that has many spoons'. And his disquiet when an officer does not return the sole prison issue spoon. There is always the quiet humour in these writings, as expressed by Azim Khan when he imagines the sound of silence as that 'of the human/body growing fat'. Humour undercut by the constant refrain that prison is also work is found in the poem, 'The Norm', by Eliko Raco.

The sense of being cut off from the world is strong in the collection. The loneliness and the silence that gathers around one like a wet cardboard on the homeless makes its own profound statements in many of the pieces.