

RECLAIMING THE NATION

Two Keynote Addresses on Education

Subramani

*With a Foreword by
Professor Satendra Nandan*

Vicas Press
Lautoka

Published by Vicas Press
P O Box 7580,
Lautoka.
Phone: 665 2595
Fax: 665 2596
Email: vicaspress@gmail.com

Printed in Fiji
Cover design: Pac.Ed
Word-processing, Layout, Design: Pac.Ed

Two keynote addresses, National Conference on Education, Fiji National University, Lautoka Campus, 2014:

'Postcolonial Education and the Age of New Illiteracy', 11 July 2014.

'Reclaiming the Nation: Inventing the Postcolonial Curriculum', 7 November 2014.

© Subramani 2016

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced in any form, except for inclusion of brief quotations in reviews, without permission in writing from the author

USP Library Cataloguing-in-Publication Data

Subramani.
Reclaiming the nation/ Subramani.-- Lautoka, Fiji: Vicas Press, 2016.
24 p. ; 21 cm.
ISBN 978-982-9082-10-7
1. Education, Humanistic--Fiji. 2. Curriculum change--History and criticism--Fiji.I. Title.
LC1021.S832016 370.112099611--dc23

Contents

Foreword: Two Uneasy Pieces by Professor Satendra Nandan	5
Postcolonial Education and the Age of New Illiteracy	9
Reclaiming the Nation: Inventing the Postcolonial Curriculum	17

FOREWORD

Two Uneasy PiecesSatendra Nandan¹

Professor Subramani gave two Public Lectures in 2014. Neither of these was published in Fiji: I first read them in *The Global Indian Journal*, published in Sydney, edited by Dr Satish Rai.

The Lectures should, I think, have received wide circulation and comment in the new Fiji. They were directly addressed to tertiary institutions, teachers, administrators and students. They touch, question, inspire critical and creative thinking in the Fijian society generally. The talks are aimed at the mind of the nation itself. And Subramani's voice and vision are a vital component in the making of Fiji.

The Fiji constitution, on page 18, has a remarkable phrase in it: "freedom of imagination and creativity".

I'm not aware of any national constitution in the world which has 'freedom of imagination' integral to its other freedoms of speech, expression, thought, opinion, and publication. 'Freedom of imagination' has incalculable implications: it implies an aspect of our life far deeper—it enables us to imagine an epic and a lyric, equality and justice, ethics and politics, and critically examine the very sources of our sacred texts and profane dailiness of living.

Subramani is a creative thinker—in 1995 he published a collection of striking essays in *Altering Imagination*. One often talks of decolonizing the mind, even decolonizing the imagination, but to suggest altering the imagination is a radical dialectic of dialogue with our past, present and future. We know that the most original thinkers do not interpret the world; they try to change it. And provide alternatives. They take us into the ever-evolving reality.

¹ **Satendra Nandan**, Emeritus Professor, is a former member of parliament and cabinet minister in Fiji. A writer-academic, he's currently writing his book, *Brief Encounters: A Life in Literature and Politics*, on his experience of Fiji-Australia-India on a fellowship to Shimla, to be published in 2016.

Professor Subramani is essentially an academic; more significantly he's a writer, too. The act of writing is the most creative act followed by the act of reading and thinking. It's also actively subversive for it believes in changes and challenges

The solitude of a writer is a most powerful weapon of creativity. We're the only species born to learn a language—that is our most common and universal human bond and bondage.

Writing in human thought is a relatively recent phenomenon: Imagine our existence on this planet for 500,000 years: Reduce this into the life-span of a single individual, 50 years old. For 49 years, 364 days we didn't write a single word. It's only on the 365th day of our fiftieth year that we began to write. Most of human existence has been through oral communication. All the great epics and religious texts were first transmitted from one generation to another through orality. Even the King James Bible, the Authorized Version in English, was composed in 1611 by 50 learned men. They are all patriarchal compositions. They need serious scrutiny in our secular world where human equality gives equilibrium to any civilized society.

Such knowledge about sacred texts raises problems of divine and revealed truths for which we are prepared to kill, maim, halt and blind. This is the root cause of the dark and devastating fundamentalism confronting the world today. My exclusive TRUTH is the only truth. But the world is diverse, plural, and multitudinous in its infinite variety of men and women and their many versions of truth and reality. There are no full-stops in the history of humankind. Or evolution. No two leaves are exactly identical. Not even identical twins, including the Twin Towers.

Subramani's timely warning against pervasive illiteracy in our society is particularly notable for its immediate relevance. This 'new age of illiteracy' could be deeply damaging to a nation like Fiji. Literacy in our region is barely 200 years old, including in Australasia. Yet the introduction of writing has changed the very structures of our daily apprehension of life and liberty: our ways of thinking and imagining. Through the Word, we enter new worlds. We create and inhabit new universes. As he says: 'a truly literate society derives pleasure and wisdom from the written word in all its forms: social, educational, intellectual, artistic and spiritual.' And scientific and secular.

We know better than most how our girmit grandparents lost their world through illiteracy.

While not decrying the marvellous advancement in technology, he's aware of our fatal dependence on it. The danger is that knowledge is not wisdom, information is not insight. They may lead towards enlightenment. The function of universities are to make our students and teachers to think for

themselves. It's a challenge in any society; in a postcolonial society this is a huge and urgent task.

The new culture of computer-obsessed education can be quite corrupting, if not used wisely. All technology is a good servant but, like colonialism, it can be a bad master.

Subramani's emphasis is on writing, reading and the importance of literature and history. He pays special tribute to scholars and writers who have forged a Fijian Literature of considerable stature in less than fifty years. And how we can slowly lose the idea of human freedom in the glamour of technological pursuits. Electronic media can also cripple our thinking. It can lead to a corrosive illiteracy.

The very idea of a university is challenged in these talks: what really are the true aims of education in a multicultural society like ours? What are the values by which we survive with a sense of wholeness, coup after coup? So embarrassing, so unnecessary and yet so much part of our deeper psyche.

Why serious reading has virtually disappeared? The latest computers students carry in their shining bags, but the content of their essays show an emptiness of thought that is both disturbing and debilitating. Life is still the most precious four-letter word like Fiji. And the life of the mind is not the end but the beginning of living. We seem to be losing that core in our curriculum.

Fiji is Subramani's central concern in 'Reclaiming the Nation'. He suggests ways of creating a curriculum that is related to life, a study that grows out of life and illuminates it from life. 'Nation' is a difficult concept but Subramani is not thinking of narrow nationalism; rather how do a people fragmented by history, fractured by coups of racial and religious complexions, create a sense of a nation collectively like building a nest from fallen feathers, broken dreams.

He has particular faith in the new constitution and the 2014 democratic elections. These may lead to the forging of a new national consciousness, even conscience. There are now, more than ever, windows and doors of opportunity open to the citizens of Fiji. Significantly the lectures were delivered in 2014—the 100th anniversary of the outbreak of the First World War, a war created out of such misunderstandings and miscalculations.

In an impassioned paragraph, he writes:

“All segments of society carry their own peculiar hurts from history, be it scars of pre-contact animosities, the bruises of indenture, the psychological damage caused by colonialism, the traumas of the coups, the acrimony arising from recent elections. These cannot be easily erased or repressed. Real or symbolic wounds (various forms of true and false consciousness) are stored away in memory and resurface at moments of crisis and confrontation. If healing is

the most urgent national need...the curriculum becomes the location in which solidarity and healing assume priority.”

Professor Subramani makes significant suggestions on a number of issues. His idea that the CDU should be situated at the FNU has a lot of merit. It should be taken seriously, now that Fiji has a national university.

Here the very altering of imagination becomes imperative. We always have alternatives available to us, if we cared enough and thought long and hard, together.

These two 'uneasy talks' should create some deep and serious debate and discussion in the green groves of our academe. Professor Subramani has given us his critical thinking about the future of the Fijian society and ideas of forging a new national identity through 'reading, writing and arithmetic' with which all of us began our educational journey from Labasa to Nadi, from islands to continents, and beyond unimagined horizons. Literacy opened the world for us in its many wonders. The writer-academic is suggesting that the most creative ground is really under your feet in Fiji.

Fiji can be our wonderful world, if we can imagine it together, through our words, acts, imagination; above all, our manifold relationships with our one and only world, within and without.

6 January, 2015

1

Postcolonial Education and the Age of New Illiteracy

Let me state the thesis of this address at the start: I believe that globally we are standing at the brink of a new age of illiteracy, and a postcolonial island nation like Fiji that has acquired literacy relatively recently, beginning in 1835 with the arrival of missionaries, is quickly degenerating into new illiteracy before becoming a truly literate nation.

My definition of a literate society is one that does more than just read and write -- that is the minimum standard; a truly literate society derives pleasure and wisdom from the written word in all its forms: social, educational, intellectual, artistic and spiritual. Societies in the East and the West, where literacy existed for a much longer period of time, indeed centuries, the written word has found expression for all these purposes in the highest form; we in our post-colonial state had just created our first books when we started to descend into illiteracy again.

The first illiteracy was the inability to read and write; this new illiteracy is knowing how to read and write but the literate mind, the finer feelings associated with it, and sensitivity for the written word, hadn't become established firmly and it started to decay. In the younger generation, in particular, before the written word could forge its hold in the imagination, it lost its appeal. In philosophic terms one might say we have gone from paganism to neopaganism without initially becoming enlightened.

This may be a provocative way to put it; it is nevertheless the truth. If educators like yourself are looking for a brave task, therein is situated your great challenge to put right. The illiteracy I am trying to define begins with immediate illiteracy where our students cannot read and write in their mother tongue, and communication teachers will tell you they are only semi-literate in the English language. Much of what I have to say this morning will have im-

plications for research on teacher education. First, teacher education will have to, as an initial first step, theorize learning and education more rigorously using the language of postcolonial theory; and second, teacher education must search for a language of resistance to new illiteracy.

One does not have to be a visionary to foresee the effects of the dizzying pace of change being brought about by the electronic media, especially on the younger generation. In 1949, a visionary writer called George Orwell created a mystical character 'The Big Brother' in his novel titled *1984*. Big Brother controlled and manipulated society through telescreens that reminded people that the 'Big Brother is Watching You'. *1984* is a story of secret surveillance and manipulation; the Big Brother epitomizes a subtle form of tyranny. At that time the world Orwell created seemed beyond our imagination. It is ironic that the Big Brother image was used in Apple's 1984 television commercial to introduce Macintosh computer. The year 1984 has long gone, the world of the dystopian novel has already become a reality, and now Big Brother has had another incarnation in Uncle Google, our supreme master and tutor, who is fast taking over teachers and educators as source of knowledge and wisdom.

The thrust of my argument is not to decry advanced technology; I am an avid admirer of computers and the internet that I often see as modern miracle, more enchanting than the spell enforced by sleight of hand of magicians because such trickery is mere illusion and disappears after the act but this modern magic is here to stay to shape our life forever. I am also aware of the defenders of electronic revolution who will say that contemporary blogging, facebooking, texting, tweeting offers young people the opportunity to connect to a wide audience, and to share their concerns on trivial as well as weighty matters as never before. They will argue that all that texting, abbreviating is creating a new language of the future that the teachers might as well learn in order to keep up with their students and retain their jobs. For me all of this is too glib and hollow, not at all very convincing or truthful.

Defenders of the new culture can sometimes go overboard like Clive Thompson, the well-known writer on digital technologies, who says of Americans, "Before the internet came along, most Americans never wrote anything, ever, that wasn't a school assignment. Unless they got a job that required producing text, they'd leave school and virtually never construct a paragraph again." This is the sort of wild assertions we have to fear in postcolonial societies. What Thompson says is not even true of Fiji; we have done rather well, within a few decades we have forged a respectable body of literature in English that we can call Fijian literature. The Americans, of course, have produced great educators, writers and even politicians like Benjamin Franklin and Barack Obama, who have used the written word brilliantly.

Literacy came to Fiji during the colonial era and the electronic media –

television, mobile phone and internet-- in postcolonial Fiji after political independence, as recent as 1994-95. Television and mobile phone are used widely both in rural and urban Fiji, though only 33% of our population have access to internet, mostly in the towns and cities. Most students now have access to computers, iPads, iPods or at least a mobile phone. The impact of the electronic media is already overpowering. As far as I'm aware there hasn't been any systematic study of this on culture and associated behaviour. Just as our education in schools is 'scraps of information', in Alfred North Whitehead's words, the electronic media is also randomly used for scraps of information without any critical understanding of the ideology that produced it, and who controls the media and in whose interest it operates.

It is beyond the scope of this brief address to examine the relationship between the electronic media and the dominant ideology that is innovating it. It would require a different kind of discourse for me to consider the dialectic of technology versus culture of emancipation.

There is an important paradox involved here: the technology that frees us from back-breaking and tedious work, on closer scrutiny, also facilitates, in a capitalist order, domination and enslavement. The machines we use—television, computer, mobile phone—cannot engage in such discourse or analysis; nor do machines have a sense of history. We in Fiji might say does it really matter? We have thrown out history from our curriculum anyway or relegated it to the periphery. My response to that is: that is precisely why we are producing students without a sense of history. For that matter do our citizens have a sense of history? Why do we keep making the same political mistakes?

We who do not like to read and analyse books cannot be expected to read and analyse events in society intelligently.

The task of decolonising hasn't begun in our curriculum nor in the minds of our people. This might be an ungenerous and provocative thing to say. The truth is we still view curriculum the way we were taught by the coloniser, uncertain about the place of our own mother tongue, and we continue to see knowledge as discrete pieces of information, varying from one class to another class, without a centre that will pull the whole of it together and relate it to life. The internet is not concerned about these issues nor about what really matters to us. Let's say for survival of our multicultural life the priority is proficiency in iTaukei and Fiji Hindi languages. But we have allowed both these languages to become among the endangered languages of the world. Neither of these vernaculars is being enriched by written culture. The internet cannot help us in this matter; it is indifferent to our woes. The dominant discourse on the internet will remain in the English language.

Let us view the big picture for a moment. The big picture is in advanced industrial world where technology evolved, as Antonio Gramsci has pointed

out, the power axis has changed from control by army or police to agencies that produce modes of communication. The reverse is true for Fiji where strong military presence since 1987 has been a strong feature of our society. In short, let me say that neither the print culture nor visual culture should be seen as removed from the ideologies that produced them. They are not innocent or apolitical tools to be used uncritically, without discrimination and understanding.

In colonial Fiji, books by English authors and the English language were used in our curriculum to remind the subjected people of the power and the glory of the coloniser and his country. The local vernaculars and cultures were marginalised because English was needed for colonial administration. Today the interests that control the visual media would like us to believe that we are part of a global electronic utopia, the Brave New World, where access to more electronic goods will automatically lead to greater opportunities and happiness. Our experience tells us a different story.

In a small postcolonial island state there is unlikely to be any strong resistance or counter discourse against the hegemonic electric environment. We will continue to use the electronic media innocently. But teachers and educators, who have a serious stake in the matter, cannot go on doing what we are doing without reassessing our postcoloniality and where we are going with the electronic environment. The media agencies that are conditioning the students' habits and expectations are doing it more successfully than we are in shaping their minds and sensibilities in our schools and universities.

There are serious social consequences of this lapse on our part. We are allowing the consciousness and character of our students to be formed by the way they surf the internet, blog and network. That is intimately bound with how they want to learn and how they perceive reality. They want to learn the way Uncle Google teaches them, giving instantaneous pleasure, with speed, in the form of compressed message coming in fragments without requiring too much concentration or discipline of the mind. Under this learning regime learners have no time to read books, and it suits them well to be told which pages to skim. We, the educators and trainers of teachers, and the students in our charge, are totally oblivious to Bertolt Brecht's remark:

*Secure yourselves Knowledge, you who are frozen
You who are starving, grab hold of the book: it's a Weapon
You must take over the leadership.*

More ominous and dangerous is the new perception that the electronic media is facilitating in the young people where their understanding of reality itself is transformed. The internet is providing them with a happier and more pleasurable reality that is away from the hurts and constraints of real life. This is exemplified in the games that are available where one can transform oneself

into what you want to be: a millionaire who can purchase at random the house or the car you desire, a film star who gallivants with the most exquisite beauties, Superman who flies, a champion golfer who has name and fame. Why would you want to live in the real world of impoverishment and want? You can remain in this fantasy world all day.

Our students are just at the face book level of indulgence at the present moment; they will quickly discover the pleasures of the surreal world. I knew students in Australia who were in this virtual world three quarters of their daily life. The effect is like certain hallucinogenic drugs that produce psychedelic experience taking one beyond ordinary, waking consciousness into a semi-mystical environment. Over a period of time the expectations of those who live in the virtual world will become altered like those in the psychedelic world. They will not be able to live without fantasy or drugs for too long.

So what do students who are tutored by Uncle Google expect from us? Well, we are told we exist in a market economy, and it is the market that dictates according to the laws of supply and demand. We as a university exist to serve the manpower need of the country. Within it are our competitive disciplines who must justify their existence by bringing in more clients. Our students are our clients and their interests must be safeguarded at all times. Precisely what do they demand from us? They do not want to read whole books; so we tell them which pages to read. They want the classes to be enjoyable; we run around with overhead projectors, power point presentations, pictures and photographs, and video clips. (Thus the future teachers we train should be shown how to be clowns and jokers who will keep the class entertained). Student assignments should be short and undemanding, and allow cut and paste from Uncle Google. When the assignments are handed in the markers aren't supposed to be too harsh on their language. Most lecturers, other than those in the English Department, see it as safe to ignore their gibberish so long as they make some sense within the subject area. Finally, they want their degrees quickly, so we have invented the trimester system though it leaves the teachers exhausted with no time for research or thinking and reflection. This is furthest from John Henry Newman's ideal of a university that was meant to produce students who had "a cultivated intellect, a delicate taste, a candid, equitable, dispassionate mind." In today's word this looks like description of an alien specimen.

Let me pose a question for our universities: Where in the discrete and discontinuous offerings, disciplines of the university, is the space for reflection on the eternal verities or permanent concerns of human beings, and opportunities to strive for their attainments and for inner fulfilment?

I do not wish to leave you with this grim portrayal of higher education without suggesting a way out. I want to assure you that all is not lost because

our postcolonial Fiji hasn't yet experienced the extremes of the effects of the electronic environment. We can still be inspired by Cardinal Newman's idea of a university and visions of other prominent educators. In conclusion I want to turn to them, familiar names like Alfred North Whitehead and Neil Postman, (and Allan Bloom who wrote on the closing of the American mind), in order to propose an alternative pedagogy. The current pedagogy is definitely not working because we are trying to imitate Uncle Google and we will never succeed regardless how much we compress our lessons and programs and make them enjoyable; the internet has far too many entertaining possibilities and distractions to lure young people.

We need a new pedagogy that is subversive; subversive of both colonial education as well as scraps of information from the electronic environment. If we need a text to inspire us, let's keep handy Neil Postman and Charles Weingarter's *Teaching as a Subversive Activity* (1969). According to the authors, the way to subvert colonial education, as a rehabilitation or detoxing process, would be to declare a moratorium on text books and curriculum inherited from the past. This is immediately possible in secondary schools recently freed of interminable examinations. There lessons can develop freely from the life experience of students who, given the opportunity, will reveal what is worth learning.

Creativity and imagination should have free play in a totally democratic environment. The way to deal with the monsters that students have allowed into their psyche from the electronic environment is to carry out guerrilla type forays and drag the monsters out and display them for the students to examine them for what they are. The schools and universities together are powerful agencies to undertake this project. We have to believe in our own strength.

For our own education we ought to, from time to time, dip into good old Whitehead's *Aims of Education*. Written in 1929, his essay still has resonance for us. See the wonderful line from the opening paragraph: "Culture is activity of thought, and receptiveness to beauty and humane feelings". This is from a mathematician writing about education eighty five years ago. The world has changed since then but the basic insights of Whitehead are still valid: he told us there is fallacious dichotomy between disciplines that we enforce as 'scraps of knowledge', the justification for a university is that it wields knowledge together, and preserves the excitement of learning through imagination, creativity and fresh ideas. By diverting university education from this sort of ideal to simply serving the manpower needs we have transformed the university into a trade school, producing graduates who have plenty of marketable skills but no point of view, philosophy of life or commitment to society. All the necessary debate on decolonising education and subverting the influences of the electronic environment are left on the wayside.

The environment of the trade school type university is drab, without cultural or intellectual liveliness or excitement. That is why when we gather for talks and readings under the baka tree, few staff and students attend, and when seminars on research and writing are held only a handful show up. We are not moved by ideas or new thought. What is the purpose of all our research when there is no appreciating audience for them? When we go out in the world and conduct our research, when we return with our findings, we expect some collegial feeling for its reception. Without this collegial sense we will not evolve as a university. Where is that ideal university? John Carlyle (1795—1881) who wrote that what we become depends on the books we read, also said that "The greatest university is a collection of books." Now Google claims the supreme university is inside the computer. We ought to know that the ideal university is neither in books nor inside the computer; the greatest university is Life itself. It is from Life we should draw our curriculum, learning and teaching strategies.

2

Reclaiming the Nation: Inventing the Postcolonial Curriculum

This address will argue that before we can probe the subject of aligning national curriculum to development needs, it is imperative to abandon any internally focalised viewpoint and deconstruct the two components in the theme 'curriculum' and 'national' as problems. Educators have recognized for some time that Fiji's school curriculum, and this may also be true of tertiary curriculum, is still 'perceived to be removed from real life'. I'm quoting here from the *Report of Fiji Islands Education Commission 2000*. The call has been for a responsive curriculum that incorporates experiences of real life that the communities have actually lived through and are currently enduring.

The idea of the nation or nation-ness is even more problematic because if nation is, in the words of Benedict Anderson (who pioneered definition of the subject), an "imagined political community" then Fiji's communities have never had the opportunity to imagine the nation collectively. Of course there has been "ethnic nationalism", after 1987 for instance, but the nation hasn't been adequately imagined as alliance among communities of Fiji. There is perhaps a new spirit of solidarity where different segments of society—especially those for whom a sense of belonging was a vexatious issue—are reclaiming the nation after 2014 democratic elections. It is a suitable moment to interrogate the emerging national consciousness.

A discursive style is adopted for this paper, largely theoretical in nature, because this mode of discussion provides the necessary space for such critical enquiry. Theory has that sanction to question any facile understanding and initiate analysis that would de-stabilize the subject in order that it may be viewed from alternative perspectives. We know we cannot change reality at will; however we can transform it in the realm of theory. Theory is where we exercise our creative vision to discover and design an ideal or utopian universe. It is

useful to reiterate William Arthur Ward's often quoted words, "If we can imagine it we can create it. If you can dream it, you can become it." Theory offers us that context to re-imagine the nation, identify its needs and propose a curriculum allied to it.

Both the concepts "nation" and "curriculum" have preconceived meanings; to de-familiarise them would entail making what is well-established seem unfamiliar so that it can be re-interpreted, thus stimulating fresh perception. There is a history of curriculum innovation, whose main feature, after colonial education became established, has been a series of partial reforms; the idea of a nation, on the other hand, has no such history and therefore it hasn't taken root, the common experience being that of living in a divided state. Colonialism introduced the idea of a nation; colonial practice however left us a divided country. While curriculum has received partial reforms, the idea of the nation has remained for us in history as a half measure. The possibility of a nation remained in our imagination but never given collective expression.

For the idea of the nation to germinate we need narratives about it. In Fiji making narratives about the nation has been a discontinuous process. However it is through these stories about the nation that the idea becomes located in the popular imagination. One such story is formulated in the national anthem, ... *we stand united under noble banner blue*. A recent billboard poster announces "Together, we are Fiji". In a fragmented country, it is useful to collate such narratives of solidarity. In a recent widely discussed research paper, Sudesh Mishra revisits the journey of the indenture ship *Leonidas* that brought the first Indians to Fiji in 1879.

His focus is on five iTaukeis from Kadavu on board the ship as cleaners who accompanied the indentured Indians at the start of their history, living under the same conditions on board, put under same regulations, and speaking Hindi; this was the moment when Indians themselves were mingling together for the first time irrespective of their social position. The ship has always been a strong metaphor for the state; here it is a metaphor for solidarity and the beginning of the "nation" to be.

Mishra rightfully maintains that indenture isn't exclusively an Indian story. There are other instances of iTaukei engagement in Indo-Fijian history, subjected to vagaries of remembering and forgetting. One episode, the rescue effort pertaining to the wrecked ship *Syria* in 1884 at Nasilai reef, in which iTaukeis played a role, is sufficiently documented. There are uncollated accounts such as stories of runaway coolies finding refuge in koros that require historicizing. And more recently at the height of riots in Suva city during the coups, there have been oral accounts of Indo-Fijian women being given protection by iTaukei market vendors. All this is part of what is called minor history but as-

sumes major status in the history of solidarity. They ought to enter our consciousness at some point in our education.

The field of repressed history is a legitimate sphere for scholarly research in the context of our objectives. Over thirty years before Mishra's creative research, precisely a hundred years after the arrival of *Leonidas* with 468 indentured workers and the five Kadavu iTaukeis, Pio Manoa was charting out the task ahead for investigators of inter-dependence in nation-making. He wrote discerningly that, "The task ahead of us must first include an untangling of views, opinions, prejudices, judgements about us, whether they be of our own creation or whether they be creation of others, or whether they be co-created. The success of this undertaking will contribute in no small measure to our mutual self-understanding."

There are voices in Fiji's own literature that haven't been heard widely and our curriculum has more or less ignored these voices.

Thirty four years after that essay by Pio Manoa was written, Bhim Singh, a former High School Principal, writes in his recently published autobiography, "I was delighted to make my acquaintance with Pio Manoa. Here was an iTaukei voice I hadn't heard before. His response to Indo-Fijian writing compelled me to do the same, that is, respond to iTaukei writing."

Writing is a powerful site for dialectic on nation-making and it is the responsibility of curriculum workers to make all students participants in this discourse irrespective of the students' subject areas. Students must see imagination as how all citizens, and not only writers and intellectuals, dream and feel together.

The curriculum offers a broad space for imagining together what is possible. Narrow view of subjects in the colonial curriculum has been a real barrier in promoting interdisciplinary studies in which such broad discourses are possible on learning and living together.

Whatever one's political affiliation, a critical moment in nation-making has been the ruling to call all citizens *Fijians*. With that, according to the autobiographer: "New hope has been restored because we have established once and for all that every citizen deserves the same rights and opportunities as anyone else. We have genuine equality. And for the first time, everyone is a Fijian. We all belong, no matter where we come from and whatever our beliefs. It is a wonderful time to be Fijian as we set our sights on a united future, with all the possibility that holds for us and for future generations."

This is a view from the diaspora. For this grand ideal to be realized, we have to attend to the greatest national need of the moment, that is, to address the wounds, real or assumed, that different communities have been nurturing. All segments of society carry their own peculiar hurts from history, be it the scars of pre-contact animosities, the bruises of indenture, the psychological

damage caused by colonialism, the traumas of the coups, the acrimony arising from the recent elections. These injuries cannot be easily erased or repressed. Real or symbolic wounds (various forms of true and false consciousness) are stored away in human memory and resurface at moments of crisis and confrontation. If healing is the most urgent national need, and as we are talking about aligning our education to true national needs, avoiding puerile economism or vocationalism as ideologies, the curriculum becomes the location in which solidarity and healing assumes priority. We know that curriculum is never the panacea for all national ills and fractures (the civil society is another site for public discourse on such matters), nonetheless the premise is right; the kind of society we will construct depends on the kind of education we are imparting now. The way proposals are formulated in the curriculum must lead us competently towards cohesion and solidarity, producing a citizenry that is constantly in conversation; in the end for political stability to become a reality, all Fijians should be able to reclaim the nation.

Before we proceed to consider how this national need for solidarity (that is, community of feelings, purposes and responsibilities) and healing (in all aspects—psychological, political and spiritual), can be accommodated in the education curriculum, I would like to make a radical suggestion that the Government's Curriculum Unit should now be relocated in its own national university. This unit was established in the last years of colonial rule, and it has served its function of initiating curriculum reform. Its relocation will greatly revitalise curriculum work and allow scholars to tackle the unfinished project of decolonising education. The university has an emancipatory function, and it has now the added responsibility of resisting neo-colonial encroachment of transnational corporations by producing counter strategies. In that task the university itself must not appropriate norms of commerce in conducting its affairs. It is the responsibility of the national university to serve the country not only in the narrow sense of supplying manpower but, more crucially, contributing to the country's sovereignty, self-determination and self-sufficiency—elements that make nationhood.

Relocating the CDU will facilitate interaction with advance educational research, expose curriculum work to discourses in other disciplines and foster multi-discipline route to the national project. The colonial categories of knowledge and pedagogy needs to be reviewed, as we all know now that colonial system of education functioned to maintain colonial order and dependency, and to manage the minds of the subjected people. There have been piecemeal reforms but the fundamental transformation of the system of education in terms of school architecture, structure of classroom, classification of knowledge, pedagogy, medium of instruction, status of creative and imaginative curricula still awaits deconstructing. The timetable at all levels is forever cluttered with

so-called subjects providing little space for a challenging field of learning for our fractured universe like human values education as a discipline on its own right.

If solidarity and healing are the critical need of the moment, then a major shift in paradigm is called for with renewed emphasis on learning to live together and learning to be, without undermining learning to know and learning to do—together identified as the four pillars of learning that are widely adopted in modern curriculum reform. This paradigm shift would entail new orientation: first, development of a curriculum designed to bridge the gulf between communities with emphasis on inter-dependence, inter-personal skills and partnership projects to bring about the ideals of peace, justice and trust; and second, the curriculum's goal of fostering self-knowledge, development of individual potentials and desire for life-long learning. The latter is the 'treasure within' that UNESCO has been highlighting in its publications on curriculum reform. A report prepared by the International Commission on Education for the Twenty-first Century says, "It is true that many other problems have to be solved ... but this report has been prepared at a time when, faced with many misfortunes caused by wars, crime [one might add coups in this list - author] and underdevelopment, humankind is apparently hesitating between continuing headlong along the same path and resignation. Let us offer another way."

The other way is ... "renewed emphasis on moral and cultural dimension of education, enabling each person to grasp the individuality of other people and to understand the world's erratic progression towards a certain unity; but the process must begin with self-understanding through an inner voyage whose milestones are knowledge, meditation and the practice of self-criticism." Thus in the school curriculum in Fiji a whole dimension of education is either marginalised or largely ignored. I mean the affective domain, the emotions and feelings where we live every moment of our daily life, and the imaginative world that is connected to creative impulses. With the paradigm shift that is proposed both refinement of feelings and imaginative life will receive proper articulation.

The challenge for curriculum workers, then, is to invent a curriculum that achieves these objectives against the dangers of political set-back, reversal and relapse. Therefore these objectives must indeed rise above and go beyond all other educational goals and national needs so that we do not regress to the disorder of post-1987. The configuration of the new curriculum defines itself in these considerations. A broadly-based and sensitively developed values education program will subsume the dual educational orientation of learning to live together and learning to be. Self-knowledge and self criticism, healing the self is, of course, the necessary precondition for the larger healing process. Within the space provided by values education and reorganization of knowledge in the

new inclusive curriculum, students will bring to the learning processes their own cultural archive of knowledge that had been marginalized in the colonial curriculum. Thus the epistemologies that different communities consider relevant will be foregrounded. The challenge here for curriculum reconstruction is, first, to align diversity with unity; and second, to infuse national values into foundations of particular epistemologies, thus generating a common civic culture.

The configuration of the proposed curriculum will inevitably be hybrid and not the monopoly of any one sector of society, and national identity that will be shaped will be pluralistic. The postcolonial education will celebrate this pluralism. In 1995, I published a book called *Altering Imagination*. The title was meant to reflect the challenge of forging a different kind of imagination in opposition to the communal ideologies of a quarter of a century since independence. It was envisaged an altered imagination would view the freedom of others as essential to one's own liberation, and pluralism as what defines our existence on this planet with a multiplicity of ethnic communities, languages, cultures, religions and landscapes; further pluralism was also meant to suggest that "... the reality that is before us is diverse, various, multifaceted; there is no homogenous reality but many realities; there is no absolute meaning but several meanings; and there is no single answer to life's problems but a multiplicity of answers." Pluralism thus explained has implication for curriculum discourse and identity formation. It is true we are all Fijians but individually we will always be complex entities. Our solidarity as a nation will be our tolerance for heterogeneity.

The book I published in 1995 did not find its way into the education system. That is also the fate of Pio Manoa's sensitive essay on solidarity and other narratives of belonging and identity by Fijian authors. It is like shutting out sites where the most energetic debate is taking place on nation-making, issues of inclusion and exclusion, belonging and not belonging. There is a mind-set in a closed curriculum that resists life as it is lived and culture that is around us. Let us hope that a generation later we will not be saying, "Why haven't we heard those voices before?"