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An Elusive Dream: Multiracial Harmony in Fiji 1970 - 2000

A thesis submitted to the University of Waikato for the degree of Master of Philosophy, January, 2007.

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Abstract

The common perception of Fiji, which is unique in the South Pacific, is that of an ethnically divided society with the indigenous and immigrant communities often at loggerheads. This perception was heightened by the military coups of 1987, which overthrew the democratically elected government of Dr. Timoci Bavadra because it was perceived as Indian-dominated. Again in 2000, the People's Coalition Government headed by an Indian, Mahendra Chaudhry, was ousted in a civilian coup.

Yet Fiji had been genuinely multiethnic for several decades (even centuries) before it became a colony in 1874. From then onwards, however, because of the policies of the colonial government, the society slowly became plural (in Furnivall's classic sense) as the different races were separated in almost every walk of life. Until the 1920s there were hardly any conflicts between Fijians and Indians. From the 1920s, however, the Fijians were taught to be wary of the Indians.

After independence in 1970, the Alliance government under Ratu Sir Kamisese Mara followed a policy of "multiracialism" with the stated aim of bringing the different ethnic groups together in a society where people achieved some degree of integration in terms of a common national identity, while retaining their own separate traditions. But, more than thirty years later, Fiji still remains an ethnically divided society with hardly any integration. My research explores the reason for this failure.

My thesis is that the failure arose from the kind of democratic system that the country adopted at independence. That is, the Westminster concept of government and opposition can be problematic in a multiethnic society if political parties are divided on ethnic lines rather than based on political ideologies. Ratu Mara was one Fiji leader who recognized this problem and had said that the confrontational Westminster system is not appropriate in a South Pacific island with a multiracial population.

While Stephanie Lawson, Peter Larmour, Futa Helu and others have made some important contribution to this debate, my thesis will focus on an argument put forward by Michael Goldsmith on the role of the opposition, making a distinction between two kinds of opposition, "confrontational" and "thoughtful". This thesis contends that the Westminster system that Fiji adopted at independence failed to bring integration in part because the National Federation Party (NFP) degenerated over the years from a 'thoughtful' and effective opposition to a 'confrontational', ethnic opposition.

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I am also grateful to the Waikato Centre in Auckland city where I often went and made use of the facilities. I also wish to thank the people in Fiji with whom I have had interaction for helping to clarify my doubts by answering my questions. While the policy of maintaining the confidentiality of the sources would not let me reveal their names, they know who they are.

I also wish to thank the members of the Anthropology Department, the University of Waikato, where I have been an off-campus student, for their support in various ways whenever I came and spent a few days on campus. Last but not most of all, I would like to thank my supervisors, Dr. Michael Goldsmith and Dr. Keith Barber, for their guidance and support throughout without which my thesis would have remained 'an elusive dream'.

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Preface

When I first came to Fiji in 1966, I noticed that there were many similarities between the ethnic Fijians and the people of Kerala, the southernmost state in India, where I was born. These similarities included their food habits and way of dressing. So from the beginning I was shocked by the attitude of the Indians in Fiji to the indigenous people and their traditions. They tended, for example, to dismiss them as the ways of the 'jungle'.

The common Indian perception of the Fijians stemmed from a historical stereotype that probably points to a deep-seated cultural opposition between civilization and wildness. When the Indians started arriving in Fiji, from 1879 onwards, most of the land in Fiji had not been under cultivation, so they had the task of clearing the bush ('jungle' in their language) and planting mainly sugar cane. They had hardly any contact with the Fijian people but they knew that just two or three decades ago they were practising cannibalism. The stories they had heard about the Fijians, such as the one about Udre Udre (who was supposed to have been a notorious cannibal) confirmed the Indians' belief that the local people were 'junglees' (people from the jungle). The Indians were wary of them until they got to know them in schools and work places.

As an English teacher my interest in Fijian culture became stronger when in the 1970s the Ministry of Education in Fiji (and elsewhere in the South Pacific) successfully sought to add South Pacific/Fiji options to some of the subjects in the New Zealand School Certificate and University Entrance examinations to make them more relevant to the Pacific where students took these exams. In English it was decided to follow a thematic approach and every year certain themes were prescribed for study, with these themes featuring in the final examinations in essay topics, comprehension passages etc. One of the first themes to be chosen was Culture.

So in class we studied Fijian and Indian cultures, the two dominant cultures in Fiji. There were no text books or other resources which could be used to facilitate the study of this theme. The Curriculum Development Unit of the Fiji Ministry of Education sent some material but this was never sufficient. So in the English

Department at Jasper Williams High School where I taught, we started looking for relevant material (mainly from the newspapers) and building up our own resource collection. It was a lot of hard work but at the same time very stimulating. It would not have succeeded without the active participation and commitment of all the members of the department.

Jasper Williams High School was different from most of the other schools in Fiji at that time as it was more multiethnic and therefore more multicultural than most other schools. As a consequence studying 'Culture' became easier. We would often have discussions in class on the different practices of the two major communities and we were able to see a lot of similarities between the Fijian and Indian culture such as having extended families.

In February 1987 I took leave and went to Perth to do postgraduate studies. Less than three months later the first military coup in the Pacific overthrew the one-month-old government of Dr. Timoci Bavadra. I was not surprised by the news as ever since the Fijian-dominated Alliance government was voted out I had expected some political upheaval.

Perth at that time had very few students from Fiji, unlike the other Australian cities. Most of us knew each other and everyone was shaken by the political turmoil. I had the naivety to say to some of them, "What else did you expect? Call them 'junglees' and this is what you will get". Most of them got annoyed with me and told me that the Indians had done nothing wrong. I quite agree with that claim and it was far from my intention to even remotely suggest otherwise.

The point I was making was that while the Indian contribution to the welfare of Fiji and its people, including the Fijian people, has always been positive they had a wrong attitude towards the Fijians. Only one of them understood my point and he agreed with me and gave his own example. He said when he was at the University of the South Pacific (USP), languages were being offered and there was a choice between French and Fijian. He said he chose French because he said to himself, "Who would want to study that 'jungle' language?" He later realized that his attitude was wrong

and regretted it. Unfortunately there are very few who have the humility and courage to honestly admit that they were wrong.

The attitude clearly persisted because it was passed down by the parents, who had little contact with the Fijians, to their children, who also had limited contact as schools remained predominantly monoracial. The leaders of the two communities had contact through the Legislative Council and the relationship had been cordial. For example, in the Legislative Council, the Fijian leader, Ratu Sukuna, and other Fijian members used to vote with the Indian members until the Indians boycotted the war efforts during the Second World War (Gillion, 1977, pp.174 -175). This was interpreted by the Fijian leaders as lacking commitment to their country of adoption.

I would say that the Indian contribution even during the war was positive because the colony needed them only as farmers and not as soldiers. The sugar strike during the war may have been the first example of a leadership lapse but A.D. Patel, the Indian leader, when he realized his mistake, sought a meeting with Ratu Sukuna to explain his action. Later Patel did a similar thing, showing his willingness to admit mistakes and make amends, after the by-elections of 1968 (see Chapter 1). He also made a genuine effort in the 1960s to get more Fijian support for his party, the NFP, but after his death his successors went in the opposite direction, making the party more ethnic-based than before. So the responsibility for the Indian perception of the Fijians not changing after independence, I would attribute to leadership failures rather than to the Indians' personal prejudices.

I was just embarking on my research when the coup took place. My area of interest was education and I started by looking at the history of education in Fiji, to see why a racially segregated system of schooling was established and maintained. As I progressed, I realized that the history of education was in many ways the history of the country itself.

Formal education in the Western sense started in Fiji in 1835. This is an important date in the history of the nation because that was when the Christian missionaries landed in Lakeba in the Lau group and started the process of Christianising the islands. Education was their tool for conversion. Christianity changed the way of life

of the islanders. The orthodox accounts state that the Fijians abandoned many of their traditions such as cannibalism and human sacrifice as the missionaries taught them that they were 'primitive' and 'barbaric'. One writer noted that "credit must ...be given to the Fijian people as a whole, who turned within a few short years from utter savagery to a peaceful and civilized life. Men who had been practising cannibals for years changed completely when at last they decided to embrace Christianity" (Burns, 1963, p.62).

From the beginning, education was closely linked to religion(s) in Fiji. Later, when the Indians arrived, their religious organizations established schools to counter the Christian influence on their children. Since the colonial government refused to assume responsibility for education and left it in the hands of the voluntary agencies, the influence of the various religious groups on the education system continued throughout the 20th century.

Similarly, the trade union movement was closely involved in education as the Fiji Teachers' Union was one of the first to emerge in the colony. It was first organized in 1930, though registered only in 1947. Teachers' unions also emphasized the separation of the major ethnic groups as a separate Fijian Teachers' Association was established in 1960, while the nominally multiracial Fiji Teachers' Union remained predominantly Indian. After independence the two teachers' unions together formed the Fiji Teachers' Confederation to give them more bargaining power. Moreover, it was the teachers' strike called by the Fiji Teachers' Confederation in 1985 that acted as a catalyst for the formation of the Fiji Labour Party which had had a decisive role in shaping events in the 1980s and 1990s.

So I realized that though my previous research had identified the main reason for the lack of integration in Fiji, which was the education system, there were other areas of life which had contributed to the present situation. This led me to doing further research and the result is this study.

I had been planning to undertake this study ever since the publication of my book, *Education and Race Relations in Fiji, 1835-1998* (1999). I had difficulty in finding a suitable supervisor who knew the area well and could provide me guidance.

Meanwhile the crisis of May 2000 took place. Three months later, in August 2000, I decided to move to New Zealand permanently. This proved to be a good move for my research as Dr. Michael Goldsmith agreed to be my supervisor and by the end of that year I had some hope of getting a scholarship from the University of Waikato.

By the time my enrolment was finalized it was mid-2001 and Fiji was gearing up for the August general elections. Since the situation in Fiji was tense I had a lot of misgivings about the consequences of my research. The questions that troubled me were these:

If I loudly proclaimed my views (which are quite different from the views held by most people in Fiji, including scholars) would it in any way adversely affect the situation in Fiji? Would it be better for me to keep quiet and not make my views known?

Finally, I came to the conclusion that, at least until the situation in Fiji became more stable/less volatile, the best course perhaps would be to record my findings and conclusions quietly and talk about them only with my supervisors and anyone else who might be interested rather than making my views widely known. My main concern was in ensuring that nothing I said would lead intentionally to an increase in tension in Fiji.

I know many Indo-Fijians with whom I have had discussions see me as an outsider (as one not born and brought up in Fiji) with limited understanding of the situation. I can see their point and I respect their views but at the same time I do feel that since I have lived and worked in Fiji for most of my adult life I might be able to interpret the happenings in a different light which might be of some value.

I have also discussed my concerns thoroughly with my supervisors before I decided to proceed with the research. Michael Goldsmith, in particular, though strongly disagreeing with some of my assertions, still agreed to be my chief supervisor, for which I am most grateful. Since I lacked an anthropology background Keith Barber, my second supervisor, helped me to gain a better understanding of the notions of 'race' and 'ethnicity' and related ideas.

I took it as a challenge to prove that my wild assertions had some validity. My supervisors, even when not agreeing with me, believe that I have a right to be heard, however 'outrageous' my views may be!

Our conclusion was that if my views were recorded, it would give another dimension to the ethnic question in Fiji and it would serve historical purposes if nothing else. This was the main reason for my decision to go ahead with the study.

Contribution to Knowledge: Many books have been written on the political problem in Fiji, especially after the military coups of 1987. Most writers see it as an ethnic problem, while a few see it as a class problem. So far no one has looked at it, with the possible exception of Stephanie Lawson, as a problem arising out of the kind of democratic system the country adopted at independence. This is the focus of my study.

While Lawson (1991) claims that the failure of democratic politics in Fiji was largely due to the failure to accept constitutional opposition by the eastern chiefs of Fiji, who dominated the government after independence, my contention is that Fiji had no viable opposition which provided a choice for the electorates, except an ethnic choice.

My thesis is that the Westminster system of government and opposition, which Fiji adopted, was one of the main reasons for the ethnic problems in Fiji as the political parties were divided on ethnic lines rather than on political ideology. I. F. Helu (1994) has talked about the unsuitability of the Westminster system for small Pacific nations while Goldsmith (1993) believes that it needs to be applied with careful consideration of local needs and constraints. This study looks at the Fiji situation as the direct result of the failure of the NFP, which was in opposition from 1970 to 1987, to provide a viable alternative government for the country.

Limits of the Study: The study, though it provides a brief overview of Fiji history since the beginnings of colonialism, focuses on a period of about twenty years, starting from the 1960s when Fiji became self-governing to 1987 when the democratically elected FLP/NFP coalition government was overthrown in the first ever military coup in the Pacific. In trying to identify the reasons for the political

problems in Fiji I have looked at most areas that contributed to the maintenance of a plural society such as education, trade unions and political parties.

One area I have not looked at in detail is sports. Sports can bring people of different walks of life together to pursue their common interest but in Fiji there were ethnic preferences even there. This, however, is not an area in which I can claim much knowledge or understanding so I have not attempted to study it in detail. Similarly, I have also not looked at the role of the army in Fiji and its contribution to the maintenance of a plural society though some observers feel that the military has had a decisive role in this.

Definition of Terms: In this thesis many of the terms are used as they are commonly used and understood in Fiji. Hence an attempt is made to define them at the outset so that there is no confusion. For example, the term *Fijian* is used only for the indigenous people of the country while *Indian* refers to the descendants of the immigrants from the Indian sub-continent who settled down in the country during the colonial period. Later they came to be referred to as *Fiji Indian*. In recent times *Indo-Fijian* is used in preference to *Fiji Indian*, though some sections of the Fijian leadership have expressed strong disapproval of the use of this term (*Indo-Fijian*) which is used mainly by scholars based at USP.

During colonial days racial differences were emphasized to divide the population into three distinct groups which were *Fijian*, *Indian* and *European*. Later the last group started to include the descendants of the European settlers who were of mixed descent. When self government was introduced, for election purposes, *European* also included Chinese while *Fijian* included other Pacific Islanders as well. After independence, *European* was changed to *General Elector*. Today, the term that is used to describe this group is *Other* – that is, *Fijian*, *Indian* and *Other* (which includes everyone who does not come under the first two categories).

European in colonial days consisted of three very different groups of people who had very little in common with one another. First of all, there were the missionaries, who were British and French, Methodists, Anglicans and other protestant denominations as well as Roman Catholics, whose sole aim in coming to the islands was to convert the

Fijians to Christianity. Secondly, there were those who had come, the majority of them from Australia, seeking their fortunes mainly as planters. In this thesis, the term *vested interests* is often used to distinguish this group from the other *Europeans* (although it must be stressed that after independence this group, that is, the *European vested interests*, was slowly replaced by a local business community which mainly comprised non-Europeans). Lastly, there were the colonial officials who were posted to the colony for a specified period of time and went back to Britain at the end of their terms to be replaced by other officials posted from the British Colonial Office.

Today people use the term *ethnicity* in preference to *race*. Even then there are problems. For example, *Indian* refers to anyone whose ancestors came from the Indian sub-continent though they do not form a singular ethnic group. It includes people who follow different religions and speak different languages.

Multiracialism was the official ideology of the Alliance government which was in power for seventeen years after independence. Later the term *multiculturalism* was also used. It was perhaps the officials of the Education Department who started using the latter term as they tried to put the official ideology of *multiracialism* into practice at schools by focusing on the different cultures. The notion of *multiracialism* was thus amended to embrace/include *multiculturalism*.

An Outline of the Thesis: The thesis begins, after the Introduction, with a quick historical survey of the major events leading up to the time of independence to see how a plural society was developed over the years, especially during the colonial period. The first chapter ends with a discussion of the policy adopted by the government of independent Fiji for the future development of the country. This was one of ‘multiracialism’ and ‘multiculturalism’ to bring about integration.

Chapter 2 is about governing ethnically divided societies and what kinds of governments are recommended by scholars as suitable for such countries. It also looks at the attempts to build an integrated Fiji nation out of the plural society that existed at independence using consociational practices for avoiding conflict. It describes how the attempts failed because of the manipulation of primordial loyalties

by Fijian nationalist politicians while the Indian opposition failed to support government's implementation of policies aimed at integration.

The rest of the chapters look at how and why government's policy of 'multiracialism' failed in different areas. I begin here with 'Education' (Chapter 3) which was to have laid the foundation for the new 'multiracial' society and why it failed to do so. The major reason for this was the persistence of the voluntary system (that is, the voluntary communal organizations which provided the majority of the schools rather than the state providing education) which contributed to communalism. The government had a policy for wiping out voluntarism but the opposition NFP failed to support policies for the removal of communalism from the education system.

Chapter 4 focuses on how worker solidarities emerged and brought the different ethnic groups together as they formed unions to fight for better pay and working conditions. This chapter ends with the workers' decision to form their own political party because they believed the government was following unfair labour practices and there was no one to fight to change government policies because the opposition had become almost defunct. The idea of forming a political party, however, came from the 'labour aristocracy' and many blue collar unions were not supportive of the idea of politicizing the union movement. Moreover, the newly formed Fiji Labour Party (FLP) went into a coalition with the predominantly Indian NFP and became reduced to another Indian dominated party. This adversely affected the union movement which had managed to develop without ethnic divisions after independence.

Chapter 5 outlines how sugar became an important political issue after independence causing divisions as Indo-Fijian politicians in particular tried to manipulate the sugarcane farmers for their own political ends. The NFP opposition, which had been a 'thoughtful' opposition under Patel, became more and more 'confrontational' as it made sugar into a 'political football'. This, and the education policies advocated by the NFP, turned it into a predominantly Indian party.

Chapter 6 outlines the formation of political parties and how most of them remained predominantly monoracial, though they claimed to be multiracial. Initially this was because the issues that affected the different communities were not the same, as they

had led their separate lives. But soon after independence, the NFP turned the national seats into an extension of the communal seats. Moreover, they like the Fijian nationalists, started appealing to ethnic interests hoping to secure more votes in the elections. This led to the polarization of the two major communities leading to the failure of the Westminster system.

Chapter 7 looks at how leadership failures have contributed immensely to the prevalence of ethnic divisions in the country. The leaders of the 1960s, both Fijian and Indian, had the interests of the nation as the major priority. After independence, the Indo-Fijians lacked a leader who was dedicated and farsighted like A.D. Patel who had died just before independence. Ratu Mara who continued as the leader of the country, still carried on with policies which were for the benefit of the nation rather than for any particular community while the opposition NFP concentrated on issues that only appealed to the Indian voters.

I conclude by looking at the prospects for future peace and stability in the country.

Introduction

Fiji has remained unique among the islands of the South Pacific in its cultural mixture. In pre-colonial times, it was neither overwhelmingly Polynesian, nor exclusively Melanesian¹. With the arrival of Europeans and Chinese from the early 19th century and the indentured Indians from 1879 onwards it became even more diverse. When it became independent in 1970 this cultural diversity was promoted as an asset by its first Prime Minister, Ratu Sir Kamisese Mara, who called it ‘the richness in diversity’ of the new nation. He, moreover, tried to use it for building harmonious relations between the various communities, while developing a unique Fiji identity. Unfortunately, most other leaders did not share his vision and still clung to their narrow communal loyalties. Moreover, they also blocked his attempts to bring about gradual integration by openly attacking some of these policies while covertly working against some others. Thus diversity remained a source of conflict.

My thesis is that Ratu Mara’s efforts at building harmonious relationships between the various ethnic groups and developing a unique national identity failed because the Indian leaders of the opposition became narrow in their outlook and failed to look at issues from a national perspective rather than a communal one. The result was that over the years the predominantly Indian National Federation Party (NFP), which was in opposition throughout the period looked at, degenerated from the ‘thoughtful’ opposition that it was in the 1960s and early 1970s to a ‘confrontational’ one (terms to be defined shortly). Over the years the NFP became a predominantly ethnic party not only in composition but also in its policies. This led to the failure of the Westminster system of government and opposition that Fiji had adopted at independence as the NFP which was initially effective as a ‘thoughtful’ opposition slowly became reduced to a nominal one.

¹ Marshall Sahlins (1985) places Fiji in Polynesia but the standard Polynesian/Melanesian distribution is still widely accepted.

Opposition and the Westminster System

Scholars list an institutionalized opposition as a feature of the ‘Westminster model’ of government, stressing its existence “*as an executive in waiting*” (Rhodes and Weller, 2005, p.8, emphasis in original). In this system of government and opposition, ‘Her Majesty’s Loyal Opposition’, as it is respectfully referred to, enjoys a pride of place as the ‘alternative government’ or the ‘government in waiting’. Loyal Opposition is the concept that one can be opposed to the actions of the government or ruling party of the day without being opposed to the constitution or the political system.

The Leader of the Opposition is invariably seen as the alternative Prime Minister and heads a rival alternative government known as the shadow cabinet. The opposition is therefore expected to present itself as a viable alternative government by having policies which are different from those of the government. It also has the important job of keeping the government on its toes by carefully studying its actions and attacking them wherever they are not considered to be in the best interests of the country. An effective leader of the opposition is one who would make the government accountable to the parliament and the public.

Opposition can be of two kinds – ‘confrontational’ or ‘thoughtful’ (Goldsmith, 1993). A ‘confrontational’ opposition opposes all government policies for the sake of opposing whereas a ‘thoughtful’ opposition is “characterised by consensus around the good and criticism of the bad; it justifies support where that is necessary or desirable, opposition where it is not” (Goldsmith, 1993).

For the emergence of a ‘thoughtful’ opposition certain conditions are necessary. It could also depend on the strength or weakness of the opposition parties at a given point. It, moreover, depends on the personalities of the leaders. The Fiji example shows that the fear of imminent ethnic conflict and the strong desire by the leaders to avoid it could produce a ‘thoughtful’ opposition. Even under such extreme circumstances where there is the definite possibility of ethnic conflict, the

opposition may not change because in the final analysis it depends on the qualities of the leaders and how keen they are on avoiding conflict. While the opposition under A. D. Patel in 1968 became 'thoughtful' when ethnic tensions threatened the continuation of peaceful coexistence, Patel's successors went back to the 'confrontational' style leading to conflicts. This shows the importance of having leaders of a certain type for the success of democracy, Westminster type or otherwise, in a Pacific country (especially a multiethnic one like Fiji). Scholars who have studied ethnically divided societies such as Arend Lijphart (1977) and Donald Horowitz (1991) have pointed out the importance of sound leadership for having stable democratic government in such countries.

C. J. Lynch believes that in the Pacific because of the "lack of political sophistication in the 'western' sense" (1982, p.149)² the Westminster system needs to be adapted emphasising the consensus method of decision making which involves consultation, discussion and compromise. This calls for a 'thoughtful' opposition rather than a 'confrontational' one. Goldsmith points out that the problem with thoughtful opposition is that it does not fit the reality of the party system in any society (Goldsmith, 1993). It seems to become more akin to consociationalism (see Chapter 2, p.?) than to the Westminster system.

In Fiji, when the Westminster system started in 1966, the Opposition under A. D. Patel was adversarial but Patel's confrontation was with the colonial rulers who he thought were leading the Fijian chiefs from the back. He called the Alliance Party the 'white colonialist Alliance'. Patel thought the Fijians were just being led by the European vested interests rather than having any strong opinions of their own. This may have been a patronizing view regarding the Fijian people but Patel sincerely believed that the Fijians were being manipulated by the European vested interests. There was some truth behind this belief (see Chapter 1, p.9 ?) though Patel was perhaps mistaken in his understanding of the Fijian people and their

² This, however, is a patronizing judgement of politicians in the Pacific but it is relevant because in the island nations, for most of the common people, democracy was a concept that they were not familiar with and (therefore?) not interested in.

relationship with their chiefs. Patel believed that the Fijian commoners were being exploited by their chiefs and they (the common people) wanted an end to colonialism as well as the rule by the chiefs. This was not so because the Fijian people wanted colonialism and the chiefly rule to continue for fear that otherwise the country might be overrun by the immigrant Indians.

Patel's attitude to the Fijian chiefs and the Fijian people as a whole changed after the by-elections of 1968 (more on this in Chapter 1, p.14?). After that the opposition became a 'thoughtful' opposition, co-operating with the Fijian chiefly-led Alliance government on policies which the NFP considered to be for the benefit of the country. The NFP leaders also started openly showing respect to Fijian culture and traditions. An example was the motion to restore the chiefly island of Bau as a national monument because of its historical significance (see Chapter 1, pp.14-15?).

Ratu Mara and Patel, who were at loggerheads during most of their political career seemed to have been very similar in their outlooks and attitudes. They both were against colonialism and exploitation, especially by the European vested interests. The main difference was that Ratu Mara, like most Fijians, remained a loyal subject of the British crown, making a distinction between the British monarchy and white colonialism while Patel could not see any such difference. The reason for this difference in their perception of colonialism and the British crown was that Patel was born and brought up in India during the freedom struggle under Mahatma Gandhi whereas Ratu Mara was born in a chiefly family in Fiji which was ceded to Queen Victoria by the Fijian chiefs with a promise to look after Fijian interests. The British did safeguard Fijian interests to some extent (see Chapter 1, p.15?) so their loyalty to the crown was not completely misplaced.

Sometimes the aim of the government and the opposition may be the same but the difference may be in the methods they have for achieving it. This was the position of Fiji in the 1960s. The government and the opposition wanted to integrate the

people of different communities as citizens of the nation with a common loyalty. Patel believed this could be done only through a common roll electoral system, but the Fijian leaders and some Indian leaders (for example, those who belonged to the Indian Alliance) disagreed. They believed integration could be brought about through education, by everyone attending the same schools and learning each other's language. They also believed in a gradual change in the electoral system by introducing limited common roll through the 'cross-voting' system (see Chapter 2, pp.6-7 ?) and then extending it further if it were found to work in the best interests of the country.

Koya and the Fijians

After Patel's death in 1969 Siddiq Koya, who became the Leader of the Opposition, seemed to have continued as a 'thoughtful' leader as he was willing to bend over backwards to accommodate Fijian demands. This was something that everyone found difficult to understand as he had been most aggressive until then and was not particularly sensitive to Fijian feelings. Fijian leaders did not consider him a friend of the Fijians until then. In fact, he was considered anti- Fijian.

Two Fijian members in the Legislative Council, Semesa Sikivou and Joshua Rabukawaqa, both found Koya's attitude to the Fijians arrogant and impudent. They also found him insincere. While pretending to champion the common Fijian people (who he thought were not well represented by the Fijian leaders, who were mainly the chiefs) Koya talked against them to his Indian followers. Rabukawaqa claimed that he (Koya) told the Indian cane farmers not to engage Fijians on their farms because they might learn cane farming and displace the Indians. Rabukawaqa warned: "... this is the type of representative we should watch out for" (LC Debates, 24 May 1966, p.92).

Both Sikivou and Rabukawaqa also noted that the majority of the Indian people did not have a similar attitude to that of Koya towards the Fijians. Many of them

were tolerant and supported the Fijian belief that change should come gradually but Koya interjected that they were behind the time. Rabukawaqa believed that Koya was trying to put a wedge between the Fijian chiefs and the common people while Sikivou remarked that their watch word should be “evolution rather than revolution”. The Fijian leaders also believed that the change must come from within themselves and they did not want it thrust down their throats by someone they knew who had “no interest whatsoever in the welfare of our race” (LC Debates, 25 May, 1966, p.108).

At the time of independence though Koya seemed to have been leading a ‘thoughtful’ opposition, as Patel had done in his last year or so, there was a major difference between the two leaders. Patel looked at each issue carefully and then decided whether to support the government or attack it. Koya in his early years (up to the 1972 general elections) showed restraint and did not attack any government policies in Parliament though later he attacked the same policies outside mainly at election times. In doing that he did not consider what was best for the country as a whole in the long run as his only concern seemed to have been what would bring him more Indian votes. The best examples were his education policies (see Chapter 3).

Thus the Opposition started becoming less and less thoughtful from 1972 onwards until by 1977 it became completely confrontational (see Chapters 3 and 5). Though later in 1977 Koya was replaced by Jai Ram Reddy as the Leader of the Opposition, the NFP continued to be confrontational, while concentrating only on issues that affected the Indian population (see Chapter 6). In doing that Reddy also overlooked the importance of maintaining the ethnic balance until the country became integrated.

Fiji’s “relative ethnic peace” after independence was attributed to the maintenance of the balance between its major ethnic communities (see also Chapter 2). In order to maintain the balance and the resultant ethnic peace “Indians and

Europeans [were] expected to restrain their use of economic power to seize political control” (Premdas, 1986, p.134). When the difference between the two major parties became reduced to ethnicity rather than political ideology there was the threat of the loss of the ethnic balance that had prevailed for a decade after independence. This also affected the effective functioning of the Westminster system as the Opposition National Federation Party slowly turned into an ethnic Indian party not only in composition but also in policies. This finally led to the failure of the Westminster model of government in Fiji because the ethnic balance that held the nation together was lost.

The 1997 Constitution and the Opposition

To support this hypothesis I look at the period from 1966, when the Westminster system (of government and opposition) was first introduced, to 1987 when the democratically elected government of Doctor Timoci Bavadra was overthrown in a military coup a month after it was elected to rule the country. This also marked the temporary end of democracy in Fiji with the country not having an elected government for the next five years. From 1987 to 1992 there was only an interim government appointed by the President while a new constitution was being prepared to replace the 1970 constitution which was abrogated in 1987.

Democracy was partially restored in 1992 with an elected government under a new constitution. The 1990 constitution, however, was openly racist, blatantly discriminating against one half of the country’s population. Bowing to international pressures the Fiji government agreed to revise the 1990 constitution and the 1997 constitution was the result. Democracy was fully restored in the country after the 1999 general elections which saw the emergence of the People’s Coalition government under an ethnic Indian, Mahendra Chaudhry. However, the new constitution introduced the multiparty system of government which made the role of the opposition negligible. This was later identified as one of the main weaknesses of the new constitution.

This problem with the opposition became apparent soon after the 1999 general elections when the question of appointing members to the Senate arose. The Fiji Senate is a wholly nominated body, with senators being chosen by the Prime Minister, the Leader of the Opposition and the Great Council of Chiefs who submit their lists of nominees to the President who then makes the appointments.

The Fijian Association Party, led by Adi Kuini Speed, had joined the multiparty government. When Chaudhry was working on his list of nominees for the Senate, Adi Kuini gave him a few names for inclusion. Chaudhry did not include any of those recommended by Adi Kuini. It was explained that though Adi Kuini was in the cabinet, her nominees to the Senate would come from the Leader of the Opposition's quota. When the Leader of the Opposition, Ratu Inoke Kubuabola, gave his list of nominations to the Senate, the President did not appoint all of them as he included some from Adi Kuini's list. Incensed, Ratu Inoke threatened to take the President to court. The President also sought legal opinion to clear the issue.

It turned out that the President's action was constitutionally correct. Though Adi Kuini would be in the multiparty cabinet, her appointees to the senate would be part of the opposition senators. There seems to have been a deliberate attempt to weaken the concept of opposition in the 1997 constitution. A constitutionally enforced multiparty government later proved unworkable, as Laisenia Qarase had been claiming from the time he was elected to lead the country in 2001. Even Chaudhry seemed to concede its impracticality when after demanding to be part of the government for three years (after the 2001 general elections) he finally agreed to be the Leader of the Opposition³.

³ Now after the latest elections (May 2006) Prime Minister Qarase has invited Chaudhry to form a multiparty government which Chaudhry has accepted. Its success will depend on the willingness of the leaders to compromise. The *Fiji Times* has warned in an editorial: "Mahendra Chaudhry will certainly not play second fiddle to anyone and Mr. Qarase will not take lightly any attempts to sabotage his authority" (21 May, 2006). It is for Chaudhry and Qarase to prove that they can rise above their narrow personal preferences for the good of the nation.

Sir Vijay Singh, a former Speaker and cabinet minister in the Alliance government in the 1970s, however, pointed out that this multiparty government was not the recommendation of the Reeves Commission which was responsible for the 1997 constitution. Reeves had rejected the proposal for an enforced union of the main political parties into a government. Singh blamed “the political leaders and their loyal supporters of 1997” who “rejected Reeves’ realistic and principled advice and unanimously introduced the provision that has bedeviled us since” (*Fiji Times*, 19 January, 2005).

Singh seemed to be referring to Sitiveni Rabuka and Jai Ram Reddy (and their supporters) who were the leaders in 1997. A scholar has noted that “the provision for a multi-party government was adopted in a context of extraordinary personal co-operation between former coup leader Rabuka and the leader of the Indian-dominated National Federation Party, Jai Ram Reddy” (Palmer, 2005, p.212). The multiparty system could work well if there are no policy differences between the major parties. The Rabuka-led SVT and the NFP in the 1990s were ethnic parties fighting for the rights of the communities they represented. So the multiparty government could have worked as it would have been similar to a consociational government (see Chapter 2) which Lijphart (1977) recommends for multiethnic countries.

The architects of the 1997 constitution were advised to give priority to improving race relations. Perhaps it was believed that the idea of opposition was not compatible with the aim of avoiding conflict. So the constitution had to be subordinated to that end (of improving race relations) as the possibility of order in Fiji was thought to depend on harmonious relations between indigenous Fijians and Indo-Fijians (Larmour, 2001, p.8). That could have been the reason for trying to deliberately weaken the opposition. So from 1987 to the present there has been no effective opposition in Fiji because the constitutional provision for a multiparty cabinet weakened “the likelihood of a strong opposition that could form a credible alternative government”(Palmer, 2005, p.214). This study, therefore, concentrates

on the period from 1966 to 1987 (though it refers to the period from 1987 to the present wherever it is relevant) when the opposition was an important part of government and looks at the slow change that came over the NFP turning it from a ‘thoughtful’ opposition to a ‘confrontational’ one.

Westminster in the Pacific

According to Peter Larmour, a distinguishing feature of the Westminster system is the selection of ministers from the legislature (2001, p.2). While Fiji did not have any difficulty in adhering to this principle, it had some of the other problems listed by Larmour. These included the fact that:

- (1) the rule of law is often challenged by the claims of custom, or personal and clan ties because the separation of powers is often difficult;
- (2) property rights are often unprotected against the claims of traditional owners; and
- (3) some human rights do not have much popular support.

These problems highlight the difficulty of having any kind of democratic government in the South Pacific, let alone the Westminster model.

Lynch argues that the Westminster system can be made to work in the Pacific by adapting it and developing government systems that are based on local practices and traditions (Lynch, 1982, p.149). This seems to have happened in Fiji as the Native Administration⁴ developed by the colonial government continues today as the Fijian Administration under the Fijian Affairs Act. The Fijian Administration, which includes the Great Council of Chiefs (GCC) and provincial councils, wields significant political power. “Its continuing influence represents a blending of Western democratic principles with ‘traditional’ authority structures” (Palmer, 2005, p.207).

⁴ During the colonial period there was ‘indirect rule’ for the indigenous Fijians as they continued to live in the villages under their chiefs.

One problem Lynch anticipates arising out of the conflict between traditions and the Westminster system is the role of the Speaker who might have to deal with a minister of a higher traditional standing. Tomasi Vakatora who was the Speaker of Fiji in the 1980s illustrates this problem from his own experience. He describes how the House was debating a motion one morning and because the debate was so “intense” he had ruled that some matters raised should not be brought up again. Prime Minister Ratu Mara who came in the afternoon and did not know about the ruling wanted to go back to the earlier debate but the Speaker stopped him. “I had to summon a lot of courage to do that. He was my party leader, and he was my Chief”, Vakatora confessed (Vakatora, 1997, p.7).

The Westminster system could work in Fiji for seventeen years because in this and other cases Ratu Mara accepted the ruling and therefore the traditions of the Westminster system. This, however, was not the case with the Leader of the Opposition, Jai Ram Reddy, who refused to accept Vakatora’s ruling⁵ by walking out and boycotting parliament and eventually resigning. This again shows the importance of leadership and how the system can only work if leaders accept the rules and play by them. One scholar, Yash Ghai, has emphasized “the desirability of an effective leader of the opposition to meet the objective of honest government accountable to the parliament and the public” (Palmer, 2005, p.211). Unfortunately Fiji lacked such a leader after Patel’s death in 1969.

A major change Lynch recommends while accepting the general principles of the Westminster system is to be centred on the notion of consensus which involves an active avoidance of polarization. This could be done by reaching a generally agreed solution through consultation, discussion and compromise. This technique (which Lynch describes as part of the ‘Pacific Way’⁶) is markedly different from

⁵ This was on 15 December, 1983 when Reddy refused to stand while objecting to a ruling made by Vakatora and an angry clash followed (see V Lal, 1990, p.165).

⁶ The Pacific Way is an ideology Ratu Mara introduced in the early 1970s to promote regional solidarity. Ron Crocombe who seemed to have helped Mara define this ideology has himself admitted that it was an ideal and not a reality, giving the example of the ‘hard work’ that Mara stressed as part of the Pacific Way (Crocombe, 1976 p.24).

the 'confrontational' technique that is common to the Westminster system and resembles the consociational system, as mentioned earlier.

While Lynch believes that the opposition is not essential in the Pacific situation, Michael Goldsmith, who draws the distinction between the two kinds of opposition, seems to think that the distinction is important. The system of government and opposition may work in a small Pacific country if the opposition is 'thoughtful'. The 'thoughtful' opposition looks at every issue from the point of view of how it would benefit the people and the country. If it feels it is for the good of the country, it supports the government, and opposes only those policies which it does not regard as in the best interests of the nation. Its prime consideration in making its decisions would be what it sees as good for the country. (It is an ideal type but the Fiji opposition under Patel seems to have come close to the ideal.) 'Confrontational' opposition, on the other hand, opposes all government policies for the sake of opposing. Its principle is 'we oppose what you propose'.

Having a 'thoughtful' opposition seems to be all the more important in a multiethnic country like Fiji where there is the tendency to look at every issue from an ethnic perspective, leading to ethnic polarisation. This is where Stephanie Lawson's interpretation of democracy becomes problematic, especially if political parties are mainly ethnic based. Lawson asserts that foremost among the widely accepted principles and practices of democracy is the idea that any political opposition may, through the constitutional process adopted by the state, succeed legitimately to government (1991, p.vi). While she is right in stressing the importance of the opposition in a democracy, her conclusion that there was no democracy in Fiji from 1970 to 1987 because there was no alternation of government seems far fetched⁷.

⁷ In India, for example, there was no change of government for over two decades after independence. The Congress Party under Nehru was in power for 17 years from the time of independence in 1947 until Nehru's death in 1964. Even after that the Congress continued to be in power. Moreover, a little over a year after Nehru's death, his daughter Indira Gandhi became the Prime Minister.

Palmer who also sees the 1987 (and 2000) coups as “a rejection of the idea of a loyal opposition” (2005, p.208), however, fails to note the reason for this rejection which was the degeneration of the NFP into an ethnic party. Under such circumstances, as Palmer herself noted, “victory by one political party is perceived as the victory of one ethnic group over another” (2005, p.216).

According to Lawson and Michael Howard (1991), the eastern chiefs who were in power after independence (meaning Ratu Mara and Ratu Penaia Ganilau) wanted to stay on, establishing themselves as an ‘oligarchy’ which these scholars see as the reason for not having a change of government from 1970 to 1987. But K.C. Ramrakha, who used to be the opposition whip in Fiji until 1977 has a different view of the chiefs. In 1987 he talked of “the Chiefs who have yielded so much power, and had made Fiji what it is today” (Fiji Sun, 13 April, 1987, quoted in V.Lal, 1990, p.186). Though this was written before the military coups of 1987 there seems to be some truth in the statement.

Ratu Sukuna who was the leading chief until the 1950s “resisted the extension of voting to indigenous Fijians” (Palmer, 2005, p.208). Ratu Mara, who was the most nationally important among the four paramount chiefs (‘The Big Four’ as they were popularly known) who succeeded Ratu Sukuna, was prepared to extend the franchise to all ethnic Fijians and finally they were given the right to vote for the first time in 1963. This showed that Ratu Mara and his fellow chiefs were prepared to share power not only with the immigrant Indians but also with the Fijian commoners rather than just preserving the rights of the chiefs. But they wanted a gradual change as more and more Fijians received higher education and accepted democracy as the best form of government. Paradoxically, at the time of independence in 1970, the Fijian commoners did not seem to have wanted democracy with equal rights as they wanted the country to be given back to the chiefs who had ceded it to Queen Victoria in 1874 (see Chapter 1, pp.16-17 ?).

The main reason for not having a change of government from 1970 to 1987 was that the opposition NFP failed to get enough votes (especially non-Indian votes) to get elected. This was because the opposition did not provide the electorate with choices and alternatives except the choice of which ethnic group should dominate in government. Lawson admits that democracy can be legitimately adapted to suit particular circumstances but insists that “there are limits to its elasticity” (1996, p.30). The fact in Fiji was that the NFP opposition in the 1980s did not promote views contrary to the philosophies, policies and actions of the government of the day which, according to Lawson, is what an opposition is expected to do (1991, p.16) as it became reduced to an ethnic party, concentrating only on issues that were of concern to the Indian community.

In the 1960s though the two major political parties in Fiji, the Alliance and the NFP, were predominantly ethnic based, they had policies which were broad based with general relevance to the country rather than meant for any particular section. These policies were for improving the social and economic welfare of the nation as a whole and not meant to benefit only one particular community. The NFP supported the workers and their fight for justice while the Alliance believed in a slow change without suddenly upsetting the privileges of the vested interests. A leading scholar on Fiji politics and history, Brij Lal, has noted how the NFP became reduced to a shadow of the Alliance from the late 1970s and how ideologically the Alliance government no longer had any opposition (Lal, 1986, pp.94-95).

From 1972 onwards the NFP opposition started concentrating only on issues that were of interest to the Indian community. Education and sugar (and everything associated with the sugar industry such as land, marketing of sugar etc.) became the two areas that the NFP concentrated on and they looked at these only from the point of view of how the policies would benefit the Indians and not what was best for the country (see Chapters 3 and 5). So the NFP could not compete for office presenting itself as an alternative government because it had become reduced to an ethnic party.

In doing that, the party changed from a ‘thoughtful’ opposition to a ‘confrontational’ one. Unlike Patel who changed from a ‘confrontational’ leader to a ‘thoughtful’ one, his successors, Koya and Reddy, initially gave the impression that they were ‘thoughtful’ leaders but later proved to be ‘confrontational’ (see Chapters 5 and 6). This is where leadership played an important role in the failure of the Westminster system in Fiji.

I. F. Helu (1994) is one Pacific scholar who sees leadership as very important if democracy is to succeed in the island nations. He suggests that leaders of the Pacific should follow Socrates, who believed the main aim of leaders should be community service, rather than going for personal power as the Sophists did. Helu believes that this could perhaps be achieved by making people who become national leaders give up some of their traditional privileges. Being a ‘thoughtful’ opposition also calls for following the Socratic tradition because the welfare of the nation would be the main priority of such an opposition.

This thesis argues that the change of the Fiji opposition from a ‘thoughtful’ one at the time of independence to a ‘confrontational’ one after independence adversely affected the efforts of the government to develop a unique Fiji identity with a common loyalty to the country. The failure of the opposition leadership to support government efforts in this crucial matter resulted in the country not becoming integrated. Fiji therefore failed to become a nation because it lacked the important prerequisites for achieving this – a “shared national identity” (Palmer, 2005, p.223) and a common loyalty. Therefore it continued to be a plural society, and ‘multiracial’ harmony remained an elusive dream.

CHAPTER 1

Fiji: the Historical Background

Most scholars agree that the first settlers to the islands of Fiji arrived more than 3000 years ago from South East Asia through Vanuatu. These pioneers were Austronesian people who also brought with them some physical and cultural features of the “pre-Austronesian peoples of western Melanesia with whom Austronesian populations had long been in contact” (Norton, 1990, p.18).

Successive waves of migrants followed these original settlers, and the people who reached Fiji about 2500 years ago, that is, about a thousand years after it was first inhabited, ventured past these islands and went further beyond Fiji and settled in most of the islands which lie in what is now known as the Polynesian triangle.

Not only was Fiji the point of dispersal for the Polynesian people but for centuries after that it was a region of “contact and mixture” between Pacific people (Crocombe, 1977, p.20). From the earliest times, the people who went and settled down in Tonga travelled back and forth to Fiji, especially to the eastern islands. The early contacts were of a political and social nature but the later visits were mainly for trade as the Tongans began to appreciate the superior quality of Fijian products, especially of the Fijian double canoe (Derrick, 1957, p.126).

Very little is known about the history of Fiji between its first settlement in the pre-Christian era and its first “discovery” by Europeans a little over two hundred years ago. So there are considerable gaps in our knowledge of the country in the period between the first peopling of the islands and the time of European contact.

European explorers had been passing through Fiji waters since the 17th century. But it was only from the 19th century, when sandalwood trade was at its peak, that American and European vessels started coming regularly to the ports of Fiji. The missionaries came next followed by the planters. A new era in the Pacific, of

annexation and colonisation, was quickly being ushered in. Thanks to its central location, Fiji played a prominent role again during this period.

After Fiji became a British colony in 1874, Britain also established the High Commission for the Western Pacific in Fiji, which was responsible for the administration of the British Solomon Islands, British New Hebrides, the Kingdom of Tonga and the Gilbert and Ellice Islands. The Governor of Fiji was also the High Commissioner for the Western Pacific. Suva, the capital of Fiji, soon became the unofficial capital of the British South Pacific.

During the colonial days many of the region's institutions were established in Fiji. The first was probably the Central Medical School (later known as the Fiji School of Medicine) which, with a grant from the Rockefeller Foundation in 1928, started training students from most of the Pacific Islands. Following this, throughout the 20th century many other regional institutions were established, the most important ones being the University of the South Pacific in 1968 and the Pacific Islands Forum (originally known as the South Pacific Forum) Secretariat in 1972 to encourage economic and political co-operation between its member countries (which were the independent nations in the South Pacific). One obvious result of this development was that Fiji always had people from other islands in the Pacific.

During the Second World War, American and New Zealand military established bases in Fiji. Nadi airport became an important refuelling stop for military as well as commercial planes so most of the major airlines passed through Fiji. To fly to the other island countries in the Western Pacific, until the last decades of the 20th century, one invariably had to pass through Nadi Airport, which became the principal international airport in the region.

Until the time of cession, although there were several ethnically different groups living together in Fiji, there was no official segregation along ethnic lines. For example, apart from Fijians, there were Pacific Islanders from Tonga, Samoa, the

New Hebrides (Vanuatu), and the Solomon Islands, as well as Chinese and Europeans. Fiji had been multiethnic and multicultural for a long time but there was social cohesion to some extent as the different groups lived together with some degree of integration. A proof of this was the growing number of people of mixed descent which consisted mainly part-Europeans and part-Chinese (see for example 1909 Education Commission, pp.50-53). Fiji was a melting pot with all the different people who came becoming part of Fiji and adapting to the established way of life.

With the start of colonial rule in Fiji racial segregation became an accepted policy. There were few opportunities for ethnic mixing, leading to the separate development of the different ethnic groups. This turned Fiji, which had been a multiethnic and multicultural society, into a 'plural society' of a quite specific nature (see Chapter 2).

The Colonial Legacy

During the 96 years of colonial rule in Fiji, there were two policy factors that affected the social composition of the population. The first was the decision in 1879 to bring Indian labourers to Fiji to work in the sugarcane plantations. In the following decades their numbers increased until in 1946 Indians had become the majority ethnic group.

The second factor was the colonial administrators' practice of keeping a social distance from the ruled. This meant policies of segregation in schools, churches, and at places of work and recreation. The result was that the country at independence was not a 'nation' in its true sense, where the majority had a common national outlook with a common loyalty to the country, but a 'plural society' where the various groups had different aspirations and loyalties.

Even when the question of independence arose, there was division, with Fijians

wanting the colonial rule to continue, while Indians pressed for independence. This was partly because the impact of colonialism was mild on the Fijians compared to its effects on the other Pacific islanders such as Papua New Guineans, New Hebrideans (ni Vanuatu), Solomon Islanders and most of all the Indians in Fiji. The Fijians had limited contact with the Europeans. This was because the British imposed a system of 'indirect rule'.

A separate administration for Fijians was created by the first Governor, Sir Arthur Gordon, including a Council of Chiefs. Thus the majority of the Fijians continued to live in their villages under the village chiefs. The presence of the Indians, who comprised the bulk of the labour force on the sugar plantations allowed them to carry on their lives in the villages, undisturbed by the changes that were taking place around them. The colonial officials dealt with matters concerning the Fijians through the chiefs. On the whole, the colonial experience was not directly oppressive for Fijians because it was so indirect.

With the Indians it was a different story. They were in close contact with the Europeans, especially the officers of the Colonial Sugar Refining Company (CSR) and the colonial officials. Their relationship with Europeans was "superficially amicable" but based on the colonisers' assumption of white superiority. "It was the tolerance of master and servant" (Gillion, 1977, p. 17).

With the end of indenture in 1920, the unquestioning acceptance of white superiority ended. The Indians wanted to fight against discrimination and exploitation by the European business interests and the colonial government, but they lacked leadership as most of them were illiterate. Manilal Doctor, a lawyer who came from India, assumed leadership of the Indians and helped to give expression to their discontent. This led to a strike by the Indian workers in 1920 but the strike failed and Manilal was banished from Fiji (Gillion, 1977, pp.33-34).

Some discriminatory practices were stopped after the 1920 strike such as

“discrimination in admittance to the Suva Race⁸ Club” (Gillion, 1977, p.39). Indian dissatisfaction continued, however, and culminated in another strike in 1921. The leader this time was Sadhu Bashishth Muni, who was more anti-British than Manilal. He too was soon deported (Gillion, 1977, p.58).

The major consequence of the strikes was that the European planters and businessmen, who so far had paid little attention to the Fijians after cession, started using them against the Indians. In 1920 two hundred Lauans were recruited to form an auxiliary force (Gillion, 1977, p.28). During the 1921 strike the CSR recruited Fijian labourers “at higher wages than it paid to Indians even though they were less efficient” (Gillion, 1977, p.60). Two hundred and fifty Bauans were enrolled as special constables and posted to the strike area (Gillion, 1977, p.60).

Europeans now realised that the Indians were the ones who posed the greatest threat to their hegemony. Thus began “an explicit accord between the Europeans and the Fijians before the advancing Indians” (Gillion, 1977, p.61). Some European agitators deliberately tried to stir up the Fijians. Rumours were spread that Britain would let the Indians become the rulers of Fiji and take the Fijians’ land away. One European, J. J. Ragg, wrote to the Roko Tui Tailevu in November, 1921, suggesting that he “endeavour to permeate the whole of the Fijian race with the fixed idea that the granting of the franchise and equal status to the Indians in Fiji would mean the ultimate loss of their lands and rights and later their final extinction from the face of the earth” (quoted in Gillion, 1977, p.74).

Fijians became increasingly receptive to such warnings. Although there had been little open hostility between Fijians and Indians, because of the limited contact, there were no bridges of understanding in times of crisis. The *Fiji Times* played a major role in spreading anti-Indian propaganda. There were daily attacks on the

⁸ It is highly unusual for a Racing Club to be called a Race Club but perhaps it was unintentionally appropriate.

Indians in the pages of the newspaper. A letter to the Editor under the heading “A White Fiji” was typical. It read: “I would venture to say that 99 per cent of the Europeans in Fiji and the Fijians are loyalists and the handing over of Fiji to evil-smelling, treacherous, non-educated, garlic eating Indians would be one of the major crimes in the history of the British Empire” (quoted in Gillion, 1977, p.81).

Indians and Europeans both realised that, more than anything else, what would make the former equal to the latter, was education. So the Europeans vehemently denied them educational opportunities while the Indians equally vigorously made their own efforts to educate their children. The policies of discrimination in education were equally against the Fijians but for various reasons the Fijians did not feel their effects as much as the Indians. Fijians too were not allowed to attend European schools, but it did not matter to them much, as they had their own mission and government schools. There were schools for Fijians established by the missionaries in all the villages even before Fiji became a colony. The colonial government had also established a few schools for Fijian children, so they were not lacking in facilities. With the Indians it was a different story, they had hardly any schools at all.

What the European business interests succeeded in doing, as far as Fijian education was concerned, was in making sure that the standards remained low (Legislative Council Debates, 12 November, 1918, pp.180-181) and provision for secondary educational facilities in Fiji for Fijians was vigorously opposed by the local European leaders (Legislative Council Debates, 21 November, 1917, pp.261-263; also see Gaunder, 1999, pp.58-59; and 104-105). The Fijians valued literacy but because of the hierarchical system they were happy to leave higher education to the chiefs. The colonial government made provision for educating the sons of chiefs abroad. So the Fijians did not quite realise what was being done to block opportunities for higher education for them by the European settlers and fell victim to their propaganda. They saw the Europeans as their friends and the Indians as their enemies.

Indians had been demanding an end to colonialism whereas the majority of the Fijians wanted the colonial rule to continue for fear that the Indians might dominate once the British withdrew from the country. This fear had been heightened by calls for a common roll in elections by the Federation Party leader, A.D. Patel, from the 1930s, calls which were rejected by the Europeans and the Fijians as an attempt by the Indians to assume control. Patel tried to explain that what he wanted was equality and not domination.⁹

The steady increase in the Indian population until, in the 1940s, it overtook the Fijian population, lent weight to the fear of the Fijians who continued to reject common roll. A Fijian member of the Legislative Council, Joshua Rabukawaqa, for example, said in 1965, “not everybody wanted equality, nor was it possible or desirable” (quoted in Lal, 1997, p.206). Fijian leaders had said that asking for common roll in this context was like putting the cart before the horse. Before common roll Fiji should achieve common grounds, common language, common beliefs and common culture, Rabukawaqa went on to explain.

In the same debate Patel responded by saying that political integration should precede racial integration and he cited the examples of Australia, New Zealand and the United States. But Indian Alliance member in the Legislative Council, Vijay R. Singh, condemned Patel’s call: “He has this idea of common roll and with this idea he is in search of guinea pigs. But the Alliance is not willing to allow the people of this country to be made guinea pigs so that his ideas may be experimented with” (quoted in Lal, 1997, p.230).

The Federation Party claimed to be defending the victims of colonialism (the common people, both Indian and Fijian) against its beneficiaries (expatriate

⁹ The attitude Patel displayed may have been sincere but it was also somewhat naïve. Brij Lal characterises this view generally, without referring to Patel specifically, as a belief that common roll would ‘by some magic power unite and integrate the different peoples of Fiji’ (Lal, 1998, p.146).

colonial officers, European capitalists and Fijian chiefs). Patel failed to realise that the Fijian commoners did not see themselves as victims as they had hardly felt colonialism as oppression. Indigenous Fijian protest against the colonial rule, though it did occur, was a rare event in the history of the crown colony of Fiji.

The most important protest movement against the European establishment was led by Apolosi R. Nawai between 1914 and 1917 (see also chapter 4). As he was a commoner, it was also seen as a challenge to the chiefly system. He formed the Viti Company to buy bananas and sell them without European middlemen. He had singular support from the Fijian community who resented the activities of the European commercial enterprises. “[T]he anxiety of Fijian landowners was after all based on a correct reading of the desire of most of the European colonists to see Fiji become an advanced British colony on the lines of Australia and New Zealand with the crown assuming control of the bulk of the lands and offering them on easy terms to new settlers” (Scarr, 1979, p.178). The movement was suppressed and Apolosi was deported to Rotuma. The first organised Indian protest followed a few years later in 1920 (the strike previously referred to). After that Europeans started deliberately turning Fijians against Indians to maintain their own dominance under the pretext of safeguarding the Fijians.

The colonial experience had not been an unhappy one for the majority of the Fijians. They were proud to be British subjects and they had remained overwhelmingly pro-British, considering the British monarchy to be an extension of their chiefly system. Similarly the British administration had a special regard for Fiji as it was ceded by the chiefs of Fiji to Queen Victoria for protection with a promise to safeguard Fijian interests. As late as 1965 Ratu Mara declared: “... independence is not our goal because we have never found any sound or valid reason to attenuate let alone abandon our historical and happy association with the United Kingdom” (quoted in Lal, 1997, p.198).

There was, however, mounting pressure from the United Nations to grant

independence to colonial territories and Britain had already started introducing some degree of self-government by 1964 when it introduced a membership system conferring ministerial responsibilities on Ratu Mara (representing Fijians), John Falvey (representing Europeans), and A.D. Patel (representing Indians). According to Mara, the membership system, which lasted for two years, was a successful one (LC Debates, 27 July, 1966, p.845). Siddiq Koya, an elected Indian member of the Legislative Council, also praised the membership system a year after it was introduced saying that with the system the government was prepared to listen to the voice of the taxpayers (Legislative Council Debates, 24 March, 1965, p.62). Looking back, Mara described it as “an embryo government of national unity” (Mara, 1997, p.71) as the three members worked well together, co-operating with each other for the good of the country.

When the colonial government indicated its plans to hold a constitutional conference in London in 1965, the Fijian paramount chiefs recognised the inevitability of self-government. They had formed the Fijian Association in 1956 to counter Indian demands and safeguard Fijian interests but now they reorganized it as the main base of the Alliance Party. While these Fijian chiefs, who were the top leaders of the Alliance Party, were prepared to share power with the other ethnic groups and give them equal rights, their main concern was to protect “Fijian interests which were not to be compromised for short-term political gain” (Lasaqa, 1979, pp.182-183).

Before the constitutional conference in London in 1965, Fijians held meetings to express their views. At one such meeting held in Nausori, under the chairmanship of Ratu Edward Cakobau, “Fijians resolved that if independence did come Indians must leave. In London, the Fijian and European leaders held fast to the principle that the pace of political development must be set by Fijians and won” (Scarr, 1984, p.170). ‘Be calm, the victory is ours’ Mara reassured the Fijian people in a message from London which was broadcast in Fiji. The Alliance plan was for internal self-government from about 1970 with full independence much later

(Scarr, 1984, p.170).

Following the constitutional conference, elections were held in 1966, which saw for the first time the emergence of competitive party politics. The Alliance Party under Mara won the elections and formed the Government, and the Federation Party became the Opposition with its leader, A.D. Patel, becoming the first Leader of the Opposition. This was the beginning of the Westminster system of Government and Opposition in the country. The nine opposition members were all Indians, elected through communal franchise, while the government benches, in addition to Fijians, had Europeans and three Indians who were elected through cross voting where the eligible voters of all ethnic groups in the constituency voted.

The government formed in 1966 was not a purely Alliance government, nor was it wholly elected. There was only partial self government with some elected members holding certain specified portfolios while colonial officials still controlled the major areas of administration. Mara, who was the head of the government, became the Leader of Government Business. A year later, in September 1967, the colonial government decided to introduce a ministerial system with Mara becoming the Chief Minister. Patel complained that the Federation Party had not been consulted about the introduction of the ministerial system.

Patel further claimed that “the same old pattern of racial imbalance existed. In the Council of Ministers, there were nine Europeans, two Fijians and only one Indian” (Lal, 1997, p.228). There were in fact six Europeans, three Fijians and one Indian. Out of the six European members three were colonial officials and the other three were elected members of the Legislative Council. So there was an equal number of European and Fijian elected members. Patel was, however, right in claiming that there was an imbalance as there was only one Indian member.

In September 1967, Patel led a walkout of the members of the Federation Party, who were all Indians, from the Legislative Council, protesting against communal franchise, demanding a common electoral roll, and precipitating by-elections. To allay the fears of Indian domination, Patel tried to attract more Fijians to the Federation Party to make it more multiethnic. He launched “Operation Taukei” to recruit more Fijian members. Prominent Fijians who joined the party included Ratu Mosese Tuisawau, Ratu Julian Toganivalu, Apisai Tora who had come into prominence as a trade union leader and Isikeli Nadalo. Tora’s National Democratic Party merged with the Federation to make it the National Federation Party (La1, 1997, p. 232).

Though it managed to win some high profile individuals to its side, still the grassroots Fijians did not support the party in any large numbers. Ratu Mosese’s and Tora’s motives in joining hands with Patel were debatable. Ratu Mosese had emphasized earlier that in the event of self government Fijian dominance should be ensured, while Tora had called for the deportation of Indians.

The ethnic Fijians who joined the National Federation Party included both chiefs and commoners. Ratu Mosese and Ratu Julian both resigned from government jobs to work for the NFP. Ratu Julian had been a district officer in the colonial government. He became the organising secretary of the NFP. Ratu Mosese became the editor of the *Pacific Review*, a newspaper that was published by Indian leaders from Nadi.

Campaigning for the 1968 by-elections “was marked by a more aggressive criticism of the chiefs” (Norton,1990, pp.94-98). After victory in the by-elections, the NFP held a public celebration claiming that the elections had demonstrated a desire for equal rights and independence. In fact, since the elections were only for the Indian communal seats, non-Indian participation was limited to the Fijian members of the Alliance Party and the NFP campaigning for their respective candidates. The Alliance candidates were all soundly defeated with the NFP

increasing its majority of votes. A. D. Patel called the Alliance Party the ‘white colonialist Alliance’, claiming that its leaders were stooges for Australian businesses. The Fijians rejected “Patel’s rhetoric and showed active hostility to his party” (Scarr, 1984, p.170). They organised rallies and marches. Fiji came as close to the brink of ethnic conflict as it ever had (Lal, 1997, p.237).

Ethnic conflict did not erupt in violence, however, because the chiefs were able to contain it, emphasising to the people the need for accommodating other groups. The menacing Fijian protest, though it reaffirmed the reality of ethnic conflict, also confirmed the national role of the chiefs as buffers and conciliators (Norton, 1990, p.102).

Patel’s biographer, Brij Lal, admits that “Patel did not sufficiently recognise the depth of the feeling against the Indian community among powerful sections of the European and Fijian community” (Lal, 1997, p.232). The NFP also miscalculated in trying to divide the Fijians from their chiefs and challenging their positions. Viliame Saulekaleka of Ra was expressing the feelings of many Fijian commoners when he asked: “Why hate our Ratus? Don’t other people know that they are still our law?” (quoted in Lal, 1997, p.236). Chief Minister Mara warned: “Let there be no violence but let it be clearly understood that the Fijian people have spoken in no uncertain terms and they cannot and must not be ignored” (quoted in Lal, 1997, p.238).

From an Ethnically Divided Society to an Integrated Nation?

Patel now recognised the strength of the Fijian chiefly system in Fijian culture. He had been critical of the Council of Chiefs and had declined invitations as an observer to its meetings before. But after the by-elections Patel understood the importance of the chiefly system not only to the ethnic Fijians but to the whole of Fiji. This led him to move a motion in the Legislative Council to restore the chiefly island of Bau as a national monument, a motion that was seconded by

Mara. “It was a symbolic gesture of reconciliation and helped to heal wounds” (Lal, 1997, p.287).

Patel was received as a guest at Bau and was invited to the Queen Victoria School, the premier Fijian school, as a guest of honour. He had always accepted the necessity for the paramountcy of the Fijians in their own country (“first among equals”). What he was fighting against was the dominance of the Europeans. Patel had claimed that the Fijian representatives at the London Constitutional Conference were led by the Europeans. This clearly angered the Fijian members of the Legislative Council, with Sikivou asking if Patel was “purposely trying to be insulting”. Mara informed the council that “the papers presented at the Conference were prepared by me and by me alone” (Legislative Council Debates, 15 December, 1965, p.638). Before the by-elections Patel had believed that Fijian chiefs were just the front men for the European establishment. His attitude to the paramount chiefs now changed.

It was for good reasons that the Fijian chiefly establishment sided with the colonial rulers. It was an “acknowledgement that colonialism was far from oppressive to the Fijians. They had been left with more than enough land for their needs and their culture had been respected and honoured even though altered and standardised as the approved ‘Fijian way of life’” (Gillion, 1977, pp.175-176).

During the 1968 by-elections, when the possibility of communal violence became real and imminent, Mara and Patel both realised the need for more dialogue for easing tensions and building racial harmony. Mara noted in his Memoirs that it became clear to him after the by-elections that if they were to move forward with any hope of a peaceful transition to independence, there would need to be some hard thinking, discussion and conciliation. According to Mara, “Just at that point one afternoon, A D Patel poked his head round the corner of my office door and asked if he could have a word. It turned out that he too had read the signs and that was the beginning of discussions between us that would lead to the 1970

Constitution” (Mara,1997, p.85).

The governor also encouraged both Mara and Patel to talk among themselves and develop a common agenda for self government. They had their first meeting in August 1969 under the chairmanship of Ratu Edward Cakobau. It was a confidential meeting attended also by Vijay R. Singh, K.S. Reddy, H.W. Yee, David Toganivalu, W.M. Barrett and S.M. Koya.

Patel wanted complete independence while Mara wanted full internal self government (Lal, 1997, p.240). Patel wanted Fiji to be a Republic with a Fijian chief as the head but later this view was modified to the extent that, as a first step in constitutional change, dominion status on the lines of New Zealand and Australia was agreed to by both sides, in deference to the Fijian people’s wish to preserve ties with Britain (Mara, 1997, p.96). Patel was still adamant about common roll and, though the gulf between the two sides still remained, the meeting was a cordial one and it was agreed that they would meet again soon. But before this could happen Patel died in October 1969 and Siddiq Koya became the NFP leader.

According to Mara, Patel’s death, “sad as it was and a great loss to the Indian community, made negotiations for independence much easier” because with Koya as the opposition leader “there was more give and take” (Mara, 1997, p.97). Thus there was a reconciliation between Fijian and Indian leaders which was the “outstanding feature of Fiji at independence” as their “acrimonious rivalry had threatened racial violence scarcely a year before” (Norton, 1990, p.107).

Even though negotiations for independence became easier, the fundamental structure of society did not change and at independence there was still limited contact between the two major ethnic groups. Moreover, the two communities had different aspirations. While Indians wanted independence with equal rights, many Fijians were not for democracy as they wanted the country to be given back to the

chiefs who had ceded it in 1874. What they wanted perhaps was a kind of democracy where the elites were in charge (see LC Debates, 16 December, 1965, p.662). Many of them also wanted the Indians sent away (Scarr, 1984, p.170).

Adi Losalini Dovi, the nominee of the Great Council of Chiefs in the Legislative Council made the feelings of the Fijian people before and after the 1970 London Constitutional Conference abundantly clear. She said that the opinion “aired most strongly, and I repeat most strongly, by the Fijians at various meetings before the London Constitutional Conference ... [was] that in the event of independence for Fiji ... we Fijians get the control of our land” (Legislative Council Debates, 18 June, 1970, p.242)¹⁰.

She further said that after the conference the Fijian members of the Legislative Council had various meetings “throughout the length and breadth of the country”, trying to explain the constitutional conference and the agreements reached and “although there were fears and disquiet aired at these meetings we were able to dispel them successfully” Adi Losalini said one of the questions asked at these various meetings was, “why should we not get our land back when our chiefs ceded it to Great Britain?” What the Fijians wanted was not just their land, which they have always had, but control of the government also rather than a democratic government with all the communities having equal rights. As noted earlier, many of them expressed the wish that Indians would be sent away.

The answer the Fijian leaders gave was that “we have now a multiracial society in our midst with which we must live, and live happily. We have enjoyed their contribution to the social and economic development of this country and we on our part have welcomed them. The people accepted this explanation in good faith and with implicit trust in our elected representatives ... particularly our leaders at the present moment. They realize that the measures designed are for the benefit of us all, including the Fijians”, Adi Losalini concluded.

¹⁰ Same source for the quotes in the next two paragraphs.

Ratu Mara and his fellow chiefs were able to persuade the indigenous Fijians to accept democracy when the opposition NFP agreed to special provisions to safeguard their rights as the original settlers. It was only the strength of the chiefly system that made the Fijian people accept democracy. So it was important for the Indian opposition to tread cautiously without causing any fear or suspicion in the minds of the Fijians commoners. It was also important for the Indian leaders to work to achieve more integration and to maintain the ethnic balance¹¹ until the country became integrated. The hope was that meanwhile democracy would become accepted by all the groups as the best form of government for the country. Hence the leaders of independent Fiji faced the mammoth task of transforming an ethnically divided country into an integrated nation where people had similar outlooks on national issues and lived in relative harmony.

Independence and the Multiracial Ideology

In the early years of independence Fiji was fortunate to have had an able leader with vision in its first Prime Minister, Ratu Sir Kamisese Mara, who recognised the dangers inherent in a system where different groups led their separate lives with little interaction among them. He advised the people of Fiji against doing or saying anything that would cause discord. Even in 1970, when everyone seemed to be basking in the euphoria of independence, the Prime Minister sounded a stern note of warning to his fellow Parliamentarians. Quoting from Arthur Lewis and giving examples of countries where there was no political stability or harmony because of antagonism between the indigenous and immigrant peoples, Ratu Mara said:

“The story began in Burma where shortly after independence all the Indians were driven out, being forced to leave most of their belongings behind The Indians in East Africa are clearly doomed, the only question being how many will be killed before they are all driven out”. He concluded that genocide was the favourite crime of the century, “what with Turks and Armenians, Germans and

¹¹ At the time of independence if the Fijians were dominating in politics and owned most of the land, the Indians were leading in education and business so there was a kind of balance that held the country together.

Jews, Russians and Ukrainians, Hindus and Muslims, Arabs and Jews — it is a melancholy tale. Any decent country is bound to wish to avoid such happenings” (Parliamentary Debates, 15 December 1970, p.285).

Mara hoped that Fiji would be able to avoid bloodshed but this could only be done by understanding and tolerance which he said he had preached “time and time again” because he saw fully the dangers that lay ahead. When people came and talked in Parliament about not caring for the political climate, he wished they could go to some of these countries and live in them to see for themselves what happened when there was no understanding or tolerance (Parliamentary Debates, 15 December, 1970).

Mara suggested “multiracialism” as the way forward for Fiji for building an integrated nation. The “multiracialism” that Mara proposed for national integration was one characterised by a deep and undivided sense of loyalty to Fiji as a nation¹²; respect for the rule of law; a commitment to uphold human rights and basic freedoms;¹³ and an awareness of and respect for the differences in the traditions of other ethnic groups while maintaining one’s own culture.

To give recognition to other cultures public holidays were declared for Diwali, the Hindu Festival of Lights, and the Muslim Prophet Mohammed’s birthday¹⁴, as well as giving holidays for the major Christian festivals. The Hindu and Muslim communities involved organised public celebrations of these festivals and often a Fijian leader was invited as the chief guest. This created an awareness and

¹² For example, at independence it was decided that Fiji would not allow any of its citizens to have dual citizenship. People had to decide whether they wanted to be Fiji citizens, in which case they had to renounce their foreign citizenship. This rule still continues.

¹³ One writer noted: “The 1970 Constitution embraces all the conceptual protections for human rights and dignity that can be conceived to prevent man doing evil unto man, , and it is entirely proper for Ratu Mara to take credit for being one of its principal intellectual architects” (Bain, 1988, p.134).

¹⁴ Jacqueline Leckie describes Ratu Mara’s acknowledgement of Indian culture in Fiji in 1999 as a great surprise (2002, p.254) but Mara had always given recognition to all cultures found in Fiji. As Prime Minister he not only granted holidays for Indian festivals but also included inter-faith services at all important occasions. He also wanted to make Fijian and Hindi compulsory languages in schools but did not get the support of the voluntary agencies that ran the schools (see Chapter 3).

appreciation of other cultures.

Schools were to be the centres for the dissemination of this “multiracial” ideology. The Mara government envisaged the use of education as a means for laying the foundation for a new “multiracial” Fiji. The idea was to use education as an instrument of indoctrination so that the children of Fiji, although belonging to different ethnic groups, grew up as loyal citizens of the nation, with a common outlook on national issues, attending the same schools and learning each other’s language.

Before schools could promote nationalism and a national identity, they themselves had to get away from their communal set-up. That was why it was important to take over communal schools and provide, if not state schools, at the very least non-communal ones like area or district schools, managed by local committees. The government had a plan to wipe out communalism from schools but the opposition, especially its leader, Siddiq Koya, was not supportive of it and the government was reluctant to act and implement these policies without the full support of the opposition as it was a highly sensitive issue (see Chapter 3).

The seeds of “multiracialism” were sown with a great deal of good will but it would require careful nurturing for them to flourish. The opposition National Federation Party, while it agreed in principle with the government’s policy, failed in its support when it came to translating this policy into action.

The government had policies for bringing about more integration by removing the disparities that existed between the two major ethnic groups. This was part of its policy of “multiracialism” as it believed that there could be no genuine “multiracialism” as long as such disparities remained. If “multiracialism” meant the two ethnic groups being given equal opportunities, then they had to be on an even field to make use of these opportunities. This was something the NFP leaders failed to grasp. Their limited understanding of “multiracialism” led them to take it

to mean merely the elimination of segregation.

The opposition's idea of "multiracialism" diverged even further from Mara's after 1977, with the NFP leader, Jai Ram Reddy, taking it to mean ethnically dominated parties, with each in turn allowed to rule the country, as long as it had some support from another party (see *Daily Post*, 25 July, 1992). This was first shown by his attempt to topple the Alliance government in 1982 by going into an alliance with the exclusively Fijian Western United Front Party. In 1987 he did a similar thing by getting the NFP to go into a coalition with the multiracial Fiji Labour Party and succeeded in his aim of defeating Ratu Mara's Alliance Party.

In 1992 Jai Ram Reddy openly revealed his narrow view of "multiracialism" when he elaborated in Parliament: "... you can have multiracialism in two ways. You can ...have multiracial parties ... That kind of multiracialism is, maybe, a bit premature for Fiji; perhaps we are not ready for it ... There is another kind of multiracialism ...Let us each be in our separate racial compartments ... Let communal solidarity prevail ... Let everyone be united, but from our respective positions of unity, let us accept that we must co-exist and work together ... It may be ... that that is a more realistic approach" (Parliamentary Debates, 24 July, 1992, pp.730-731, quoted in Fraenkel, 2000).

This was not multiracialism at all. It was a return to pluralism of the type described by Furnivall, but without an overriding colonial power. Or perhaps Reddy was anticipating Fiji becoming a plural society of Lijphart's definition where the various ethnic groups were segmented and had little 'criss-crossing' (Varshney, 2002, p.37).

While Mara could foresee the dangers that lay ahead if the country did not achieve some degree of integration, most others, in particular the Indian leaders, could not. Though they accepted the "multiracial" policy advocated by the Prime Minister, they did not support the endeavours of his government to implement many of its

measures for bringing “multiracialism” about. Implementation of these policies would have helped to transform the country from an ethnically divided society into an integrated nation. Unfortunately this did not happen as the predominantly Indian NFP, which had been a ‘thoughtful’ opposition under Patel in the 1960s, started to become a ‘confrontational’ one. This made the Westminster system become unworkable in multiethnic Fiji as party politics became reduced to ethnic politics. That was the tragedy of Fiji after independence in 1970.

Chapter 2

Governing a Multiethnic Country

In an ethnically divided society, if political parties are based on ethnicity, it is not only difficult to maintain a stable democratic government; but avoiding ethnic conflict also becomes a major concern. This was the situation of Fiji from the time it became self-governing in 1966.

The first scholar to discuss the difficulties in governing a multiethnic country probably was John Stuart Mill in the nineteenth century. He believed that “for a democracy to function a nation must exist by which he meant common loyalty to a political center” (Varshney, 2002, p.36). Fiji at independence lacked this important prerequisite for the functioning of a democratic government as people identified with their ethnic groups and not with the country, so it was a plural society of J. S. Furnivall’s description.

Furnivall described a plural society as: “It is in the strictest sense a medley [of people], for they mix but do not combine. Each group holds by its own religion, its own culture and language, its own ideas and ways. As individuals they meet, but only in the market-place, in buying and selling ... with different sections of the community living side by side, but separately, within the same political unit. [and] in the economic sphere ... a division of labour along racial lines” (Furnivall, 1956, p.304).

The Plural Society

Furnivall, the first to distinguish the ‘plural society’ as a separate form of society, was an economist and he coined the term to describe the economic relations that he noticed in South East Asian colonies such as Burma. There he perceived a “dual economy comprising two distinct economic systems, capitalist and pre-

capitalist” (Furnivall, 1956, p.304). Furthermore, he saw this economic pluralism as an aspect of the social pluralism as there were wide differences between the social standards of the “tropical peoples” and those of the “modern West” with the “western superstructure of business and administration rising above the native world” (Furnivall, 1956, p.304).

According to Furnivall (1956), a plural society was one composed of groups which were socially and culturally discrete, but integrated through economic interdependence and dominated by one group, a colonial power. They were differentiated socially and culturally. There were no shared values. It was only the coercive force of the colonial administration, which had the police and the army at its disposal that held the groups together. Furnivall saw these societies as deeply divided (Eriksen, 1993, p.49).

M. G. Smith (1965), a later theorist of plural societies, argues that social pluralism is correlated to cultural pluralism (Smith, 1965, p.89). He defines such a society as “a unit of disparate parts which owes its existence to external factors and lacks a common social will” (Smith, 1965, vii). But he notes that “[r]ace differences are stressed in contexts of social and cultural pluralism” (Smith, 1965, p.89). Smith sees these societies as notoriously unstable.

One major problem, identified by Smith as facing an emerging nation with a recent colonial past, is that of transforming it from pluralism to heterogeneity, which he saw as a necessary first step for its transformation into a cohesive national unit. In a heterogeneous society, all the groups enjoy equality with no group dominating. Each group also enjoys the freedom to follow its own culture. To transform a plural society into a heterogeneous nation (leading to integration) is no easy task. Smith identifies the following conditions as necessary for achieving it:

- (1) effective institutionalisation of uniform conditions of civil and political equality throughout the country; this especially involves the elimination of elite, sectional or ethnic privileges in the public sphere;
- (2) provision of equal, appropriate and uniform educational, occupational and economic opportunities to all cultural sections of the society and the principled recruitment of active participation in appropriately equivalent ratios from all the major ethnic groups;
- (3) public enforcement of the fundamental freedoms of worship, speech, movement, association and work (Smith, 1969, p.60).

Smith further notes that in these non-national states it remains necessary to pursue policies that eliminate sectional barriers, identities and fears among the collectivities that comprise them (Smith, 1969, p.449). In a heterogeneous society with cultural differences prevailing without social divisions, individuals participate in a common collective life under uniform conditions. Cultural differences would then be individually optional, functional alternatives, restricted to the private domain and to secondary institutional spheres (Smith, 1969, p.445).

It is noted that for the nation state to “be secure despite cultural diversity ... civism must prevail over pluralism [and] the state must have an integrated culture and structure”. This common culture is then called “the culture of the state” (Bullivant, 1984, pp.105-106).

The most important characteristics of a nation state would be a deep sense of primary loyalty to the country as a nation rather than to any communal groups; and an awareness of and respect for the differences in the traditions of the other ethnic groups while maintaining one’s own culture.

From Pluralism to Multiracialism

Furnivall's description of a plural society fitted colonial Fiji where there was not only both economic and social pluralism but cultural pluralism as well. Furnivall noticed that the economic activities of the people in a plural society differed according to their 'race'. This was true of Fiji. The colonial government recognised three major 'races', Fijian, Indian and European, who were expected to play different roles in the economy.

In the economic sphere, the indigenous Fijians were the land owners and the Indians were the labourers, with Europeans being the entrepreneurs who made use of both Fijian land and Indian labour.

Socially, indigenous Fijian society was organised under the village chiefs and the villagers shared all resources, especially land, which belonged to the 'mataqali' or the extended kinship group. This was different not only from the western way of life but also from the Indian who lived in extended families but not communally.

From the mid 1960s, Fiji became internally self governing, as Britain started slowly passing on the reins of government to elected representatives. It started with a membership system in 1964. Then in 1966 elections were held for the first time on a party basis. Though the parties were formed on communal lines, they tried to appeal to all communities. Thus the Fijian Association, which was originally formed to safeguard Fijian rights, soon became the 'multiracial' Alliance Party as it incorporated the General Electors (Europeans and anyone else who was not Fijian or Indian). An Indian Alliance was also formed as part of the Alliance Party.

Ratu Mara, who became the Chief Minister after his Alliance Party won the first party-based elections in 1966, realised the importance of bringing the

communities together in friendly co-operation. His efforts were mainly directed towards removing communal separation and turning the country into a culturally heterogeneous nation. The first step was to remove all segregation. Schools like Suva Grammar School, which was exclusively for European children, started accepting non-Europeans. Similarly, social clubs, which used to have only Europeans, started admitting non-Europeans who applied for membership. Moreover, the government started repealing laws which applied to only one community because the new constitution looked with “disfavour on discriminatory legislation”, the Minister for Fijian Affairs and Local Government, Ratu Penaia Ganilau, said (Legislative Council Debates, 2 April, 1968, p.95).

At the time of independence in 1970, Fiji was still a plural society with limited contact between the two major communities though there was no longer any official segregation. Ratu Mara who became Prime Minister offered a policy of ‘multiracialism’ to bring the communities closer together. What he meant by multiracialism was, in fact, heterogeneity, as defined by Smith. That is, there would be cultural diversity without any social divisions. Fiji was making steady progress towards this goal. By 1970 many of the features of a plural society that it had before had disappeared and Fiji at independence was a plural society in transition.

There was no longer any domination by a colonial power. Nor was there a power imbalance between constituent communal groups. Instead there was a kind of power sharing. Political power was mostly with the Fijians, who also owned most of the land in the country, while the Indians were leading in the professions and fast catching up with the Europeans in the economic sphere, especially in the retail sector, whereas in colonial Fiji, the Europeans had held both political and economic power. The major problem facing the country was the unequal development of the two main groups in education which could lead to inequalities.

Ratu Mara stressed that ‘race’ was a fact of life in Fiji which should be recognised and acknowledged. After independence, though no communal group was in a dominant position, the Fijians were lagging behind economically and in educational achievement.

The government felt that they had to be helped to come up to be on a par with the other communal groups. For that it was necessary to recognise the reality of communal divisions and try to remove inequalities which could breed resentment. There could be no genuine ‘multiracialism’ (or heterogeneity in Smith’s terms) if one group was far behind the other major group in educational attainment.

The policy of ‘multiracialism’ followed by the independent government of Fiji was characterised by the removal of all kinds of segregation; the giving of equal rights/opportunities to all communities though certain preferential policies were introduced for the sake of equity;¹⁵ creating an understanding of and respect for all cultures (ethnic groups) found in the country.

Multiculturalism

To complement policies of de-segregation, a multicultural approach was taken, to recognise cultural differences. So multicultural activities were emphasized and promoted throughout the country.

Culture includes language, religion, philosophies, patterns of thought and actions of a given population. In colonial Fiji, there was cultural diversity but not multiculturalism, but independent Fiji followed a policy of multiracialism/multiculturalism. Multiculturalism in Fiji meant accepting and

¹⁵ The 1969 Education Commission had noted that it was important to bridge the gap between the Indian and Fijian educational achievement for national integration.

officially recognising the diversity of cultures that existed and trying to understand and be tolerant while giving all of them equal importance.

A practical example of giving recognition to all cultures was the declaration of public holidays for Hindu and Muslim festivals after Fiji became independent. Another was the practice of having inter-faith services at most national functions. Then there was the adoption of the “three language formula” – that is, recognising Fijian and Hindi as official languages as well as English.

The vital role of language in uniting people was seen in Fiji when the Methodist Church made the Bauan dialect the standard Fijian and in less than a century all the Fijians became more homogeneous as a community, overshadowing tribal and regional differences. Similarly, the Fiji Indians who came from different parts of India and spoke various languages became integrated because of the common language, Hindi, that the colonial administration decided would be the official language for the Indians, as well as for instruction in Indian schools.

In schools, as part of multiculturalism, cross-cultural studies were introduced as recommended by the 1969 Education Commission. As part of this policy, cross-cultural language learning of Fijian and Hindi had been planned with English remaining the medium of instruction. However, after the 1977 elections, communalism became more pronounced and school committees started demanding their vernacular languages like Tamil, Telugu and Urdu. This put an end to the policy of all children learning Fijian and Hindi as additional languages with everyone becoming trilingual. Since there was no state system of schooling, the government was not able to impose its policies in schools, most of which were run by voluntary agencies. This prevented the achievement of genuine multiculturalism in schools.

Transcending Ethnic Divisions in Politics

Fiji followed the Westminster system of government and opposition with two major political parties which were initially divided on ideologies and were multiethnic in their appeal. Each was, however, supported predominantly by one ethnic group. In elections it also used the first-past-the-post system. But the 1970 constitution gave the two major ethnic groups equal number of seats in Parliament with the communal representation being continued even after independence. This was supposed to be a temporary arrangement until the country became more integrated.

To transcend communal cleavages and wipe out communalism in politics the government introduced a limited degree of ‘common roll’ voting in elections. After 1970, while more than half the members of Parliament were elected on a communal basis, a significant number were elected on a common roll through what was known as national seats. National seats were communally allocated but all the voters in the constituency voted for them without ethnic distinction – hence the system came to be known as ‘cross voting’ (Ghai, 2000, p.35).

The national seats were allocated along ethnic lines – ten each for the two major ethnic groups and five for the minority groups. So even though everyone in the constituency voted for these candidates, they were from three different ethnic groups. The idea was to make people think on national terms rather than on communal lines as they had done so far. Political parties in Fiji were organised on ethnic lines but “the system of national seats was to be the catalyst by which communal politics and communal parties would be transcended” (Ghai, 2000, p.29). The Fijian leaders wanted a gradual change, assessing voter behaviour in national constituencies to determine if the population was ready for a common electoral roll. Meanwhile they agreed to the introduction of common roll for municipal (local government) elections to see how it worked.

Some scholars claim that ethnic separation had been encouraged by communal seats but even for national seats people normally voted on communal lines – Indians voting for the NFP and Fijians voting for the Alliance.¹⁶ In casting their votes the electorate did not seem to consider the calibre of the candidate or his/her achievements and more importantly what contribution he/she could make in the future for the progress of the nation. A very good example was Ratu Penaia Ganilau, one of the high chiefs, who had distinguished himself as a soldier and administrator. He was often praised by the Opposition members in Parliament, but was defeated through Indian votes, by a little known Fijian commoner, who stood on an NFP ticket, in the 1972 general elections.

The government of independent Fiji had various policies for bringing about genuine integration in the country and transforming it from a plural society to a heterogeneous nation. The most important of these were the education policies. Unfortunately, the government did not get the support of the opposition in implementing these policies. One reason for the opposition not actively supporting government's policies seemed to have been its limited understanding of what 'multiracialism' meant. The NFP leaders in the 1970s equated it simply with the removal of segregation.

The NFP leaders, who had been advocating a common roll, also showed inconsistency between their words and actions as none of their leading candidates stood for a national seat, which was to be the first step to a common roll as it had voters from all the communities, preferring the safety of the communal rolls. This was in sharp contrast to the leading Alliance candidates, most of whom stood for national seats.¹⁷ The NFP under Koya had accepted the system of national seats at

¹⁶ "A study of electoral results in Fiji will show that the vast majority of the people have always voted along communal or racial lines" (Lal, 1998, p.146).

¹⁷ Alexander Mamak, who studied pluralism in Fiji and observed the 1972 general elections (the first after independence) found this (the NFP leaders' failure to stand on national rolls) very puzzling. (Mamak, 1978, p.165).

the 1970 constitutional conference as the first step towards a common roll system but they did not try to make it work in the way it was intended to work.

The need to contest national seats compelled the parties to extend their appeal beyond the community they principally represented but for the most part this was not successful. National seats were decided principally by communal votes. “In this way cross voting seats became an extension of communal seats” (Ghai, 2000, p.35)¹⁸. Ghai, however, noted an exception to this trend. The Alliance Party, in the years immediately after independence, attracted a significant percentage of Indo-Fijian votes, often over 20 per cent.¹⁹ “By way of contrast, the NFP commonly gained less than 5 per cent of indigenous Fijian votes” (Ghai, 2000, pp.35-36).

The 1972 voting pattern for the national seats indicated that a large number of people were moving away from rigid adherence to ethnic allegiances and making informed choices when it came to electing their leaders. The Alliance Party, for example, though predominantly Fijian, got the support of more than a third of the Indian voters in some constituencies (Lal, 1986, p.90). If the trend had continued, with both the major political parties having policies which were relevant to all the ethnic groups, Fiji would soon have become a heterogeneous society. But by 1977 Indian voters started flocking to the NFP en masse, leaving the Alliance behind, because they found the multiracial policies of the Alliance government, especially in education, benefiting the Fijians more. The Indians withdrawing their support for the Alliance and the split in the Fijian votes caused by the Fijian Nationalists led to the narrow defeat of the Alliance Party in the first general elections in 1977.

¹⁸ Other scholars (eg. Prasad, 1988) disagree with this view and the Suva national seats in 1987 are given as an example. But Hagan has noted that it was the general electors who seemed to have brought about the change in results in 1987 rather than the two major ethnic communities.

¹⁹ In the 1966 elections it came as an unpleasant shock to the Federation Party that the Alliance attracted the level of Indian support that it did in the cross voting constituencies (Alley, 1986, p.47). In the 1972 general elections, the Indian support for the Alliance was 24.1% but in some constituencies in the western division, it attracted over 35% of Indian votes (Lal, 1986, p.90).

When a minority government led by Ratu Mara was appointed after the elections in 1977, the opposition leader, Siddiq Koya, was accused of “deliberately whipping up Indian sympathy by charging that Ratu Mara’s and the Alliance’s acceptance to form a minority government was because they did not want an Indian Prime Minister in Fiji” (V. Lal, 1990, p.58). Koya further said that their decision was an “insult to the Indian community and its self-respect”. According to one writer Koya was “deliberately whipping up Indian sympathy” by distorting facts (V. Lal, 1990, p.58).

The degeneration of Fiji politics to ethnic politics continued into the 1980s causing ethnic tensions especially during elections. Ralph Premdas noted: “Politics in Fiji is fraught with tension and racial animosity” (1986, p.107). Premdas believed that Fiji needed a system of government that was not confrontational as the Westminster system was. The two leading scholars who have been discussing the kinds of democratic systems suitable for multiethnic countries are Arend Lijphart and Donald Horowitz. Lijphart advocated a system which he called consociationalism.

Consociational Democracy

While agreeing with the well-established proposition in political science that it is difficult to achieve and maintain a stable democratic government in a plural society, Lijphart sees it as “difficult but ... not at all impossible” (Lijphart, 1977, p.1). He notes that several plural societies in Europe have achieved stable democracy by consociational methods.

According to Lijphart consociational democracy entails the co-operation of segmental leaders despite the deep cleavages that might separate the segments. This is possible only if the leaders feel at least some commitment to maintaining the unity of the country. At the same time they must also be committed to democratic practices. Consociationalism is possible only if there is a basic

willingness by leaders of different segments to engage in co-operative efforts in a spirit of moderation and compromise.

The most important requirement of a consociational democracy, therefore, is co-operation between the political leaders of all important segments of the plural society. Another significant feature is proportionality in political representation and civil service appointments.

Leaders in a consociational democracy need to be willing to make concessions and compromises to accommodate the other groups, unlike in the British model where the leaders are often at loggerheads. This is due to the realization that political stakes are often high in plural societies and adversarial leadership could threaten the very fabric of the nation state. It had been noted that when people are basically homogeneous they could safely afford to bicker, but in plural societies with clearly separate and potentially hostile population segments, the Westminster type democracy with strict majority rule places a strain on the unity and peace of the system.

Even in homogeneous societies, at a time of great crisis, a grand coalition cabinet may be installed as a temporary measure. Lijphart gives the examples of Great Britain and Sweden, both of which resorted to grand coalition cabinets during the Second World War.

In plural societies, it is the nature of the society itself that constitutes the “crisis”, so it is more than a temporary emergency and requires a longer term grand coalition or consociationalism until the country is able to construct, however provisionally, a national identity that overshadows the segmental loyalties of the citizens. A grand coalition is only possible if the leaders have a moderate attitude and a willingness to compromise. Lijphart has noted that if the political leaders engage in “coalescent rather than adversarial decision making” (Lijphart, 1977, p.99) then the plural societies may enjoy stable government. He concludes: “For

many of the plural societies of the non-western world, therefore, the realistic choice is not between the British normative model of democracy and the consociational model, but between consociational democracy and no democracy at all” (Lijphart, 1977, p. 238).

Electoral Engineering

Horowitz, the other main scholar who has written about the problem of maintaining a stable democratic government in an ethnically divided country, is of the view that consociational arrangements will not work because they depend on leaders being enlightened, so that they realize that confrontation would lead to mutual destruction. He argues that “if such leadership could be counted upon consistently, consociational arrangements would be much less necessary in the first place” (1991, pp.142-143). He believes that without incentives “statesmanship will be in short supply” (1991, p.176).

According to Horowitz, if the aim is moderation on divisive issues to ameliorate inter-group conflicts, it could be achieved through a different electoral system from the Anglo-American system of first-past-the-post which Arthur Lewis had described as the surest way to kill the idea of democracy in a plural society (Horowitz, 1991, pp.164-165).

Horowitz recommends the alternative voting (AV) system as the most suitable form of electoral system for an ethnically divided society because in this system ethnically based political parties have to appeal to voters from other ethnic groups to win. His idea is to use the electoral system to induce changes in the behaviour of ethnically based or racially based parties. He calls it “electoral engineering” (1991, p.177). He believes that the challenge is to take an environment conducive to ethnic and racial allegiances in the party system and create incentives for parties to bid for floating votes “who would otherwise vote their group identity” (sic) (1991, p.203). Echoing Lijphart, he concludes: “From what we know of the

politics of severely divided societies, the choice may well be to see voters floating in the political system or floating in the air” (1991, p.203).

Consociationalism in Fiji

The first scholar to suggest that consociationalism would be the best form of government for Fiji was R. S. Milne (1975) and he gave the example of the period immediately prior to and after independence. The government that Fiji had during that period could be described as consociational as it exhibited both co-operation between leaders and proportionality. After independence Prime Minister Ratu Mara twice offered to have a government of national unity but both times the offer was turned down by the opposition NFP. The second offer in 1980, according to one scholar, had clear elements of consociationalism (Hagan, 1987, p. 132).

In the 1960s, before the introduction of self-government, a membership system existed that was described as “an embryo government of national unity” (Mara, 1997, p.71). From all accounts it seemed to have been a success (see Chapter 1).

The co-operative working relationship that Mara and Patel had developed as colleagues in the government continued even after the Membership system came to an end in 1966, when the former became the Leader of Government Business and the latter the Leader of the Opposition, until the walk-out by the opposition in 1967. Mara and Patel both realised the importance of dialogue after the 1968 by-elections took the country to the verge of violence (see Chapter 1). The NFP opposition then became (at least temporarily) a more thoughtful opposition rather than an adversarial one. This situation continued as long as Patel was the leader.

The NFP had some very able members in the Legislative Council who were good orators and brilliant debaters. They looked at every issue thoroughly and questioned the government, but if it was felt that it was for the good of the country the opposition supported the government. According to Milne, consociationalism

became stronger after Patel's death when Siddiq Koya became the Opposition Leader (Milne, 1975)²⁰. So Fiji had a smooth transition to independence.

It is questionable, however, whether the cordial relationship that developed between Koya and Mara can be described as consociationalism. Koya became close to Mara on a personal level and not as the leader of one segment of the country, because he seemed to have no clear policies for the group he represented. Mamak was the first to point out this problem. In the 1972 general elections the NFP lacked an ideology of its own and borrowed the Alliance slogan of 'Peace, Progress and Prosperity' (Mamak, 1978, p.165). Mamak also noted that the NFP failed to secure Fijian candidates for many of the national seats, let alone the Fijian communal seats. After independence Koya was also not willing to make concessions and compromises to accommodate the other group, especially in education (see Chapter 3).

After the 1972 elections Koya led a walk-out of the opposition members protesting against the Chief Justice, a move which was condemned by most government members. This seemed to have marked the turning point as after that the opposition slowly changed from being a thoughtful one to a confrontational one. According to Milne consultations between Prime Minister Mara and Koya continued until early 1975 (Milne, 1975) but this was not true, because though Mara continued to write to Koya on a number of matters where he was required to consult the leader of the opposition Koya did not acknowledge any of his letters from 1974 (*Fiji Times*, 1 June, 1977). The situation deteriorated further when Sakeasi Butadroka began a nationalist appeal to the primordial loyalties of the Fijian people. The country which had been moving towards heterogeneity took a backward step and became ethnically polarized.

²⁰ Milne, however, makes a factual error when he names Koya as the opposition member who moved the motion to restore the chiefly island of Bau, which brought the two sides closer together, when in fact it was Patel (see Chapter 1).

Primordial Loyalties, a Barrier to Nation Building

The notion of 'primordial loyalties' originated with the American anthropologist Clifford Geertz (1973) who describes a primordial attachment as "one that stems from the 'givens' of social existence". This includes, apart from one's family and relatives, "the givenness that stems from being born into a particular religious community, speaking a particular language or even a dialect of a language, and following particular social practices". He further states: "One is bound to one's kinsman, one's neighbour, one's fellow believer ...as the result not merely of personal affection, practical necessity, common interest or incurred obligation, but at least in great part by virtue of some unaccountable absolute import attributed to the very tie itself". Some attachments seem to flow more from a sense of natural affinity than from social interaction (1973, p.259).

Geertz argues that primordial ties stand in the way of nation building. As Nehru, the first Prime Minister of India, found out to his horror in 1948: "The work of 60 years of the Indian National Congress was standing before us, face to face with centuries old India of narrow loyalties, petty jealousies and ignorant prejudices engaged in mortal conflict and we were simply horrified to see how thin was the ice upon which we were skating" (quoted in Geertz, 1973, p.256). He was referring to the reorganisation of the states on linguistic lines.

Many observers wondered whether that country's political unity would survive these primordial divisions. It did because the decades of struggle for independence led by the Indian National Congress bound the people together and developed in them a commitment to nationhood. In contrast, there was no struggle for independence in Fiji.

The threat of primordial ties to political stability is that they can often be politically manipulated to promote parochial interests. On the other hand, they can be overcome by appealing to national interests, which is what the process of nation building is all about. Often the anti-colonial struggle overcomes, or at least

temporarily suppresses, primordial attachments, but because there was no unifying anti-colonial struggle in Fiji a national consciousness did not develop, and primordial attachments remained which could be appealed to and manipulated politically.

The major communities in Fiji had led their separate lives when suddenly they had to come together to build a nation. Mara offered 'multiracialism' as the way forward for achieving this but his efforts to develop a peaceful, integrated society have been described by Sitiveni Rabuka, leader of the military coups in 1987, and later Prime Minister, as trying to achieve "something that was impossible" (Lawson, 1996, pp.43-44). It was indeed impossible without the full co-operation and commitment of all groups in the country.

In the early years of independence, everyone did seem to co-operate, except for an odd discordant note coming mainly from the *Fiji Times*. This was in sharp contrast to the contribution of the press in India to nation building. There, though fiercely independent and ruthlessly critical, the press practised (and still does) self censorship when it comes to issues of national unity.

For the majority of communities in India, nationalism takes precedence over other narrower loyalties because the struggle for nationhood bound them together. In Fiji nation building started only after independence. The government of independent Fiji decided to use schools to promote a national consciousness by providing integrated schools and introducing multiple language learning. Every child was to learn to speak in Fijian and Hindi, but the policy did not take off (see Chapter 3) and the attempt to forge a unique Fiji identity was thwarted. Fiji Indians and indigenous Fijians remained linguistically different, which was one of the factors that stood in the way of nation building.

Then from 1973, Sakeasi Butadroka started directly appealing to the primordial loyalties of Fijians and preaching Fijian nationalism. His main slogan was "Fiji

for the Fijians” and his professed aim was to send the Indians away from Fiji. But the target of his campaign was Prime Minister Mara who he claimed was ‘selling’ Fiji to the Indians.

Manipulating Regional Differences

Butadroka also accused Mara of promoting policies which benefited only one region in Fiji, that is, Lau. Mara was the high chief of Lau, the eastern group of islands, which was different from the rest of Fiji because of its strong Tongan influence. Lauans were more “Polynesian” than the rest of the group. Lau was also where the missionaries first landed, so from the early days it had been ahead of the rest of the group in formal western education. Lau Provincial School was the only provincial school which used English as a medium of instruction from the very early days and in the early 1900s it had an Oxford graduate, A. M. Hocart (who later became anthropologically significant), as its headmaster (1909 Education Commission).

Butadroka worked on existing anti-Lauan sentiment. He complained that all the aid was going to the Prime Minister’s province of Lau. Then he complained that Lakeba, the Prime Minister’s island, had an air strip. Later he extended his criticism to include other paramount chiefs of eastern Fiji, claiming that the western division was under-represented in the government. He said: “It is a Tovata [confederacy] government”(Parliamentary Debates, 26 May, 1977, p.117). Butadroka reiterated the theme in 1982 on the retirement of Ratu George Cakobau as Governor-General, urging that Burebasaga confederacy chief, Ratu Mosese, should be appointed as the successor (*Fiji Times*, 4 November, 1982).

Butadroka also accused Mara of not implementing policies for the benefit of Fijians. He gave the example of the Fiji Institute Bill which George Cakobau, the highest chief of Fiji, when he was the Minister for Fijian Affairs wanted, but Mara did not approve. While attacking Mara, Butadroka praised Cakobau and tried to

suggest that the latter had the welfare of the Fijians at heart. Butadroka was again trying to manipulate the ancient rivalries between the chiefs of Bau and Lau.

Mara explained the reasons for rejecting the Fiji Institute Bill which was based on the Malaysian MARA Institute (which was for promoting indigenous Malay interests) the disastrous effect of the Institute was a riot in Malaysia.

In the early years, the NFP leaders seemed to have been sympathetic towards Butadroka's outbursts. Vijay Parmanandam, an NFP member, said in Parliament that there was a lot of truth in what Butadroka was saying. A few years later, in 1977, there were widespread rumours that the NFP collaborated with Butadroka's Nationalists against the Alliance Party during the first general elections of that year (see Chapter 3).

More than a decade later, Timoci Bavadra, the Fiji Labour Party leader, followed a similar line in his attack on Mara. He promised that under a Labour government national resources would be more rationally divided, adding that "the government resources poured into Lakeba are derived from wealth produced by others elsewhere in the country" (Scarr, 1988, p.33). This was "raising of inter-Fijian tribal issues to an unusually high level of public discord" (Scarr, 1988, p.33).

Where Mara had been trying to integrate Butadroka and later Bavadra tried to divide. Bavadra talked of the dominance of the eastern region and how the rest of Fiji had to serve the interests of a few centres in the east (Scarr, 1988, p.33).

There seemed to have been a genuine neglect of the Western Division until the membership system in the 1960s. In 1965 Semesa Sikivou found it "very encouraging" that "there is a large sum of money to be spent in the western constituency next year". He noted: "This, to me, is something entirely new" (LC Debates, 8 December, 1965, pp.478-479). This neglect of the Western Division changed from the time Fiji became self governing. Similarly there seems to have

been increased budgetary allocation for the outer islands (which included Mara's home province of Lau) in 1965 to correct past disparities.

In the early years of self government some of "the most expensive capital projects", such as the Lautoka Hospital, went to the western region (LC Debates, 4 and 5 December, 1967, pp.674, 692, 712 and 783). Apart from hospitals, nursing stations and health centres, and the Lautoka Teachers' College, there were other developments undertaken by the Housing Authority in Lautoka (1 December, 1969, p.1595).

Twenty years later, Dr. Bavadra, by pitting the western region against the eastern provinces, further contributed to ethnic divisions. Michael Howard had noted that when Bavadra became the Prime Minister, the Fijian ceremonies that were performed to celebrate the occasion were all done in the western dialect rather than in standard Fijian which is the Bauan dialect (Howard, 1988, p. 232). In doing that Bavadra was again emphasizing regional differences. It was also a departure from the customary norm of using the Bauan dialect at the national level.

Policies such as these were leading to divisions in the Fijian community rather than integrating all the communities in Fiji into a Fiji nation.

From Ethnic Politics to Ethnic Conflict

Stephanie Lawson has noted that political organization in Fiji had always been based on ethnicity (1996, p.57). From the very beginning members were elected or nominated to the Legislative Council on an ethnic basis and so the members saw their duty as championing the interests of the community they represented rather than looking at issues from a wider perspective.

When the two major political parties, the National Federation Party and the Alliance, were formed, however, their membership was open to anyone without any ethnic distinctions. They also tried to project a national outlook by promoting policies that benefited all ethnic groups. Thus the NFP was fighting against colonialism and exploitation while the Alliance believed in a gradual change by raising the living standards of the masses without suddenly abolishing the privileges of those who were in dominant positions, be they the Fijian chiefs or the mainly European commercial enterprises (the vested interests).

The 1970 constitution gave the Fijians and Indo-Fijians equal representation. Although it gave the minority Europeans and other communities (which formed the third group known first as 'General Electors' and later as 'Others') representation in excess of their numbers, both the main political parties agreed to it because the Europeans controlled the economy of the country and they could act as a buffer between the two major communities, helping to maintain the balance.

The first singularly ethnic party to be formed which made no pretensions to 'multiracialism' at all was the Fijian Nationalist Party in 1974. It was formed to fight for Fijian rights and to get rid of the 'Indian threat' by seeking to repatriate the Indians from Fiji.

The NFP from the beginning had very little Fijian support but almost a quarter of Indians used to support the Alliance in the 1960s and early 1970s. In 1977, when the USP quota system was made into a major election issue by the NFP, the Indians became a solid voting block under the NFP (for more on this see Chapter 3). This marked the real beginning of ethnic politics in Fiji, with a significant minority of ethnic Fijians lending their support to the Fijian Nationalist Party. Indians feared that the Alliance policies would adversely affect their future prospects and they saw the NFP as the only hope for their survival (Alley, 1977, p.287). This ethnic polarization led to ethnic tensions especially during general elections.

One scholar advocated consociational democracy as a short term answer to counter the problem of communal politics in Fiji until a heterogeneous society emerged (Premdas, 1986, p.107). The government that Fiji had between 1968 and 1974 had many features of consociationalism although the term ‘consociational’ was hardly used. So the call by Premdas was for the leaders to get back to consociationalism as Fiji started drifting back to pluralism and it was clear to both Fijian and Indian leaders that “conflict and confrontation would eventually lead to violence” (Premdas, 1986, p.108).

Mara called for a government of national unity in 1980 to avert a disaster (Premdas, 1986, p.108). The Leader of the Opposition, Jai Ram Reddy, questioned the sincerity of the Prime Minister as he accused the latter of “practising racial discrimination while espousing a policy of multiracialism” (Premdas, 1986, p.109).

This criticism was far from valid because the “Alliance Government, although Fijian dominated, had generally respected Indian rights and interests” (Premdas, 1986, p.115). Unlike Patel, who initiated discussions with Ratu Mara when he realized the country was drifting towards ethnic conflict, Reddy turned down Mara’s approach for dialogue. A major problem was Reddy’s idea of multiracialism.

When Mara talked of ‘multiracialism’, he meant the country getting away from pluralism and becoming a heterogeneous nation. When Reddy talked of ‘multiracialism’ what he meant was ‘pluralism’ in Smith’s/Furnivall’s sense . Reddy lamented that the architects of the 1970 constitution made certain assumptions and calculations. They should have made it clear, he said, that the Indian side was not supposed to ever be in power (*Daily Post*, 25 July, 1992). His

idea of ‘multiracialism’ in politics seemed to have been having a Fijian side and an Indian side as long as each one could be in power in turn²¹.

Kind of Democracy for the Pacific/Problems for Democracy in the Pacific

C. J. Lynch (1982) suggested that the Westminster model needs adaptation to make it suitable for the Pacific. He stressed the importance of having a consensual approach to decision making which, according to him, is a part of the ‘Pacific Way’ (Lynch, 1982, p.140, see also Introduction). Consultation, discussion and compromise are characteristics of consensual decision making. Lynch further believed that political parties and an institutionalized opposition are not essential or even desirable for small Pacific countries (1982, p.139).

I. F. Helu (1994) also believes that party politics is not needed in the Pacific because of the small populations while Michael Goldsmith (1993) is of the view that a ‘confrontational’ opposition, which is a common feature of the Westminster system, could be problematic in some contexts. Instead he recommends a ‘thoughtful’ opposition. Adopting a consensual approach could lead to having a ‘thoughtful’ opposition.

Helu and Goldsmith also consider leadership as important for maintaining stability. Helu believes leaders should follow Socrates and serve the people rather than be Sophists who want personal power. To make sure that the country has the right kind of leaders Helu recommends that those who aspire to be national leaders should be required to give up some of their personal privileges.

²¹ Stephanie Lawson (1991) asserts that foremost among the widely accepted principles and practices of democracy is the idea that *any political opposition may*, through the constitutional process adopted by the state, succeed legitimately to government (p.vi). However, it is widely seen in plural societies that ethnic politics (that is if political parties are based on ethnic lines) lead to ethnic conflict. If a change of government would only lead to conflict, it is pointless to have a change just for the sake of change.

Goldsmith recommends a 'thoughtful' Opposition rather than a 'confrontational' one which is the characteristic of the Westminster model. A 'thoughtful' Opposition would co-operate with the government on national issues for the benefit of the country and at the same time keep the government on its toes all the time. This again emphasizes the importance of leadership as leaders with foresight are the ones who give priority to what is good for the nation.

Leadership thus seems the most important prerequisite for the good governance of a Pacific Island nation following a democratic system of government to ensure stability and harmony. Fiji had such leaders in Ratu Mara and A. D. Patel. Fiji's ethnic problems seemed to have been partly caused by the absence of such a leader among the Opposition to take the place of Patel after his death. The Opposition also made concerted efforts, from the early 1980s, to get rid of Ratu Mara. This was unfortunate because a leader like Mara was needed to integrate the people of the country and turn Fiji into a nation since a national identity that takes precedence over all other loyalties is most important for the survival of a multiethnic country.

Multiparty Government

While many scholars stress the importance of good leadership for a stable democracy in a multiethnic nation, Horowitz is one scholar who has warned that good leadership is hard to come by without incentives. He suggests electoral engineering as the answer to achieve this (see p. 12). The makers of the 1970 Fiji Constitution followed a similar strategy in the 'cross voting' system for the national seats that it had. Unfortunately, the system did not work the way it was intended as it was reduced to an extension of the communal seats (see pp.7-9)

The 1997 Constitution again tried 'electoral engineering' through the preferential voting system which replaced the 'first-past-the-post' system that the 1970

Constitution had. The first elections under this system in 1999 resulted in an outright win for the FLP.

The 1997 Constitution also introduced the multiparty system of government. According to this provision, even if a party had an overall majority to form the government, other parties which secured a certain number of seats were required to be invited to join the government. This enforced union of political parties proved unworkable from the beginning.

In 1999 while the multiracial FLP won the elections, other Fijian parties like Fijian Association Party (FAP) and the Soqosoqo na Vakavulewa na Taukei (SVT) had passed the threshold for inclusion in the government. While FAP had no problem in joining the FLP as they had similar policies, FLP found it difficult to include the SVT in the government. SVT demanded specific portfolios for it in cabinet (for example, it wanted Jim Ah Koy, who was the Finance Minister in the previous SVT Government to continue in the same position) which the FLP was not willing to concede. Finally the SVT was forced to remain as the Opposition.

Similarly in 2001 the SDL party under Laisenia Qarase, which did not have an outright majority, was able to form a multiparty government by seeking the support of other Fijian parties which had won a few seats. But it refused to include the FLP which had the second largest number of seats in Parliament. Qarase insisted that his government would not be able to work with the FLP because of the difference in policies between the two parties. Multiparty government may work if the parties involved are ethnic parties working for the benefit of the groups they represent while making compromises for the national good. That again emphasizes the importance of leadership as co-operation between the leaders is important for its success.

David Robie has argued that unlike in developed countries, where individuals come and go while the political and economic systems are intact, in developing

countries, where issues are centred around individuals, toppling a leader can bring about anarchy (Robie, 1994, p.12). This was what seemed to have happened in Fiji. For twenty years, Ratu Mara dominated the political landscape of the country and those who made concerted efforts to get rid of him before the country became integrated failed to realize the disastrous consequences that would follow if they succeeded. Defeating the government of Ratu Mara seemed to have signalled the end of democracy and equal rights for the people as the majority of indigenous Fijians were not willing to accept the change

When Fiji became independent Fijians did not want democracy for fear of Indian domination (see Fiji Legislative Council Debates, June, 1970). The chiefs were able to persuade them to accept democracy with equal rights for everyone (see Chapter 1). A few years later Butadroka started his anti-Indian rhetoric and the Fijian fears re-surfaced. As long as the chiefly-led Alliance was in power the Fijian discontent was held in check. Once that was gone the over 90% of the Fijians who had not voted for Bavadra's coalition (and many who had voted for him but had not expected him to win government, only to provide strong opposition) were not happy with the turn of events. Moreover, the FLP/NFP coalition was voted in with fewer votes (47.1 per cent) than the ruling Alliance Party which was voted out although it received more (49.5 per cent) votes (Fraenkel, 2000, p.105).

When the democratically elected Bavadra government was overthrown the vast majority of indigenous Fijians supported the action of the Fiji military forces and rejoiced at the turn of events. Fiji was fortunate to have had an elected government again within a short period and full democracy in twelve years but because the country was not integrated it was easy to destabilize it once more and overthrow the democratically elected government for a second time in 2000. This time it was done by the vested interests and there was no overwhelming popular support for the illegal action unlike in 1987. The event, however, once again

emphasized the importance of having a common loyalty with a national identity for a nation state to survive.

In Fiji, as in most other countries with a multiethnic population, ethnic conflict seems to have been deliberately caused by politicians for their own ends. There was racial harmony at the time of independence and the two communities were beginning to come together when Butadroka started his attack on Ratu Mara and the Indians who were given equal rights. This rekindled suspicion of the Indians and the fear of being marginalized in the minds of many Fijians, a fear which made them stop supporting Mara and his multiracial policies.

On the other hand, the NFP leaders started accusing Mara of being anti-Indian and practising discrimination against them under the pretext of 'multiracialism'. This heightened the Indians' sense of insecurity as they became suspicious of Mara and his government. Indian leaders were doing this because after the death of Patel, the NFP lost direction and had no policies of its own. The NFP leaders found the only way they could survive was by playing ethnic politics. What was lacking in Fiji was the commitment to nation building by all which was necessary to turn the plural society into an integrated nation. Such commitment was lacking from the beginning although during the 1960s when Patel was the leader of the opposition with Mara as the leader of the government, there was the mutual commitment to the nation at least by the leaders, which took priority over other issues. Unfortunately, Patel died before this idea could infiltrate the common masses and develop a Fiji nation.

The Fiji Labour Party that was formed in 1985 was initially 'multiracial' but by forming a coalition with the NFP, just before the general elections in 1987, the coalition became predominantly Indian. The coalition won the elections but it managed to get less than ten per cent of ethnic Fijian votes. Predictably, confrontation became a reality which was given as the justification for the military

coups that followed soon after. The 1970 constitution was abrogated and the new constitution that was introduced in 1990 was blatantly discriminatory.

Miraculously, ten years after the coup, the country seemed to get back to the right course again in 1997 with a new constitution that promised equality to all. The 1997 constitution introduced the alternate voting system instead of the first-past-the-post that Fiji had so far followed. But Fiji still lacked the most important ingredient for the successful functioning of a democratic government in a multiethnic country which was ‘a common loyalty’ to the nation that all its people felt. That was why the new government had to tread carefully without upsetting any group as they worked for acceptance of the return of democratic rule which many had rejected only a few years ago.

Mahendra Chaudhry, the first Indo-Fijian to become the Prime Minister of the country, though following multiracial policies, showed lack of sensitivity to Fijian feelings. His style of leadership helped to aggravate the Fijian perception, that Indo-Fijians were threatening their rights in the country where they (the ethnic Fijians) were the original settlers. This helped the vested interests to exploit the Fijian fears by destabilizing the country and finally overthrowing the elected government in 2000, in order to maintain status quo. They also had the support of the *Fiji Times* which now turned its usual anti-Indian propaganda to concentrate on every lapse of Chaudhry, the ethnic Indian Prime Minister, and made it seem like a plot by Chaudhry to steal the Fijian heritage and Indianise the country.

A whole groundswell of Fijians was “convinced, by those with other agendas, that Chaudhry’s master plan for Fiji was ‘a little India’”(Connew, 2001, p. 79; see also Keith-Reid, 2000). The task to overthrow the government became easy because the population had not integrated and Chaudhry’s style of leadership, which was often seen as dictatorial, created suspicion in the minds of many ethnic Fijians (see also Chapters 7).

Ethnic tensions in Fiji seemed to have been caused by politicians. The inability of Indian politicians to pursue multiracial solutions and the ability of a few Fijian nationalist politicians to exploit the ethnic divisions initially caused the ethnic problems in independent Fiji. Later these politicians were joined in by some business people and other vested interests who hoped to gain by destabilizing the Labour-led People's Coalition Government. Some of Chaudhry's actions helped the rebels to exploit the gullible masses for their own ends. Leadership, or rather the lack of sound leadership, had again played a major role in the crisis that engulfed Fiji in 2000.

CHAPTER 3

Education the Foundation

It is widely accepted that one of the reasons for the perpetuation of a plural society in Fiji was the segregated education system that the colonial government maintained during most of its rule. As a result, at independence, Fiji was an ethnically divided country. So the major challenge facing the new government was transforming Fiji into an integrated nation. It was believed that education had a major role to play in achieving this aim. Ratu Mara, who became Prime Minister at independence, considered education as “the chosen instrument of nation building” (Legislative Council Debates, 2 December, 1969, p.1099).

Throughout the colonial period schools had been the major instrument for maintaining segregation. Government schools like Suva Grammar, Queen Victoria and Ratu Kadavulevu were among the most ethnically exclusive schools in the colony. When the colonial government failed to open any schools for the Indians the Indian community started establishing their own schools to educate their children, getting teachers from India, as they were reluctant to send their children to Christian schools for fear that they might be converted. Finally when the government established one or two schools for Indian children they were separate schools so there were separate schools for Europeans, Fijians and Indians.

The Indian population had gone to great trouble in educating their children with the major aim of improving their material status. Indians knew that education would enable them to hold their own against the Europeans who had been exploiting their ignorance and blocking their progress. Until the 1940s, the Fijians were leading the Indians in education or perhaps even after that. According to a leading former parliamentarian, K. C. Ramrakha, Fijians were ahead in education until the 1960s - 99 per cent of Fijians were literate at that time as against 30 per cent of the Indians (personal communication, 2005). But the Indo-Fijians started

forging ahead from the 1950s through their own efforts. Fijian education could not keep pace because of the colonial policy of not providing higher education for Fijian children in Fiji. In the following decades the Fijian achievement in education fell far behind that of the other ethnic groups. The 1969 Education Commission noted that correcting this disparity was imperative for building an integrated nation.

The argument I put forward in this chapter is that education failed to integrate the major ethnic groups and contribute to nation building because the opposition NFP politicized it, making it into an election issue in the 1972 and 1977 general elections. In doing that the NFP showed that it had begun to change from the ‘thoughtful’ opposition that it was under its founding leader, A.D. Patel. In this chapter I elaborate the actions of the NFP which showed that it was becoming less and less ‘thoughtful’.

The 1969 Education Commission

In 1969, on the eve of independence, an Education Commission was appointed to look into the system of education and to advise the government on the direction education should take in independent Fiji. Both Fijian and Indian leaders had been asking for such a commission but for different reasons. The Fijian Affairs Board and the Council of Chiefs had wanted a commission to look into the problems of Fijian education, while the Opposition National Federation Party called for a commission to study the question of free education. The Government decided to appoint a commission with “wide terms of reference to review the whole of the system of education in Fiji and to make recommendations” on all aspects (Legislative Council Debates, 29 January, 1969, pp.82-83).

The Education Commission made a thorough study of the country’s education system and submitted its report which was tabled in the Legislative Council in March 1970, a few months before the country became independent. However, it

generated little interest and there was no debate and hardly any comments on its recommendations. But during the debate on Fiji's Sixth Development Plan (DPVI) the Minister for Social Services talked about the commission and its recommendations. The education policy outlined in DPVI was mainly based on those recommendations. The government accepted most of the recommendations of the Commission and used these as a guideline for formulating its policies.

DPVI, which was introduced in Parliament a month after the country became independent, represented a statement of the government's economic and social policies. One of its aims was to build a 'multiracial' society where everyone had equal rights and equal opportunities. The 1969 Education Commission believed that education had an important role to play in helping to achieve this aim and it outlined three major steps to achieve this. These were: multiracial schools; cross-cultural studies; and specific measures to improve Fijian education so that there would be no disparity in achievement between Fijians and others (Report of the Education Commission, 1969; see also Gaunder, 1999, p. 138).

Multiracialism in Schools

From the 1930s Indians had been asking for multiracial schooling but both Fijians and Europeans rejected it for different reasons. Europeans wanted segregated schooling to continue as a way of maintaining their control of the status quo while Fijians wanted their separate schools for fear that otherwise they would be dominated by other races and eventually lose their culture. This fear was heightened by the fact that they had become a minority in the 1940s and comprised a little over 40 per cent of the population at the time of independence in 1970.

By the last decade of colonial rule, the policies of segregation started being abolished with schools like Suva Grammar (which had been exclusively for European children) becoming multiracial. Exclusively Fijian schools like Queen

Victoria School were slower to change. In 1964 A. D. Patel, the member for Social Services, a portfolio which had responsibility for education, wanted to promote multiracial education but the Fijians rejected it.

In my book, 'Education and Race Relations in Fiji, 1835-1998' (Gauder, 1999), I have explained how the government wanted to implement the recommendations of the 1969 Education Commission but did not get the support and co-operation of the opposition NFP in their efforts to do so, even though the opposition had not attacked these policies in Parliament and had given their silent consent. So I have suggested that one of the major reasons for the country not becoming integrated was the opposition's response to the educational policies put forward by the government. The NFP, while it had no concrete policies to offer, attacked government's education policies and made them into election issues in the first (1972) and second (1977) general elections after independence.

I know that many of the academics in Fiji do not agree with this view, but so far I am not aware of any written rebuttal of my arguments. Now, after the death of Ratu Sir Kamisese Mara, there is a reassessment of his contribution and I feel it may be an appropriate time to express my views in more detail than I have done so far. So in this chapter I elaborate how education failed to lay the foundation for a new multiracial society partly because the opposition NFP did not support the government policies to bring in more integration in schools in order to make them the basis for a new 'multiracial' nation.

To repeat, in not supporting the government in its endeavours to wipe out communalism from the education system and provide integrated schooling to the growing generation the NFP opposition showed that it had begun to change from the 'thoughtful' opposition that it was before independence.

Problems of Voluntarism in Education

The 1969 Education Commission identified the voluntary system as the main reason for the persistence of communal divisions in schools. Voluntarism in education meant leaving the responsibility for opening and running schools to voluntary agencies rather than the state providing schools. Even before Fiji became a colony, there were schools established in almost all the villages by the Christian missionaries so the elementary education of Fijian children was taken care of. The Methodist Mission, which ran most of these schools, wanted to relinquish their control of the village schools in the late 1920s and early 1930s and the initial plan was for the government to take over these schools.

James Russell, who was the Director of Education at that time, did not favour such a policy so many of these schools were handed over to local committees (Hopkin, 1977, p.86; also see Gaunder, 1999, pp. 89-91). The Education Department, moreover, neglected to exert effective control over them and most of these schools deteriorated in quality, and standards became low (Hopkin, 1977, p.91).

Then there was the growing number of Indian children in the colony for whom there were hardly any schools at all for over three decades (since the arrival of the first Indians in 1879). The only Indian schools in the early 1900s were a couple of schools established by the Methodist Mission and the few run by Indian religious organizations like the Arya Samaj and the Islamic Associations.

The colonial government followed a *laissez faire* policy in education, so private (voluntary) committees were left to run both Indian and Fijian schools. The main difference was that in the case of Indian schools, they were mostly run by Indian cultural and religious organizations, while the Fijian schools were run by local committees.

So first and foremost, the phasing out of the voluntary system was considered important for making schools multiracial. Having state schools was also important for the government to have an effective control over the education system. Children of different ethnic origins could be brought together from an early age by phasing out the committee system and encouraging schools to amalgamate wherever there was duplication, the Commission had said.

During the debate on DPVI, the Minister for Social Services explained what was being done to make schools multiracial and to improve Fijian education. It still did not generate much interest and the policies were accepted with hardly any debate or criticism.

The majority of the schools in the country were (and still are) run by Indian religious and cultural organizations or Fijian village committees. Indians had made great sacrifices to establish their own schools, so they were justly proud of what they had achieved. This was despite the various obstacles placed before them by the vested interests who did not want the Indian children educated as that would put an end to their chief source of cheap labour. With independence, however, these voluntary agencies who ran the schools had outlived their use, which was evident from some of the problems highlighted by the Indian leaders themselves.

One major problem was duplication of facilities in certain areas and the resulting wastage of scarce resources while some other areas lacked facilities for education. Often in one area there would be three small schools close to one another. There would be one Fijian school and two Indian schools – one run by a Hindu organization and the other by a Muslim association. Amalgamating them would have not only brought more integration but it would also have been more cost effective and resulted in better standards because there was a shortage of qualified teachers. Many of these committee schools employed untrained people to teach.

Several Indian opposition members had pointed out these problems even before independence. Some of them had tried successfully to amalgamate schools in their areas. For example, the Bua Indian School and the Bua District School were amalgamated by the NFP Member of the Legislative Council under whose constituency the schools came (LC Debates, 28 November, 1966, p.950). Three years later, another opposition member gave the example of the Tagitagi area in Tavua where there were two schools opposite each other which he thought could be amalgamated (LC Debates, 29 January, 1969, p.98).

Such problems continued after independence. In November, 1972, Karam Ramrakha, a leading member of the Opposition, said in Parliament that there was a lot of duplication of schools because of the segregated system that was in force. If these schools were reorganized, he said, it would save costs and remove racial barriers (Parliamentary Debates, 8 November, 1972, p.1609).

Another sign that the voluntary agencies which ran schools had outlived their use was that until the 1950s the Indians were contributing to the costs of running the schools but with increased grants from the government for various purposes there were already signs that misuse of funds had started. This was highlighted by various members of the opposition such as James Madhavan, Chirag Ali Shah and Karam Ramrakha (Legislative Council Debates, 1969).

Ramrakha, who was also the president of the Fiji Teachers Union, was concerned that the committees might not pay the teachers the full salary grant that they received from the government and keep some of the money for other purposes (LC Debates, 25 April, 1969, p. 647). Similarly, another opposition member pointed out that the committees might not pay the parents of needy children the remission of fees that the government paid for them (LC Debates, 25 April, 1969, p.648). It would have been wise to nip these misuses in the bud and the best way would have been to take over at least some of the schools if not all.

For ensuring that teachers received their pay in full, Government later started paying the teachers directly and slowly absorbed most of them into the civil service. The majority of them continued to teach in committee schools even though employed by the Government. The system still continues.

Opposition members also complained about the growth of school fees collected in various ways, such as building grants. Government had increased grants to the voluntary agencies hoping that there would be a corresponding reduction in school fees but this had not happened (Legislative Council Debates, 22 March, 1967, pp.155-156 and 29 January, 1969, p.102). This was a clear indication that as long as the voluntary system continued, costs would not come down.

Significantly, the one opposition member who spoke in support of these voluntary agencies which ran schools, rather than criticizing them, was Siddiq Koya, although earlier he also had spoken in favour of government running all the schools (LC Debates, 22 July, 1966, p.71). Vijay Singh, the Minister for Social Services in 1967, pointed this out. In agreeing with the opposition's criticism of the committees that ran schools, Singh said that they were only stating the obvious but he did not know what the Opposition expected the Government to do because earlier the Indian member for Lautoka (Koya) had emphatically stated that "the committees are masters of their own schools, they would manage it (sic) and levy building funds and admit students to their schools as they desired" (Legislative Council Debates, 22 March, 1967, p.172).

Members of the Opposition other than Koya continued to highlight the problems in committee schools. Koya became the Leader of the Opposition towards the end of 1969. In spite of that it would have been an ideal time for starting to take over some of the committee schools as there was implicit support for such a move from many members of the opposition. This was also the recommendation of the 1969 Education Commission.

The Education Commission offered as the solution to the various problems found in the committee schools the ending of the voluntary system and providing state schools. This would also have brought about more integration and reduced communalism as well as costs of education for the parents. It would have further resulted in better standards. To begin with, the Commission recommended the phasing out of the voluntary system in primary schools and amalgamating schools wherever there was duplication.

The major recommendation for promoting multiracial education at the secondary level was the establishment of Government Junior Secondary Schools of high quality in carefully selected rural areas. At the same time, the Commission hoped that the Education Department would discourage the further proliferation of poor quality committee schools.

The government's long-term aim was to assume responsibility for committee schools if and when their managers sought integration into a state system. The Minister in charge of Education, Jonati Mavoa, agreed that eventually the government should aim at a wholly state system of primary education but he was conscious of the fact that some of the private organisations might very well be reluctant to hand over their schools to a central government (Parliamentary Debates, November, 1970, p.209).

The Opposition accepted without criticism the educational policies outlined by the minister. Speaking on the benefits of multiracial schools, one member of the Opposition pointed out that such schools would not only bring the children of various races together but they would also be more cost effective, as it would avoid duplication, while another stressed the importance of multiracial schools for nation building. Adi Losalini Dovi, a nominee of the Council of Chiefs, agreed with the opposition on the importance of such schools which she strongly believed was the answer to the problems in Fiji.

Unfortunately, Siddiq Koya, the new Opposition leader, seemed uninterested in abolishing the committee system and putting an end to communalism in schools. His priority in education seemed to be to concentrate on policies which would bring more electoral support. He obviously did not think taking over committee schools would prove popular with the different religious and cultural organizations that ran these schools. On the other hand, free education was an issue which had popular support, especially among the Indians, so he decided to champion that in the 1972 general elections (the first after independence). "Free, compulsory, primary education straight away. This is the only thing the party [NFP] advocated officially in the last election," Koya declared after the election (Parliamentary Debates, 2 June 1972, p.712).

Free Education

The Opposition had brought up the question of free education in the Legislative Council even before independence. In January, 1969 Mrs. Narayan, a leading member, introduced a motion calling for the immediate introduction of free and compulsory education (Legislative Council Debates, January, 1969). It is not clear what prompted her to bring that motion up because a few days before that the Minister for Social Services had announced in the media the decision to appoint an Education Advisory Commission.

In introducing the motion, Mrs. Narayan talked of the importance of multiracial schools where children would learn tolerance from an early age. She seemed to believe that free and compulsory education would make schools multiracial. What was needed for that was a wiping out of the voluntary system which fostered communalism. That would have also saved costs. Mrs. Narayan's motion, moreover, revealed the complete lack of understanding of the Indian leaders of the Fijian educational problems. The major difficulty for Fijian people was not fees because many Fijian schools did not charge fees as was pointed out during the

debate by the Fijian members. In contrast, there was hardly any Indian school which provided free education.

The Minister for Social Services said that many of the Fijian schools, especially in the rural areas, did not charge fees. Mr. Yarrow, a backbencher, gave the example of a Fijian school in Tavua, Nadelei Catholic Mission School, which charged only nominal fees where almost half its students and half its staff were Indians. The school committee was predominantly Fijian but Indian parents/guardians were invited to attend its meetings. Most of the money was raised by communal village effort. "To the best of my knowledge no one has been turned away from Nadelei School because of the inability to pay fees and I think this would apply to almost every Fijian school using the same system" (Legislative Council Debates, 1 December, 1969, pp.1508-1509).

The problem for Fijians was access, as many Fijian villages were isolated. Often geographical features like mountains and rivers also made accessibility difficult. However, the question that was worrying the Fijian leaders most was the under-achievement of Fijian children and they wanted the Education Commission to make that its main focus. The NFP leaders were either unaware of or did not consider these issues (accessibility and under-achievement) important. The poor performance of Fijian children, however, was a serious national problem as it had the potential to cause resentment and ethnic tension. If after independence the Indians started occupying most of the important positions in the country because of their higher educational qualifications that was sure to create resentment among the Fijian people. On the other hand, if the Fijians with lower qualifications were accepted for positions to keep the racial balance in the civil service and other areas of national life, Indians were sure to resent it. Mrs. Narayan, a teacher, seemed completely ignorant of this major educational problem which was worrying Fijian leaders. This was an indication of the gulf between the two communities that existed in colonial Fiji.

It had also been pointed out that although many Fijian schools had free education it was impossible to have compulsory education because of the geographical isolation of some of the villages and the associated difficulties the children faced in remote areas in getting to school. Many parents were reluctant to send their young children to school because of these problems which resulted in many Fijian children starting school at an older age than others.

Alliance Minister Vijay Singh (who was the Minister for Social Services before a reshuffle of the cabinet) pointed out that when A.D. Patel, the NFP leader, was the Member for Social Services his priorities in education were universal (not compulsory) education and reducing the cost of education. Universal education seemed to have continued as the priority with the Alliance Government because in 1968, K. S. Reddy, the Assistant Minister for Social Services, talked about how the Government was working towards achieving this aim by 1972 (Legislative Council Debates, 3 December, 1968, p.352). Incidentally, Mr. Reddy was the person who called for the appointment of an education advisory commission to make recommendations “to remedy the ills” which might be in the existing education system, particularly in Fijian education.

Significantly, Patel did not speak on the motion and the Opposition accepted the amendment moved by the Minister for Social Services: “that this Council notes with pleasure government’s intention to appoint an Education Advisory Commission to make recommendations about the development of Fiji’s education system and recommends that the possible introduction of free and compulsory primary education at an appropriate date be included in the terms of reference” (Legislative Council Debates, 29 January, 1969, p.91). Vijay Singh congratulated Patel and Mrs. Narayan for accepting the amendment (Legislative Council Debates, 29 January, 1969, p.100).

Unfortunately, the Opposition decided to make free education an election issue in 1972. Education and land were the two most sensitive issues in Fiji at the time of

independence and it would have been wise to solve these through negotiation rather than causing open controversy, But by then A. D. Patel had died and S. M. Koya had become the new leader (of the NFP as well as of the Opposition) and this change in leadership adversely affected the performance of the Opposition.

The issue of free education was again raised by the Opposition soon after the 1972 elections, in November, 1972, when it again introduced a motion calling for free and compulsory education. In moving the motion, Ramrakha, a leading Opposition member, referred to the Education Commission and what it had to say “on this important question” (Parliamentary Debates, 8 November, 1972, p.1606). The Commission said it could not recommend that primary education be made free or compulsory immediately because of the “lack of suitably qualified teachers” (Parliamentary Debates, 8 November, 1972, p.1606). But Ramrakha believed (perhaps rightly) that the problem of shortage of teachers could be overcome by reorganizing the schools as there was a lot of duplication.

Ramrakha did not, however, make it clear how they should be reorganised. The Education Commission had also recommended a reorganisation by taking over committee schools and amalgamating them wherever there was duplication.

Ramrakha further noted that education was an issue with which the country could not afford to play politics but admitted that “in the last election this did become a severe issue between the two major political parties – the Alliance and the NFP” (Parliamentary Debates, 8 November, 1972, p.1607). Understandably, he did not say that it was the Opposition who made it into an election issue.

The other major reason given by the Commission against the introduction of free education immediately was that “the considerable additional cost to government (about \$2.5 million per annum) would inevitably divert funds from other educational needs of even greater urgency” (Parliamentary Debates, 8 November, 1972, p.1606). Ramrakha pointed out that the Leader of the Opposition had

indicated a solution to this, which was “greater taxation on the larger companies” like the Carpenters, which were making, by their own admission, “incredible profits” (Parliamentary Debates, 8 November, 1972, p.1607).

In 1969, the Minister for Social Services, Jonati Mavoa, had said that the Government had accepted in principle that primary education should be free and it was working towards that end. It was, however, clear that cost of education would not come down as long as the schools were run by private organizations (Legislative Council Debates, 29 January, 1969, pp.89-90). So what was important was having government schools to actually reduce the cost of education.

In December 1970 the Minister for Social Services had stated in Parliament that free education was something that newly independent countries tried to have but he believed it did not really help the needy or benefit the country. It was only done to catch votes (Parliamentary Debates, 21 December, 1970, p.438). Giving examples of African, Middle Eastern and Asian countries which introduced free education, he showed that it had not really benefited the people because in these countries less than fifty per cent of the school age population attended schools.

The Minister thought what had happened was that they catered more for the children in the cities and towns, forgetting the rural population. “Now this is not what we want to do in Fiji and our efforts should be directed more to helping the poor children first ... Not that we think those in cities should not be assisted; we think we should help first those in need of help most and then as we can afford it, extend the help to others” (Parliamentary Debates, 21 December, 1970, p.439).

In Fiji also the Opposition’s demand for free education seemed only a vote-catching device and not for really helping the people in need. This was evident from the fact that one of their members admitted that primary education did not cost much, particularly in the government schools, but in the case of certain

private schools costs were going up and people were finding it difficult to pay (Parliamentary Debates, 8 November, 1972, p.1622). The problem was that there were very few Government schools. So if the Opposition were genuinely concerned about helping the poor parents, supporting the Education Commission's recommendation for a state system of schools would have been the answer to this problem.

Harish Sharma of the Opposition stressed that multiracial schools were as important as free and compulsory education. He noted that "if one were to analyse the racial composition of various schools, one would find that our schools are far from multiracial in character ... whilst the government ... is considering the provision of free and compulsory education, it should at the same time take positive steps to implement the question of multiracial education in schools" (Parliamentary Debates, 8 November, 1972, p.1622).

The Education Commission had a practical plan for reducing costs and at the same time promoting multiracialism in schools by the state providing primary schools. In due course they were to be made free but it did not consider it an immediate priority because of other more urgent needs such as wiping out communalism from schools and promoting more integration. Meanwhile it had recommended a progressive increase in the funds made available for remission of fees of indigent children.

In DPVI, which covered the first five years of independence, the government had expressed its willingness eventually to take over all schools run by voluntary agencies if they so wished. The policy was dropped from DPVII. No reason was given (more importantly, no questions were asked by the Opposition), but the Minister for Education had since admitted that phasing out the voluntary system would have meant long delays in the introduction of fee free education (Whitehead, 1986, p.6).

When free education became a political issue the government decided to introduce it gradually from 1973, resulting in the indefinite shelving of the policy of taking over of committee schools. The Opposition's suggestion of increasing taxation on larger companies perhaps was not taken for fear that it may send wrong signals to investors.

Fee-free education, which took priority over the introduction of a state system of schools, had mass appeal and could win (or lose) votes, but in reality provided minimal financial relief to the poorer sections of the community. As the voluntary system continued the committees found ways of getting money out of the parents as had been predicted. The costs did not in any way come down and duplication and wastage continued which also affected standards.

The Alliance Government made the grave mistake of introducing 'free' education rather than providing a state system of schools. The issue had not attracted many voters to the NFP in the 1972 general elections and the Alliance had a comfortable majority. This was an ideal time to take over schools as many opposition members (though not its leader, Koya) had also spoken of the problems of the voluntary system. The failure of the government to act entrenched communalism in schools rather than their becoming multiracial as had been planned. I would say that this was the biggest mistake made by the government of Ratu Mara in its seventeen years' rule after independence.

Moreover, government did not have ultimate control over the schools to implement its policies such as cross-cultural studies. The committees were still in control and they were not interested in these policies. In clamoring for free education after independence, the Opposition NFP ignored other more important educational issues such as integration and cross-cultural language learning. Having a state system of schools would have not only helped to wipe out communalism by making schools multiracial in areas where there was a

multiracial population; it would also have helped to implement the policies, such as cross-cultural language learning, for developing a distinct national identity.

Jone Naisara, who became the Minister for Education after the 1972 elections, had said: “Government’s declared policy [is] set out in DPVI ... and we will stick to it” (Parliamentary Debates, 8 November 1972, p.1610). Unfortunately, government did not stick to it. In this connection, Whitehead had noted that unlike a colonial government, “a popularly elected Government had to be far more sensitive to the force of public opinion” (Whitehead, 1986, p.6). By not supporting the policies of the government, which were based on the sound advice given by the Education Commission, the Opposition contributed (perhaps inadvertently) to the maintenance of communalism in schools.

One Fijian scholar blames “the post-Independence leadership [which] lacked that decisive commitment to break from the shackles of the colonial education order, which was an important prerequisite for the creation of a genuine multi-ethnic order” (Baba, 1988, p.18). It is true that ultimately the fault lay with the government for not sticking to the sound policy it originally had based on the recommendations of the Education Commission.

Government and Opposition should have explained to their supporters that the priorities in education were universal education and reducing the cost of education, both of which could have been better achieved by having state schools. Abolishing fees, moreover, did not mean that education became free. It had been pointed out by the opposition members themselves that the cost of education would keep going up as long as private committees ran the schools. Instead of explaining its position and sticking to it the government also allowed itself to be influenced by the opposition in this vital area which was the reason for the continuation of communalism in schools. It is, moreover, believed that “[had] there been sound education structures ensuring that children of all races were

educated together at an early age, multi-racialism would not have floundered so easily” (Baba, 1988, p.18).

Cross-Cultural Studies

Since building a nation was seen as the main aim of education, the Commission recommended the teaching of a basic Fijian language course to non-Fijian students so that they would be able to understand and speak the language. This was to help to integrate the population by developing a distinct Fiji identity and creating a national feeling in the children. The Commission also recommended cross-cultural studies to promote integration and pointed out that school subjects such as History and Geography should be used to foster a sense of national pride and promote national unity.

The Alliance Government, following its ‘multiracial’ policy, went a step ahead and decided to teach not only Fijian but Hindi as well to all children. The aim was to make the growing generation trilingual, with everyone able to converse in Fijian and Hindi with English remaining the medium of instruction. Thus a distinct Fiji identity was hoped to be developed. This would have gone a long way in integrating the young population. Government, however, could not implement its policies satisfactorily because the voluntary system persisted.

Indian religious and cultural organizations that ran most of the schools were not interested in such a programme as they were more interested in promoting their own vernaculars. Apart from Hindi (for their own students, and not cross-culturally) some organizations, like Sangam and the Muslim League, wanted languages like Tamil, Telugu and Urdu re-introduced (this is explained later in this chapter) in their schools. Neither did the parents nor the teachers show an interest in cross-cultural language learning as they concentrated on examinations and examination results.

The only concern was expressed by Adi Losalini Dovi, the Government Whip, who raised the issue in Parliament: “I have often wondered whether we as a Government responsible for this country are really sincere in our efforts of bringing together a closer understanding of the races in this country”. She asked the Minister of Education when the language policy would be implemented because she felt that “if we overcome the language barrier, then a lot more could be achieved in that way” (Parliamentary Debates, 10 December, 1973, p.2026). K. S. Reddy of the Alliance agreed with her: “Language, sir, will play a great role in moulding our multiracial society” (Parliamentary Debates, 10 December, 1973, p.2059). But only one opposition member, K. K. Singh, spoke in support of her (Parliamentary Debates, 11 December, 1973, p.2122).

It was a criticism of the Government by none other than its own Whip, and one would have expected the Opposition to pounce on that opportunity but it was not to be. This showed the low priority it gave to cross-cultural language learning. The Minister said the Curriculum Development and Advisory Section was preparing suitable course material and trying it out in selected pilot (primary) schools. The Minister further said that two types of language courses were being developed in Fijian and Hindi at secondary levels, “a mother tongue course for those who speak the language and a second language course for those who do not”. It was hoped that the second language courses would promote better understanding among the various communities in Fiji. The Curriculum Advisory Board which had opposition MPs, senators and others with the Minister as the Chairman would discuss the matter at its next meeting, the Minister maintained (Parliamentary Debates, 14 December, 1973, p.2256).

A year later, the Minister for Education, Jone Naisara, again referred to “the plea made by the honourable Government Whip,” for cross-cultural language learning and said: “I would like to emphasize that government is committed to a policy of better understanding among the various communities”. But he went on: “It should be appreciated, Mr. Speaker, Sir, that making the teaching of any vernacular

language compulsory to children of another mother tongue can be [a] highly contentious, complex and sensitive issue in a multiracial society like ours” (Parliamentary Debates, 2 December, 1974, p.1660). That was why it was important to have the co-operation of the Opposition to make it acceptable to all the communities.

When the Ministry of Education tried to implement cross-cultural language learning it had difficulty in finding suitable teachers. So it was decided to introduce it as a radio programme. In 1978 the Ministry of Education started teaching Fijian and Hindi cross-culturally as a school broadcast programme and radio based lessons were developed. It unfortunately had a very short life span probably because the majority of the population seemed to have no interest in the issue. By 1982 the emphasis had shifted from cross-cultural language learning to, each one learning his/her own mother tongue, as this was the priority of most of the committees that ran schools. The then Minister for Education, Ahmed Ali, supported these moves, especially by the South Indian and Muslim organizations, probably in the hope of winning more votes. Neither the Opposition nor the teachers’ union, attacked the policy for fear of antagonising the communities involved.

In the 1920s, when Indians started establishing their schools, they wanted to teach their children their various languages and took the trouble of getting teachers from India if they were not available locally. Fifty years later, the majority of them only spoke Hindi. So it was a sheer waste of resources to re-introduce languages like Tamil and Telugu in schools as there was hardly any demand for them from the general public. The voluntary agencies running the schools were promoting these languages for their own reasons, ignoring the need of the nation, which was clearly cross-cultural language learning. The government again made the mistake of not sticking to its original policies and allowing them to be modified as it did not get the support of the Opposition for implementing them. So three decades later the language barrier between Fijians and Indo-Fijians still remained.

Fijian Educational Problem

The Commission noticed a wide disparity in the educational development of Fijians by comparison with other races. It also found that the quality of Fijian primary education was often low. Bridging the gap between Indian and Fijian educational achievement was important for bringing about national integration. Otherwise Fijians would be disadvantaged when it came to occupying positions of responsibility in the newly independent nation.

The Commission found that with a few exceptions, representatives of other racial groups were generally supportive of special measures for the improvement of Fijian education, although understandably not on a permanent basis. It was also found that Fijians were anxious to ensure that any such measures were not permanent and that they should be phased out as the achievement gap narrowed. Any permanent discrimination in favour of Fijians was regarded as unworthy of the dignity of the Fijian people (1969 Education Commission).

Improving the quality of primary education, especially in the rural areas, was seen as the long term solution to the problem. This could be brought about through more government involvement and by setting up Junior Secondary Schools. In promoting measures that would help the Fijian students to achieve better standards, the Commission cautiously avoided any steps that could be interpreted as blatantly discriminatory. Instead, it emphasized the rural-urban dichotomy and recommended policies that would improve rural education.

For example, the Commission wanted to see a progressive increase in the funds made available to provide free and partly free places at secondary schools for children of indigent parents. Such an increase would do much to correct the disparity between the number of Fijian children at secondary schools and those of other races because it was mainly the former who lived in the rural areas where ready cash was hard to come by. This recommendation was clearly aimed at

helping the Fijians but the Commission wanted the emphasis to be placed on need rather than on race so that it would not appear to be discriminatory.

The opposition had been very rightly criticising the implementation of the free and partly free places. In 1969, A.D. Patel had pointed out that many deserving students in Nadi, whose parents could not afford to pay school fees, missed out on that. Another opposition member, Chirag Ali Shah, had also given similar instances from Ba and Tavua and the Minister in charge had promised to look into those cases. Such problems persisted after independence, and Ramrakha, the Opposition Whip, gave the example of his own child who was offered a free place though he had not applied for it.

The problems in the proper implementation of these awards came to a head in the mid-1970s when government announced that only Fijian students would be given free and partly free places in schools. Indian members in Parliament, on both sides, protested vehemently against the move and the government withdrew its decision and admitted that an error was made.

The incident proved how effectively Parliament could be used, to put pressure on the government, when decisions were made that were unfair to one particular community. Unfortunately, this was a rare example after independence of making use of the Parliament to fight issues affecting Indians, with some unity of purpose, rather than being at logger heads on party lines. This kind of co-operation which could have transformed Fiji society was, however, short lived.

USP Quota System

The Fijian Affairs Board had proposed that fifty per cent of the government scholarship funds at the University of the South Pacific should be earmarked for Fijians. The Commission, given the special circumstances of time and place, favoured such an allocation but only for a specific period. The Commission

recommended special provisions for Fijian education for a period of nine years with a preliminary review at the end of six years. If there was no marked lessening in the disparity by then, the position was to be reviewed. It was also to be clearly understood that special measures of themselves availed nothing, unless they were matched by a converse Fijian effort.

The Minister for Social Services, while introducing DPVI, had explained what was being done to improve Fijian education (Parliamentary Debates, 7 December, 1970, pp.221-224). He had said that the government intended to keep the problem constantly under review. The first proposal was the award of scholarships to all deserving Fijian applicants. This, the Minister said, was already being done, but the problem was that too often there were very few qualified Fijian applicants and there was no point in giving scholarships to people who were not qualified to undertake the courses for which the scholarships were awarded.

On the other hand, if qualified Fijians were available in adequate numbers, then the recommendation of the Commission that fifty per cent of the scholarship award be reserved for Fijians would do no more than maintain the existing racial imbalance in senior posts, the Minister claimed. To show the enormity of the Fijian educational problem, the Minister drew attention to the racial breakdown of secondary school roll in 1969 which was: Indians 8,330; Fijians 3,964; others 1500. Far more than fifty per cent of the scholarships would need to be devoted to Fijians if the government was to correct the present imbalance, the Minister warned.

The Opposition Leader, Siddiq Koya, had said a few months before the country became independent that there would be problems after independence and “the only way I can see how we can solve these problems is to approach them as if they were national problems”. He gave an assurance that “as long as I occupy my chair, I shall do my best to see that they [the Fijian problems] are [solved] ... by joint consultation and we would give our fullest support to the Government”. He

further assured that this attitude would continue “until we have completed the transition period” (LC Debates, 15 June, 1970, p.193).

The Minister in charge of Education expressed pleasure at Koya’s assurance but added: “In years to come, I think the Fijian people ... will need to see some practical action of what is being done to help them ... we should aim in the future to remove the imbalance in the distribution of income and also in the education of our people” (LC Debates, 15 June, 1970, p.218).

Unfortunately, there was not only no “practical action” to help the Fijian people; but also no practical suggestions from the Opposition for the improvement of Fijian education, while they (the Opposition) continued to attack Government policies during election times.

Three years after independence Koya reiterated that the problems facing the Fijian people were national problems. He said: “... we have already said words to the effect that the concern for the welfare of Fijian people is not the monopoly of the Alliance Government. It is a national problem and as such we have a duty to solve the problem, to do our best to contribute all we can to solve it and that is where we stand” (Parliamentary Debates, 14 December, 1973, pp.2325-2326).

The Opposition had not only accepted the preferential policies to improve Fijian education without any criticism but it also did not ask for a review of these policies after six years as the Commission had recommended. But in October, 1975 during the debate in Parliament on Butadroka’s motion calling for the repatriation of Indians from Fiji, Koya admitted that the Opposition did not agree with the Government’s policy on education. Both the Prime Minister and the then Minister for Education (Naisara) wanted to know what exactly he opposed and what proposition he had. Koya’s reply was vague: “Sir, it is the objective [with] which, I think, both sides agree ... this is a national problem and it must be achieved – but the method, Sir, we disagree with” (10 October, 1975, p.1152).

The PM interjected that Koya was only paying lip service (to improving Fijian education).

Koya was obviously referring to the Government's policies for improving Fijian education, which included preferential policies for Fijian students for scholarships at the University of the South Pacific. The Prime Minister perhaps was justified in suggesting that Koya was not sincere in his support for improving Fijian education because the Government's educational policies were largely based on the recommendations of the Education Commission. The Opposition had neither criticised these recommendations nor suggested alternatives.

In 1976 a Senate Select Committee was appointed to look into the problem of absenteeism among Fijian children. That would have been an ideal time to review the special measures as, coincidentally, it was six years after the policies were first introduced. But the Senate committee made no mention of a review of these policies. More importantly, the Opposition did not demand such a review.

The Opposition criticism of the special measures to improve Fijian education only helped to turn these into a permanent feature as it became a political issue with the Fijian Nationalists accusing the government of not helping the Fijians while doing a lot for the Indians.

Fijian education had made great strides during the first six years after independence because at the end of 1976 a good number of Fijian students did qualify to attend university, unlike in previous years, depriving some of the Indian students with better marks of their chances of receiving a scholarship. In 1977, the government decided to grant scholarships to the University of the South Pacific's Foundation Year science programme to Fijian students who passed the New Zealand University Entrance Examination with a minimum of 216 marks while the Indian students were required to have a minimum of 261 marks. The announcement provoked a student strike on the campus.

The NFP which had earlier accepted the quota system took up the issue before the general elections of 1977 to gain political mileage (see Lal, 1986 and Ali, 1980). Koya, the Opposition Leader, “denounced the policy in ringing terms” (Lal, 1986, p.86).

Instead of explaining to its Indian followers why such a policy was imperative for achieving long term harmony in the country, and asking for a review of the policy, as recommended by the 1969 Education Commission, the opposition NFP chose to make it an election issue in the 1977 general elections. It was an ideal time to demand a review and decide on what the future policy should be but it was not to be. The policy could have been changed to give more emphasis to need rather than to exam results in granting scholarships, explaining to the people that the main priority of the government was equity.

The Opposition succeeded in attracting most of the Indians under its banner by campaigning against the quota system. The NFP was in disarray at that time with a leadership struggle between its two factions, one supporting the Opposition Leader, Koya, and the other opposed to him. With all its internal problems, NFP was still able to gain most of the Indian votes with the Indian support for the Alliance dwindling considerably.

Indian students with better marks failing to get USP scholarships, many of those Indians who had traditionally supported the Alliance now voted for the NFP. Roderic Alley summed up the situation precisely: “For all its talk of multiracialism and tolerance, could the Alliance really be trusted to play fair? That was a question many Indians must have asked. With a vigilance bred from past insecurities, enough Indians must have responded negatively, viewing the NFP, its warts and all, as a lesser threat” (1977, p.287).

Until now the Indians had been divided between the NFP (75%) and the Indian Alliance (25%), a wing of the ruling Alliance Party. Unfortunately, the Indian Alliance now lost most of its support since the Indians overwhelmingly rallied behind the NFP in the hope that its leaders would ensure the security of their future in Fiji. This marked the beginning of ethnic politics, a fact that was pointed out by the Fijian Nationalist Party leader, Sakeasi Butadroka (Parliamentary Debates, 26 May, 1977, p.113).

Meanwhile the Fijian education problem seemed to continue in spite of the preferential system and there was no in-depth analysis of the causes of the problems or a systematic review of the policies being followed. One of the major problems was the very poor standard in most rural schools and very little was done to remedy this situation. The Education Commission had recommended the setting up of Government Junior Secondary Schools of high standard in carefully selected rural areas with boarding facilities but this did not eventuate as the voluntary system persisted.

In 1978, a Fijian academic and later Deputy Prime Minister in the People's Coalition Government, Tupeni Baba, gave a prophetic warning: "In my view, the so called Fijian education problem is a national problem and ... it is going to determine in a significant way how we are going to live together in this country as a multiethnic and multicultural society. Can we afford not to meet this challenge?" (Baba, 1978, p.5)

Fiji as a nation clearly could not afford to fail to meet this challenge posed by the Fijian educational problem but the Indian leaders did not realize this. The NFP leader, Koya, also agreed that it was a national problem but he did not do anything to help to resolve it. Instead of trying to help to solve this major national problem that the country faced, the NFP, its leader in particular, was playing politics with education. It led to the consolidation of ethnic politics in Fiji. From then onwards, ethnic conflict became a political time bomb waiting to be detonated.

To sum up, the NFP's education policies which put pressure on the Government to introduce free education led to the abandoning of other policies which were aimed at wiping out communalism and bringing about more integration. In particular, it resulted in the continuation of the voluntary system. The persistence of voluntarism in education stood in the way of the Government's plan to introduce cross-cultural language learning in order to create a distinct Fiji identity in the growing generation. The NFP policies in education also led to the consolidation of ethnic politics in Fiji as the Indian leaders, rather than explaining to their followers the need for preferential treatment for Fijian students for a period of time for the sake of equity, made it into an election issue. This led to the Indians abandoning the Alliance Party.

In the 1977 general elections, by making the USP quota system a major issue, the NFP succeeded in its quest for more electoral support, with Indian voters flocking to the party, seeing it as their only saviour. It, however, destroyed the possibility of the policy being implemented properly (that is, according to the recommendations of the 1969 Education Commission). This led to the policy degenerating into a permanent discrimination in favour of the Fijian students – the very thing the Commission had warned against. The combined result of all these lapses was that education failed to develop a distinct national identity and lay the foundation for the new multiracial nation that was to be created.

Chapter 4

Worker Solidarities Emerge

This chapter looks at the union movement which brought the Fijians and Indians together as class solidarity challenged ethnic alignments. Unfortunately, the ‘labour aristocracy’, which emerged in the urban areas, politicized the union movement in the mid-1980s and formed the Fiji Labour Party (FLP), against the wishes of several blue collar unions, and went into an opportunistic alliance with the almost exclusively Indian NFP when the only thing they had in common was their wish to get rid of the Fijian-dominated Alliance government. The chapter concludes by looking at how the FLP soon lost its multiracial image and with that its credibility. Moreover, it affected the carefully nurtured ethnic unity of the labour movement.

Workers Unite to Stop Exploitation

Worker solidarities had started emerging from the 1950s, to the rude shock of the European business establishment which had never anticipated such a development (Bain, 1989, p.13). The earliest resistance to European commercial exploitation perhaps came from Apolosi R. Nawai, a Fijian commoner from western Viti Levu (see chapter 1). His movement (during WWI) was seen as an attack on the chiefly system though what Apolosi was trying to do was to do away with the European middlemen in trying to sell bananas (Scarr, 1979).

Brij Lal has noted that the causes Apolosi championed, which involved fighting “the ethos and ideology of British colonialism ... earned him the wrath of the colonial establishment and the Fijian chiefs, and they eventually combined to defeat him and his vision for the future of the Fijian people” (Lal, 1992, p.48).

According to Lal, at the heart of Apolosi’s message was a desire to better the lives of the Fijian people. Apolosi, however, like other Fijian leaders after him, also

made racist utterances about Indians though “he was not alone in wanting to ‘rid Fiji of Indians’”(Lal, 1992, p.48). This, moreover, showed that Fijian leaders were already wary of the Indian presence. These were not the chiefly leaders alone but commoners, some of whom, like Apolosi came from the western provinces.

A few years later, in 1920 and again in 1921, Indian workers struck demanding higher wages (see Chapter 1). Until the 1930s, however, there were no formal trade unions except for an association of European civil servants (Anderson, 1977, p.4). In the 1930s the colonial government urged all colonies to introduce legislation giving legal rights to trade unions. The response from Fiji was slow because there was resistance from companies like CSR, so the colonial government did not act to regulate labour organizations until 1942 when a Department of Labour was set up and the trade union movement received formal recognition (Lawson, 1991, p.159).

The colonial government gave workers freedom to form unions, but it provided “no legal frame to allow compulsory recognition of unions” as the state “in collusion with capital undermined any real possibilities towards collective bargaining” (Plange, 1986, p.15). Such legal recognition of unions through legislation came only a few years after independence, in 1976.

It has been suggested that personal advancement in the political sphere was a strong motive for involvement by Fiji Indian leaders in union activities and because Fijian voters could not be a source of political support (owing to communal voting) they received little attention from Fiji Indian leaders (see for instance, Lawson, 1991, p.60). Perhaps there is some truth to it but there were exceptions. In 1959 B. D. Lakshman (an Indian) formed the Fiji Trade Union Congress and his associates in the new organization were James Anthony, Apisai Tora, and Michael Columbus (Hince, 1990, p.18). The four of them belonged to four different ethnic groups (James Anthony is part Indian, Apisai Tora is a Fijian

and Michael Columbus is part Fijian). A small group like that was not indicative of a general trend but at least it was a start.

The unions were ethnically based initially because of the pattern of employment “but overt racial exclusion clauses were not common until the late 1950s” (Anderson, 1977, p.9). After the 1959 riots in Suva by the Wholesale and Retail Workers General Union (WRWGU) members under Apisai Tora and James Anthony, when the Fijian chiefs intervened to calm the rioters, ethnically exclusive unions for Fijians were actively encouraged by the establishment.

The most significant aspect of the 1959 strike was the co-operation between Indian and Fijian workers against white employers (Bain, 1989, p.17). “The appearance of a coalition between Indian workers and Fijian workers combined as a more or less united proletariat against white domination and exploitation was very disturbing to the chiefs”, claims Bain. More than to the chiefs, I would say that it was disturbing to the European vested interests who enlisted the help of the Fijian chiefs.

“The Fijian workers were **weaned** quickly from their new found alliance and the status quo ante was quickly restored” (Bain, 1989, p.18; emphasis added). Bain’s patronizing language suggests that the Fijians are naïve and trusting and open to manipulation. The chiefs are credited with quelling the riots, but B. D. Lakshman, a leading trade unionist and Member of the Legislative Council, played a more important role. Hince noted that the official report, after praising Lakshman for his public action, “widened such praise to include Fijian chiefs” (Hince, 1990, p.20).

Bain claims that the chiefs did it to maintain the status quo. After the disturbances, the chiefs encouraged the formation of separate Fijian unions in all major industries so that Fijians would not be “corrupted” or “led astray” by “Indian agitators” (Bain, 1989, p.18).

The 1959 riots in Suva were seen by most as a 'racial' phenomenon with Fijian and Indian workers joining forces against the Europeans and attacking their properties. According to Heartfield, the report of the riot to the Fiji Legislative Council by Chief Justice A. G. Lowe "established beyond doubt that the riots contained an anti-European motive" (Heartfield, 2002, p.76).

Heartfield, however, questions the validity of this claim. Europeans suffered the most because of their greater wealth. So it was not anti-European but "anti-poverty". The protest and strike were not 'racial' at all as far as the leaders of the strike were concerned "but the means to advance a legitimate economic demand" (Heartfield, 2002, p.77). Heartfield suggests that it was the *Fiji Times* editor, Len Usher, who "first introduced a racial element into the reporting".

Rather than appreciating the role of the Fijian chiefs as peace makers in calming the mob²² and stopping the rioting, Bain is critical of the chiefs, claiming that they tried to divide the Fijian and Indian workers on 'racial' lines in order to maintain their status quo. I believe that it was the European vested interests who wanted to stop the Fijians and Indians coming together and challenging their status quo just as in the 1920s they tried to stop the Fijians and Indians getting together by using the Fijians against the Indians when the Indians went on strike and the Fijians initially were sympathetic and helpful to the Indians.

In 1858 the Fijian chiefs were just called upon to calm the rioters. The chiefs had been moderators and against any violent change. So Ratu Sukuna supported the banishment of Apolosi in 1917. The chiefs who addressed the unruly crowd at Albert Park in 1959 and put an end to the rioting included the highest chief, Ratu George Cakobau, and the other high chiefs, Ratu Edward Cakobau, Ratu Penaia Ganilau and Ratu Mara. "Ratu Edward expressed his shame that the Fijians had been led on by 'other people' who were using them for their own ends. The same

²² This was a role they successfully played again in 1968 as Norton has noted (1990, p.102).

theme was hammered home even more forcefully by Ratu Penaia Ganilau” (Bain, 1989, p. 16).

Elsewhere, however, Bain writes very appreciatively of Ratu Edward. “His warm charm, innate dignity and gentle courtesy were to win hearts around the world ... and above all in his capacity to transcend race in his wide-ranging friends and admirers. He was a significant and successful breaker of racial divides in Fiji itself – always considerate, never condescending, and the teller of stories ... he was rarely without a willing audience, and it was invariably inter-racial. Not for nothing had he been one of the founders of the Union Club in Suva where Fijians, Indians, Europeans and part-Europeans met and mixed in colonial days when it was the exception so to do” (Bain, 1989, p.30). So Bain seems to be inconsistent in his attitude to the chiefs. (He describes Ratu Edward as a ‘breaker of racial divides in Fiji’ in one place and in another mentions him as a chief who tried to stop the Indian and Fijian workers coming together against the vested interests.)

If the workers of the two ethnic groups coming together meant rioting and destruction, then perhaps the chiefs were astute in believing it was better to have separate unions for Fijians. The chiefs also believed that the Fijians were being used by others for their own ends. The chiefs were for a gradual change, rather than a sudden one, which would ensure Fijian rights and protect their culture.

However, it proved impossible for the establishment to stop the workers from joining hands in a common cause. Anderson noted that the splinter ethnically based unions that arose were not successful in the long run and most had a fairly short life span, one of the main reasons for this being the small size of most of these unions (1977, p.8). The only one to survive was the Fijian Teachers’ Association.

Trade Unions and the Political Parties

When party politics started in Fiji in the 1960s the two major parties represented the workers (NFP) and the capitalists (Alliance). The founder-leader of the NFP, A.D. Patel, was also a capitalist but he was against exploitation so he fought hard to stop the exploitation of the farmers by the European vested interests. Similarly, though Ratu Mara was a capitalist and led a political party supported by the capitalists of the country, he was also against exploitation. So when Patel succeeded in getting a better deal for the farmers through the Denning Award (see Chapter 5), Ratu Mara was supportive of taking measures to stop the exploitation by the Australian monopoly, the CSR.

Patel died before independence but the first elected Parliament in 1972 had trade union leaders on both sides, Sakeasi Waqanivavalagi, who represented the Mineworkers' Union on the government side and controversial union leader, Apisai Tora, who was with the opposition NFP. The Alliance Party, though it started as a party for the capitalists, was sympathetic towards the workers. Ratu Mara had said that his government wanted the workers to receive the maximum wage that the economy of the country could support (LC Debate, April 2, 1968, p.66). Similarly, the NFP leaders helped not only the sugarcane farmers but also other workers. Opposition Member of Parliament Ramrakha, a lawyer, used to be the president of the Fiji Teachers' Union for several years until after independence by when their salaries and conditions of work improved considerably. According to Deryck Scarr, the "Alliance government could fairly be credited with having assumed responsibility since the mid-1970s for expanding employment and incomes by putting financial and technical support into developing natural resources" (1988, p.27).

If the Alliance Party was becoming more pro-worker, the NFP was becoming less worker-oriented. Patel had identified the mineworkers as the next group to champion after the sugarcane farmers. But under Koya, the party no longer showed an interest in the mineworkers who were victims of exploitation. Slowly it

was beginning to concentrate only on issues of concern to the Indians and there were no Indian mineworkers. In 1977 when Jai Ram Reddy became its leader the change became complete as it became a party for the Indian capitalists.

Trade Unions in Independent Fiji

From the mid-1960s the union movement managed to develop without ethnic differences. This was remarkable in a country where such differences were significant. Anderson noted: “The success of the union movement in avoiding such a split would seem to be due to a conscious effort to exclude racial differences in organization and among office holders. It is common for the top positions in a union to be held by persons of both Indian and Fijian ‘race’. The fact that the union movement has avoided direct political involvement has also helped as political parties tend to divide on racial lines” (Anderson, 1977, pp.23-24).

After independence, civil servants gained substantial salary increases and improvements in working conditions²³. The workers of Fiji led by their unions enjoyed a remarkable degree of success in improving their wages/salaries and conditions of work by remaining politically neutral and ensuring multiracialism in the unions. The FPSA, with Mahendra Chaudhry as its General Secretary, “proved to be a remarkably successful union” and its success was attributed partly to the personality of Chaudhry who gave it a strong ‘bargaining image’ (Leckie, 1988, p.167). It also acquired a “reputation for submitting well researched papers” (Leckie, 1988, p.167). It was, however, accused of opportunism. This accusation of opportunism stemmed mainly from its ability to display “a range of attitudes and tactics” (Leckie, 1988, p.167).

²³ This led to the creation of a ‘labour aristocracy’ in the urban areas (More on this in Chapter 6).

The central organization of trade unions in Fiji officially adopted the name Fiji Trade Union Congress (FTUC) in 1967 (Hince, 1990, p.18)²⁴. James Raman was the secretary of the FTUC from 1972 to 1988 when he was replaced by Mahendra Chaudhry who had been the Assistant Secretary (Hince, 1996, pp.27-28). One scholar has suggested that the reason for the change was that the “old guard of the Congress were slow to oppose the military takeover” and that “the FTUC leaders showed a willingness to co-operate with rather than challenge the regime” (Slatter, 1988, p.23). So in January 1988, at its Biennial Conference, the leadership was changed. “This historic change in leadership after seventeen long years reflected the widespread and bitter disappointment within the movement with the prevaricating and compromising stance of the FTUC old guard” (Slatter, 1988, p.24).

Tripartism

An important step in the development of trade union solidarity in Fiji was the formation in 1951 of the Fiji Industrial Workers’ Congress (FIWC) which in 1967 changed its name to the Fiji Trade Union Congress (FTUC) and became affiliated to the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions (ICFTU). In 1973 a few unions broke away from the FTUC and organised another national body called the Fiji Council of Trade Unions (FCTU) (Fiji Ministry of Information, 1980, p.68).

The growing strength of organised labour and recognition of trade unions by the Government made it imperative for employers to form their own organisation so that they could also have a united voice. In 1960, an association of employers, called the Fiji Employers’ Consultative Association, was formed. The main aim of the Association was to protect the interest of its members and to provide consultative services to the members on industrial relation matters (Fiji Ministry of Information, 1980, pp.68-69).

²⁴ It, however, had nothing to do with the B. D. Lakshman-led grouping of unions under the same name established in 1959.

In 1964 the Trade Disputes Act was enacted. The main provision of the Act was the inclusion of settlement of disputes in certain situations by reference to compulsory arbitration. A problem which began to cause a lot of friction was the one of recognition of unions by their employers. Since it was Government policy to promote collective bargaining, Government realised that recognition was an essential pre-requisite to its effectiveness. The Recognition Act came into being in late 1976. The main criteria entitling union recognition for the purpose of collective bargaining was that the union must have as its members more than 50 per cent of the persons eligible for membership. The Permanent Secretary for Labour is empowered under the Act to issue a compulsory recognition order after having satisfied himself that the union has the requisite membership of more than 50 per cent of the eligible persons (Fiji Ministry of Information, 1980, p.69).

The Tripartite Forum was formed in December 1976 to achieve a balanced approach in matters of national interest. The Forum was made up of representatives from the Fiji Trade Union Congress, Fiji Employers' Consultative Association and Government. The Forum sought to reach a common understanding when dealing with issues which affect the national interest such as industrial relations, job creation, greater flow of investment and general economic and social development of the country. The Tripartite Forum had no statutory authority. The three parties involved had voluntarily come together and had agreed to abide by the Forum's decisions voluntarily.

From the mid-1970s the Tripartite Forum played a key role in worker-employer interaction. One scholar had this to say about tripartism: "I regard tripartism ... as the philosophic cornerstone of sound, progressive and equitable industrial relationships" (Hince, 1996, p.4). Another scholar, however, believed that while this "corporatist approach to labour management attempted to institutionalize union leaders toward 'responsible' unionism and create industrial peace" it also "effectively undermined the more militant Fiji Council of Trade Unions (FCTU)"

by incorporating the FTUC (Naidu, 1987, p.215). The fact remains that the FTUC was the original organisation while the FCTU was a breakaway one which was fairly new at the time the Tripartite Forum was established.

The Prime Minister chaired the Forum. The sub-committees which operated indicated the overall breadth of the tripartite consultations. It was further noted about the working of tripartism in Fiji: “Whilst the processes of the Forum were consultative, government inevitably sought to honour agreements” (Hince, 1996, p.52). Until 1984 the Tripartite Forum had a stabilising effect on the country’s economy and the industrial relations scene because of its voluntary commitment to work out a balanced solution that was satisfactory to the parties concerned, and to Fiji as a whole.

The Achievements of the Union Movement

The period between 1970 and 1984 was one of positive achievements for the union movement, though it is said that an attempt was made to control union action through the Trade Dispute Act of 1973 which “weakened trade unionism in Fiji” (Naidu, 1987, p.215; also see Plange, 1986, p.20 and Leckie, 1988, p.139). It, however, strengthened the position of labour bureaucrats “as spontaneity of action from the rank and file was all but legislated out of existence” (Naidu, 1987, p.215).

By 1975, the strength of the Fiji Public Service Association, arising from its increased membership and financial security, enabled it to appoint a full time General Secretary, Mahendra Chaudhry (Leckie, 1988, p.150). By the late 1970s both the government and the public were aware of “the emerging power of the FPSA as a union” (Leckie, 1988, p.149).

One major problem the FPSA encountered was “the totally uncooperative attitude” of the Public Service Commission for which it (the FPSA) placed much of the blame on individuals, especially the expatriate Director of Industrial Relations of the PSC, Bill Greenaway (Leckie, 1988, p.163). The Ministry of

Labour tried to conciliate before Chaudhry decided to “bring this serious matter to the attention of the Prime Minister” (Leckie, 1988, p.162). Not only was the FPSA critical of Greenaway’s handling of industrial relations; even members of a committee appointed by the Public Service Commission to examine gradings in the department of Civil Aviation “found the PSC’s attitude unhelpful and difficult to understand”. They further noted the “hostile and uncooperative manner” of the PSC representative, Greenaway (Leckie, 1988, p.164).

Greenaway was also accused of using methods which were divisive and of attempts to “divide and rule” by approaching staff associations separately; and of seeking to “create new confrontation” by attempting to tie salary increases to those of housing rentals for civil servants (Leckie, 1988, p.165). Chaudhry was also critical of the Chairman of the PSC, J.W. Sykes, who turned meetings into “mud slinging matches between the two sides” (Leckie, 1988, p.165).

A significant achievement of the union movement was in the aviation industry. At Nadi Airport, Qantas maintained aircraft and facilities. After several industrial actions by the airport workers, who had problems with Qantas, Air Terminal Services (ATS) was established in 1981 to take over from Qantas with worker participation. The Prime Minister applauded the establishment of ATS. The initial plan was for a state-owned enterprise under the Air Pacific Company. “With intensive negotiations and unfailing efforts by the union’s leader, government finally agreed to remain only a majority shareholder with the union members owning the rest” (Plange, 1986, pp. 21-22).

ATS is a joint venture operation between the Civil Aviation Authority of Fiji which holds 51 per cent of the shares and the workers who hold 49 per cent. The company was formed to take over the catering and ground handling services at Nadi International Airport when QANTAS decided to withdraw from providing these services (Hince, 1996, p.33).

Vatukoula Goldmine

What marred the achievements of the union movement in the period after independence was the demise of unionism in the goldmining industry at Vatukoula. Vatukoula was a specific example of the failure of unionism outside the main urban areas. This was the most noticeable failure in the union movement in the post independence period.

The initial problem of the mineworkers union was in finding a sincere and dedicated leader. Sakeasi Waqanivavalagi seemed to have been the first responsible leader they had but since he was not a mineworker he did not have first hand knowledge of their problems. Waqanivavalagi, who became an Alliance parliamentarian in 1972, however, was not the usual trade union leader. Before his appointment the mineworkers' union appeared to be in disarray with yet another of its secretaries charged with embezzlement. At the invitation of the mineworkers' union executive, the colonial administration intervened, suggesting Waqanivavalagi as successor to the secretary.

Waqanivavalagi who became the mineworkers' union secretary in 1962 was an outsider, who was "unfamiliar with the harsh demands of [the mineworkers'] trade". He had been taught "the principles of 'responsible' trade unionism at Oxford and Harvard" (Emberson-Bain, 1994, 185). Apisai Tora, the other union man who was in Parliament representing the NFP opposition, was a contrast to Waqanivavalagi.

Labour department gave fellowships for selected union members to undertake courses in labour economics and labour studies abroad. Waqanivavalagi had undertaken study abroad under such a fellowship. When he became the Mineworkers Union secretary, he encouraged the Joint Consultative Council which was accepted as a forum for Emperor Gold Mines and the Fiji Mineworkers Union. It is claimed that Waqanivavalagi "turned labour management relations at

the goldmines into a model, even if temporarily, for the country” (Plange, 1986, p.19). Ironically, the living standards for workers at the mine remained far below what was acceptable, as Emberson-Bain noted three decades later. More importantly, the mineworkers did not share the view that relations between labour and management at the goldmine was a model for the country, as is evident from their desire to get rid of Waqanivavalagi.

When R.D. Patel called for nationalization of the gold mine in 1967 Waqanivavalagi failed to support his call. Patel even criticized the perks and the luxurious lifestyle enjoyed by the expatriate officers at the mine (Legislative Council Debates, 1 September, 1967, p.593). This should have been the signal for Waqanivavalagi to expose the shocking living conditions of the mineworkers. Patel might not have been quite aware of the poor living conditions of the mineworkers. Most of them were Fijians and the Indian leaders at that time had very limited contact with Fijians. The opportunity was not taken by Waqanivavalagi to highlight the contrast in the facilities given to the indigenous mineworkers and their families and their expatriate bosses.

Waqanivavalagi, as an Alliance Member of the Legislative Council was in a good position to highlight this sorry state of affairs at the gold mine and persuade the government, which was a partly elected government, to take remedial action. The opposition also would have been supportive of any such move as at that time it supported government policies which were in the interest of the nation. Waqanivavalagi was short-sighted in thinking that the grants from the government given to the company would solve the problem of the mineworkers whom he represented by expanding employment opportunities.

He did not try to improve the living conditions of the workers and his only interest seemed to have been getting more money from the government. It was when there was a request for more aid to the gold industry in 1967 that R.D. Patel first advocated nationalization of the goldmine (Legislative Council Debates, 1

September, 1967, p.595). NFP opposed further aid but no one spoke in support of R. D. Patel's call for nationalization (LC Debates, 1 September, 1967, pp.592-611) at that time. Neither the government side which had a union official from Vatukoula, Sakiasi Waqanivavalagi, nor the opposition to which R. D. Patel belonged spoke in favour of such a move though a year later the NFP advocated such a policy. According to one scholar, "nationalisation of the gold-mining industry" was in the NFP's manifesto for the August 1968 by-elections (Lal, 1992, p.203).

A few months after the by elections the NFP, through R. D. Patel, introduced a motion in the Legislative Council calling for the nationalization of the goldmine (Legislative Council Debates, 30 January, 1969, pp.151 - 163). A European member on the government side, in opposing nationalization, claimed that it was against the very notion of a 'free' society and it would spell doom for further overseas investment (Embersson-Bain, 1994, p.177). Embersson-Bain has claimed that nationalisation of the goldmine "had crystallized into a central issue" in the party's "electoral platform" (Embersson-Bain, 1994, ?). But A.D. Patel died in October 1969 before the next general elections which was in 1972 and Vatukoula did not feature in it at all. Siddiq Koya, who had become the NFP leader after Patel's death, himself admitted that the only thing the party advocated in the 1972 general elections was free education (see Chapter 3).

In introducing the motion calling for the nationalization of the Vatukoula goldmine, R.D. Patel said he was doing it "in the interest of national economy" and "in the best interests of our country" (Legislative Council Debates, 30 January, 1969, p.152). He further said nationalization of the goldmine was not "for the benefit of any particular race, any particular party, any particular group of people but for the whole state of Fiji" (Legislative Council Debates, 30 January, 1969, p.153).

A. D. Patel might have wanted to make the goldmine a major policy platform. It would have been logical to do so, for by then the NFP under Patel was about to achieve the two major issues it had been fighting for – the end of colonialism and exploitation, mainly by the CSR Company. So Vatukoula would have given him a new issue to fight for and it would have also brought the party the Fijian support that Patel had been seeking, to make it a multiracial party not only in name but in reality. But he did not live to see it happen and the new leader of the party, Siddiq Koya, did not seem to have been interested in the mineworkers' welfare. Perhaps this was the earliest indication that the NFP under its new leader was fast changing from what it originally was to an ethnic opposition.

Dissatisfaction at Waqanivavalagi's leadership as the secretary of the mineworkers' union culminated in the nomination of Apisai Tora, a member of the NFP, for the position. Tora, however, did not become the secretary of the union as his nomination was invalidated in 1967 because the Trade Union Ordinance prohibited any person from holding office in more than one union (Emberson-Bain, 1994, p.186). Navitalai Raqona, a young underground miner, was later elected as the secretary.

In 1978, for the first time, the mineworkers pressed the case for nationalization. "And for a while, the possibility of a government purchase of the mine was seriously entertained" (Emberson-Bain, 1994, p.205). In January 1978, the Prime Minister visited Vatukoula and "announced the Government's decision to enter into negotiations with Emperor with a view of acquiring Emperor's operations in Fiji" (Parliamentary Debates, 24 February, 1978, p.95).

The Prime Minister asked Attorney General, Vijay Singh, to begin work on behalf of the government. Vijay Singh asked the Minister for Labour, the Minister of State for Lands and Mineral Resources and the Minister of State for Forests to join him in discussions with Emperor. Help was also provided by Commonwealth Technical Fund while other experts provided reports. Vijay Singh told Parliament

that the last report was expected from Canadian experts after which a decision was to be made. So there was a “delay as compared to the hopes that had been expressed by the Prime Minister in early January when he visited Vatukoula”, Singh said (Parliamentary Debates, 24 February, 1978, p.96). Ratu Mara later noted that “negotiations ultimately broke down on price, when the gap between the sides was too great to be bridged” (Mara, 1997, p.140).

In 1972 the sugar industry was nationalised, putting an end to the exploitation by the Australian CSR company. The sugar cane farmers were fortunate to have had dedicated leaders like Swami Rudrananda and A.D. Patel to highlight their plight and fight for their redress. Unfortunately the mineworkers did not have such leaders to fight on their behalf.

“Losing the battle for nationalization was another mark of the union’s failure”, one scholar noted (Emberson-Bain, 1994, p. 205). It is also not clear if this failure had anything to do with the opposition in the Alliance party (by mainly its European members) to nationalization. In 1970 when the decision was made to nationalize the sugar industry Ratu Mara had the Fijians solidly behind him in everything he did and the Indian community wanted the CSR to leave so he was not worried about the reaction of the European community to his actions.

By the mid-1970s he no longer enjoyed this solid support of the nation so he had to be more sensitive to criticism from all quarters. Besides he no longer had the support even of the NFP to nationalising the gold industry though initially it was the NFP, as a ‘thoughtful’ opposition which had suggested such a move in the late 1960s for the good of the country.

Another reason for the government’s reluctance to nationalize the goldmine could have been the negative publicity that its union officials generated. Navitalai Raqona, who succeeded Waqanivavalagi as the Mineworkers Union secretary, was a contrast to the latter not only because the former was a mineworker and had

first hand knowledge of the problems. He was also very militant as a trade unionist, but by his flippancy, he mainly succeeded in making the union a laughing stock and soon people stopped taking him seriously. Hince noted: “In 1977 the excuse of a specific strike of mineworkers was utilized by the company to refuse to re-employ active unionists” (Hince, 1990, p.5).

The union failed to convince the government to take over the mine and the opposition NFP which had earlier suggested the takeover also showed no interest in the mineworkers. Later it is claimed that “Government colluded with the employer to remove Navitalai Raqona, secretary of the union during the period of militancy, from office and ultimately deregister the union” (Hince, 1996, p. 5).

Almost a decade after nationalising the sugar industry, in 1981 ATS was established to take over ground handling at Nadi Airport from Qantas. If the creation of FSC only resulted in getting expatriate exploiters replaced by local ones as has been suggested (see Chapter 5), ATS was a “multidimensional” success story (Hince, 1996, p.33) which was made possible by its union leaders refusing to politicize the union and concentrating on important issues that affected the workers. Rather than following the example of ATS, the advisers of the workers at Vatukoula in the 1980s decided to make it part of party politics of the FLP. They also failed to learn from the example of A.D. Patel, who in 1969, agreed to Ratu Mara’s suggestion of making sugar a bi-partisan (non-political) issue and succeeded in his efforts to get a better deal for the cane farmers (see Chapter 5). The supporters of the mineworkers, perhaps would have had better success if they had merely highlighted the problems rather than trying to turn them into party politics.

To sum up, in colonial Fiji though there was formal recognition given to trade unionism by giving workers the freedom to form unions, there was no legal framework for the compulsory recognition of unions. This came only after independence as both the major political parties were sympathetic towards the

workers. What the leaders of the two major parties abhorred most was the exploitation of the workers especially by the European vested interests. The NFP which started as a party of the 'have-nots', however, started changing later as it started concentrating on mainly issues that affected the Indians. Later it became a party of the Indian capitalists.

Meanwhile the Alliance Party which started as a party of the capitalists in the country became more pro-worker. This change in the Alliance Party (during its 17-year rule of the country) contributed towards improvements in the lives of the workers in the 1970s which led to the formation of a 'labour aristocracy' in the urban areas. The 'labour aristocracy' politicised the union movement in the 1980s. Moreover, with the NFP no longer championing issues that affected the workers and having any concrete policies which were different from that of the Alliance, the need for a strong opposition to protect the rights of the workers and to make the Westminster system work effectively became imperative. The expectation seemed to have been that the labour party that would emerge would become an effective opposition, as the NFP had been initially, before it was ready to rule the country. Robertson and Tamanisau have noted that in the 1980s the Alliance and NFP "policies varied little in substance" (1988, p.22). This, in effect, created the opportunity for the rise of the Fiji Labour Party in 1985.

Unfortunately the Fiji Labour Party did not become the opposition, 'thoughtful' or otherwise, while it became reduced to a predominantly ethnic Indian party by forming a coalition with the almost exclusively Indian NFP (see Chapter 6). This resulted in many of the ethnic Fijians who had supported the formation of the FLP withdrawing their support for the new party. So the major gains that the union movement had made (positive developments in the union movement) in the 1970s (such as developing without racial barriers and improving the working and living conditions of the majority of the people in the country) were all lost in 1987 following the military coup that overthrew the democratically elected labour party

led coalition government which many perceived as Indian dominated rather than multiracial.

CHAPTER 5

SUGAR POLITICS

Sugar was the backbone of the Fiji economy throughout the twentieth century. This chapter outlines how sugar became an important political issue after independence with Indo-Fijian politicians trying to manipulate the sugarcane farmers for their own political ends. This turned the NFP, which was multiracial in its policies, to an ethnic Indian party.

The Colonial Sugar Refining Company (CSR) which operated the sugar mills in the colony had a virtual monopoly over the industry and prospered from the hard work of the farmers (almost all of them Indians). The indenture system had come to an end in 1920 but the farmers continued to suffer under the CSR. At the least sign of any policy aimed at improving the lot of the farmers the CSR would threaten to withdraw its operations and the colonial government would make concessions and beg the company to stay on with the result that the sufferings of the farmers continued.

The situation changed drastically when Fiji became self governing in 1966. In 1969 the Chief Minister Ratu Mara and the Leader of the Opposition A.D. Patel decided to make sugar a bipartisan issue. This was mainly because Ratu Mara wanted sugar to be non-political and not “made a political football” (Legislative Council Debates, 23 April, 1969, p. 543). Later the same year during an arbitration, the arbitrator, Lord Denning, ruled that the farmers should get 65 per cent of the profits and the company 35 per cent. CSR as expected said it could not operate under such terms. Ratu Mara was supportive of the idea of “acquiring the industry for the nation” (Mara, 1997, p.161) and the Fiji Sugar Corporation (FSC) was established in 1972 to take over the operations from the CSR.

A.D. Patel, the founder-leader of the National Federation Party, was a lawyer and had been fighting the farmers’ cause for several years. His greatest achievement

was getting a fair deal for the farmers through the Denning Award in 1969. Unfortunately he did not live to see the result of his long struggle. He died in October 1969 just before Denning made his historic award which gave the farmers a fair price for their sugarcane.

Siddiq Koya who succeeded Patel as the leader of the NFP as well as the Leader of the Opposition was also a lawyer. But from the beginning he showed a lack of commitment and dedication to his position, giving priority to his law practice. This was evident from his frequent absences from Parliament even during important sittings. He also made sugar into a 'political football' soon after the country became independent, ignoring Ratu Mara's timely warning against such a move.

When Koya became the Opposition Leader in 1969, he initially co-operated with Ratu Mara and both parties made concessions which saw a rapid transition to independence. When the NFP agreed not to press for the immediate introduction of a common electoral roll, the Alliance agreed to immediate independence. The NFP also agreed to special provisions to safeguard indigenous Fijians rights, especially their land rights. They also gave recognition to the importance of the Great Council of Chiefs to ethnic Fijians by giving it the right to appoint senators with veto powers when it came to matters affecting Fijian traditions and culture. Everyone seemed to have been taken aback by the change in Koya who until then had been most aggressive but now "assumed a conciliatory stance" (Norton, 2004, p.176).

It was further noted that the "close rapport Koya developed with Mara, despite previous mutual aloofness, was the foundation of an extraordinary smooth and rapid transition to Independence" (Norton, 2004, p.177). Even Governor Foster, who had earlier described Koya as "full of intrigue and calculation ...a wheeler-dealer if ever there was one" seemed to have been impressed, noting that he (Koya) "never shared Patel's main fault as politician; a complete inability to

compromise” (quoted in Norton, 2004, p.177).

A note of warning was, however, sounded by the Australian High Commissioner who stressed that “the tensions of 1968 are but a short memory away and our private conversations with Fijians reveal a persistent undercurrent of suspicion as to the motives of the Indians” (quoted in Norton, 2004, p.179). One scholar, Robert Norton, thought that perhaps Koya’s fervent commitment to independence was “encouraged partly by the prospect of post-Independence power-sharing” (Norton, 2004, p.179).

At the time of independence, everyone found this sudden change in Koya difficult to understand. Norton’s conclusion that perhaps it was because Koya had hopes of sharing power after independence was true to some extent but he did not seem to have wanted to be in government. He had been in politics long enough to understand that Fijians would not accept an Indian-dominated government and rather than becoming a minister in a coalition government, which would have necessitated his giving up his law practice, he seemed to have wanted to continue as the Leader of the Opposition by winning more support from the Indian voters. So he tried to appeal only to the Indians, unlike Patel who had a national outlook and looked at what was good for the country as a whole. Besides Patel wanted to integrate all the different ethnic groups which Koya did not seem to have been interested in. That is where sugar politics came in.

It is true that sugar cane farmers’ cause formed a central issue for Patel also but the difference was that he was trying to stop the exploitation of farmers by the CSR and help them in their struggle for a fair deal. The farmers got a fair deal through the Denning Award leading to the withdrawal of the CSR. So the major problem facing the farmers after independence was security of tenure and for this it was necessary to proceed carefully so that the Fijian landlords would feel no threat to their ownership by leasing their land. By politicizing sugar Koya contributed to conflicts.

In his early years as Leader of the Opposition, Koya supported Ratu Mara's efforts to improve the social and economic welfare of the people of the country. But Koya was not consistent as Patel was and he also lacked the foresight of Patel which led to problems. At the time of independence Koya seemed to have been leading a 'thoughtful' Opposition as Patel had done. Soon it became clear that his lack of consistency was affecting the performance of the Opposition. This first came to the surface in 1972 during the first general elections after independence in 1970.

Patel had assured that ownership of any land would not be questioned and Koya had also repeated Patel's assurance. Ratu Mara later said that it was this assurance that made the Fijian leaders agree to independence. But in 1972, during the first general elections after independence, Koya made the freehold land owned by CSR, an election issue. The government had decided to turn this land into crown land when the company withdrew its operations. Koya told farmers at election meetings that the NFP would arrange to sell that land to sitting tenants.

After the elections Ratu Joshua Tonganivalu, the Minister for Lands, pointed out how dangerous the line the Opposition was taking was as it would lead to demands by many original landowners who had sold their land to European settlers before cession for next to nothing. They would start claiming back their lands, Ratu Joshua warned (Parliamentary Debates, 12 November, 1972, p.1438). The suggestion of the sale of CSR land to sitting tenants rather than it becoming Crown land as the government had decided was an early example of the Opposition becoming less "thoughtful", because they failed to realize the repercussions this policy would have, if implemented. It was like stirring up a hornet's nest, as Ratu Joshua had warned.

The farmers had been divided from the beginning because of the divisions in the Indian community itself. By the 1960s, however, most of them had started

supporting A.D. Patel because of his brilliance as a lawyer and years of selfless service to the farmers with Swami Rudrananda (a Hindu monk, popularly known as Swamiji),²⁵ who had been working for the betterment of the farmers from the 1940s. (Swamiji had come to Fiji from India in 1938 to help with the activities of the TISI Sangam, the South Indian cultural organization.) After the Denning Award, though Patel died, Swamiji continued to serve the sugarcane growers.

Koya had started showing his lack of consistency from 1972 onwards. But it was when the sugar industry was being reorganized in the mid-1970s after the withdrawal of the CSR that things came to a head. After the takeover of the sugar industry from the CSR when new arrangements were being made in the industry a Sugarcane Growers' Council was set up. Koya wanted to be a paid official in this Council. Koya's plans to become a paid official in the restructured Sugarcane Growers' Council were mainly to strengthen his control over the sugarcane farmers whom he valued as voters. Later Koya was more interested in reorganizing the sugar industry than in his duties as the Leader of the Opposition. This reorganization was, however, seen as a big financial burden on the farmers (Robertson and Tamanisau, 1988, p. 22).

Koya started organizing meetings with the farmers and confusing them because he disagreed with the advice Swami Rudrananda was giving them. In doing that he was politicizing sugar and it led to a split in the NFP. Koya was not only not acting in the interests of the nation but he was also not acting in the best interests of the Indian community the majority of whom were sugarcane farmers who supported the NFP. Later he attacked the \$2.50 deduction from every tonne of cane for the price stabilization fund.

After independence Ratu Mara was able to negotiate a much higher price for Fiji sugar than the world market price through the European Union (see Mara, 1997, pp.164-166). He had agreed to the deduction from the price of every tonne of cane

²⁵ Swami is a title given to a Hindu monk. 'ji' is an Indian suffix showing respect.

for the price stabilization fund as an insurance against a fall in the world market price for sugar. Koya, who had gone with Ratu Mara on his overseas tour, had initially agreed to the deduction but changed his mind on his return to Fiji (Mara, 1997, p.138).

The sugarcane growers were wary of the deduction because many of them had lost money from a similar deduction when their leases expired (Ramrakha, 2005, personal communication). But that was in the colonial days under the CSR. Rather than explaining the changed situation to the reluctant farmers Koya played on their fears. Swamiji, who was the Senior Representative of the Sugarcane Growers, had supported the deduction but Koya started attacking it.

Swamiji had organized meetings to educate the farmers of the new developments in the sugar industry while Koya organized rival meetings. Swamiji had given free service to the farmers for years and with his right hand man, A.D. Patel, he had achieved a lot for the benefit of the farmers. Swamiji and Ian Thompson, the Independent Chairman of the Sugar Industry, had brought unity among the farmers after independence. A leading member of the NFP, R.D. Patel, accused Koya of breaking that unity (Parliamentary Debates, 2 October, 1975, p.1042).

With A.D. Patel no more, Swami Rudrananda, faced a dilemma. The only person he could now rely on to give him sound legal advice was A.D. Patel's brother, R.D. Patel, who was then the Speaker of the House of Representatives. So Swamiji requested R.D. Patel to attend a farmers' meeting with him and Patel obliged. Patel also issued a pamphlet in Hindi which was an appeal to the farmers. Patel explained to the House of Representatives later that he did this because he could see that the "beneficial situation we have created for the farmers, the Sugar Industry and Fiji, after years of struggle and perseverance, will be destroyed at the hands of some people" (Parliamentary Debates, 2 October, 1975, p.1042).

Soon there was a split in the NFP, the first signal of which was the resignation of

R.D. Patel from the party in 1975. By taking an active part at the farmers' meeting R. D. Patel knew he had compromised his position as the Speaker. So Patel decided to resign from not only his position as the Speaker, but also his seat in Parliament to which he had been elected on an NFP ticket. He decided to resign from the NFP since he no longer agreed with the policies advocated by its leader, Koya. As he made his speech from the Chair, two NFP members, Chirag Ali Shah and Vijay Parmanandam, kept interjecting, giving a clear indication that there was a split in the NFP, with some staunchly supporting Koya, while Patel (and perhaps some others) opposed what Koya was doing in the sugar industry. A few days later when Sakeasi Butadroka introduced his notorious motion in Parliament calling for the repatriation of Indians from Fiji the transition of the Koya-led opposition from a 'thoughtful' to a 'confrontational' opposition was complete (more on this in Chapter 6).

The division in the NFP became clearer and wider a year later during the debate on Agricultural Landlord and Tenant Ordinance (ALTO) which granted 30 year leases to farmers. Koya rejected it as not being long enough, while the group opposed to Koya decided to vote with the government, to enable it to be passed,²⁶ considering it an improvement on the existing 10 year leases. Laisenia Qarase who tried to promote 50 year leases under the Native Land Trust Act (NLTA), has commented that the 1976 Act was a political compromise between the ruling Alliance and the Opposition NFP with the intention of buying "a generation of time" (fijilive, 2 December, 2005). While Koya continued with his confrontational approach, those opposed to him believed in co-operating with the Fijian leaders and coming to a compromise for the benefit of the people (especially the sugarcane farmers) and the country.

The division within the NFP, although it became open in 1976 when, in Parliament, several members of the Opposition voted with the government to pass ALTO, was patched up by the time the general elections were held a few months

²⁶ ALTO needed a two-thirds majority to be passed.

later, in April 1977. The NFP was able, not only to patch up the differences, but was also to attract most Indian votes by attacking the USP quota system for Fijian students, leading to the Indian voters becoming a unified voting block under the NFP banner (see Chapter 3).

The first general elections of 1977 provided ample proof of the Koya-led NFP's lack of foresight. There were claims that the NFP and the Fijian Nationalist Party (FNP) "were actually colluding in various strategies of mutual support" against the Alliance Party (Alley, 1977, p.288). The *Fiji Times* noted in an editorial on 4 April, 1977 that an "unusual feature of the election was the curious political marriage" between the FNP and NFP in some constituencies, while Ratu Mara claimed that, in spite of Butadroka's denial, they (the NFP and FNP) had been travelling around and working together (*Fiji Times*, 5 April, 1977, p.3).

This was surprising as the elections took place less than two years after the FNP brought its motion calling for the repatriation of Indians from Fiji. As the *Fiji Times* noted: "It is hard to understand how a predominantly Indian political party such as the NFP can equivocate its principles or ideology by wheeling and dealing with a party which has made no secret of its attitude towards Indian citizens of this country" (4 April, 1977). In supporting the Fijian Nationalists against the Alliance Party the NFP showed lack of foresight as they seemed to support anyone against Ratu Mara whatever their policies.

With the split in the Fijian votes caused by the FNP led by Sakeasi Butadroka, and increased support from the Indian voters because of the USP quota system, the NFP emerged as the narrow winner in the elections, though they did not have an absolute majority. The Fijian Nationalists were happy with this result "because it was their purpose in participating in the elections to demonstrate that Fijian paramountcy was an Alliance-created illusion, that the Indians were likely, sooner or later, to take political control of the country (thereby endangering Fijian rights)" (Premdas, 1993, p.20).

But because of the continuing divisions within the NFP, Koya was not able to claim immediate victory²⁷ and be sworn in as the Prime Minister, with the result that the Governor General appointed a minority government led by Ratu Mara for a few months until the government fell by failing to win a vote of confidence.

When the Governor General appointed a minority government led by Ratu Mara Koya accused Ratu Mara and the Alliance Party of not wanting an Indian Prime Minister in Fiji (V.Lal, 1990, p.58). Koya further said that their decision was an “insult to the Indian community and its self-respect” but Ramrakha, who used to be the Opposition Whip, dissociated himself from these allegations saying that they were extreme and lacked wisdom. This showed that some members of the opposition remained ‘thoughtful’ unlike Koya who had turned ‘confrontational’. Moreover, he had reduced the NFP to an ethnic party.

If Butadroka was guilty of stirring up Fijian nationalism, Koya was equally guilty of whipping up Indian communalism which affected Ratu Mara’s efforts of building a harmonious multiracial nation.

After the fall of the minority government in 1977 a second general election was held later in the year but by then the NFP could no longer hide its internal problems and split into two factions, the Flower and the Dove, named after the symbols they chose for the elections. The Dove faction led by Koya won very few seats and the Flower faction became the official opposition. Mrs Jai Narayan who had been providing leadership to the Flower faction as the President of the NFP made Jai Ram Reddy the Leader of the Opposition. Reddy had stood against Koya in the election and defeated him, though he was a new comer in Parliament. K. C. Ramrakha, the Secretary of the NFP, who was the other leading member of the Flower faction, had suggested making Ratu Julian Toganivalu the Leader of the

²⁷ The NFP were also hesitant to assume power (which would have led to a loss of ethnic balance) asking Ratu Mara to lead a coalition government instead which he refused (see V. Lal, 1990, p.58).

Opposition and when his advice was not taken Ramrakha distanced himself from the party. Though he served his full term in Parliament before migrating to Australia in 1982, Ramrakha kept aloof from the party of which he had been a leading member for several years. This showed that Ramrakha considered the development as a major setback for the party. Here was an opportunity to shed its image as an Indian party and attract more Fijian support but the NFP did not seize the opportunity.

The FNP managed to win one seat in the first general elections in 1977, that of its leader, Sakeasi Butadroka, who stood for the Fijian communal seat in his home province of Rewa. The party had a lot of grassroots Fijian support, as was evident from its performance in the general elections, securing one Fijian communal seat and winning a large proportion of Fijian votes in other constituencies. Most Fijians seemed to agree with its policies of maintaining Fijian hegemony and curtailing the Indian advance in most spheres of life. But in the second general elections a few months later, most Fijian voters withdrew their electoral support for the party for fear that NFP might win again by default. With the NFP in disarray and the Fijians giving their electoral support once again to the Alliance, the Alliance was able to win comfortably in the second general elections in 1977. This did not, however, mean that the Fijians no longer supported the policies of the FNP which remained dormant but intact (see Lasaqa, 1984, p.188).

If the FNP was an ethnic party, the NFP had also started slowly becoming another ethnic party. The difference between the two major parties during Patel's time had been policy-based. The NFP had followed policies to improve the lot of the people who were being exploited, without racial distinction. They were also against colonialism. It was perhaps this ideology that attracted Fijians like Ratu Julian Toganivalu to the party. The Alliance Party represented the European businesses, the Fijian chiefs and upwardly mobile Indians and it believed in a slow change while preserving the unique features of each of the ethnic groups with communal representation. Ramrakha, a leading member of the NFP, claimed

in the Legislative Council in 1969 that the NFP represented the have-nots of the country while the Alliance represented the "have-goods" (LC Debates, 12 May, 1969, p.1075).

It was true that the NFP under Patel sometimes appealed to the ethnic loyalties of the Indians²⁸ such as their condemnation of those Indians who sided with the Alliance Party, describing them as 'traitors'. Their attack, however, was based on ideological differences rather than on ethnicity alone. What the NFP leadership found unacceptable was that Indians like Vijay Singh and K. S. Reddy were siding with a party that was supported by the colonials, while the majority of Indians were suffering under colonial rule. What Patel failed to understand was that the Indian Alliance was trying to co-operate with Fijian leaders, who were the paramount chiefs, rather than with the colonial government. Patel mistakenly thought the Fijian commoners did not want the chiefs to continue as leaders. Even if he was incredibly naïve in doing so, Patel must be given credit for thinking in terms of the nation and what he saw as the national good rather than just the Indians and what would benefit the Indians alone.

The NFP under Patel was an effective Opposition, acting as the watchdog, keeping the government under constant scrutiny. The NFP continued to be a strong and effective Opposition for a few years after Patel's death. At the last session of Parliament in 1969, Ratu Mara remarked: "Criticism from the other side has been marked for its constructiveness" (Legislative Council Debates, December, 1969, pp.2083-2084). Again in 1970 the Prime Minister talked of the "spirit of co-operation in this House" and suggested that it might "underline the role of leadership" (Parliamentary Debates, 14 December, 1970, p.533).

²⁸ Patel also made racist remarks about the Chinese in 1968 before he led the walk-out of the NFP from the Legislative Council protesting against communal rolls (see Firth and Tarte (eds), 2001, p.97. *Twentieth Century Fiji*. University of the South Pacific).

It is true that when Koya became the Leader of the Opposition he failed to provide effective leadership and was often away from the Parliament. However, the other NFP parliamentarians like R.D. Patel, Ramrakha and Mrs. Narayan continued to use Parliament to make the government change its policies when they were found to be blatantly discriminatory. An example was the remission of fees for indigent children when the government decided to provide fee remission only for Fijian students (see Chapter 3).

Koya was only interested in his personal power rather than serving the people, which was clearly shown in 1973 when Ratu Mara offered a government of national unity. Koya's main concern then was what would happen to his position as the Leader of the Opposition (Milne, 1975, p.418). Koya did not want to lose his position as the Leader of the Opposition. He did not want to be a cabinet minister as that would have necessitated his giving up his law practice. Later Koya again refused to co-operate with the government on land policies which led to the split in the NFP.

While Ratu Mara was working to change the plural society into an integrated nation, Koya was trying to strengthen ethnic cleavages, particularly through his policies in education, land and politics. The pity was that hardly anyone noticed what was happening, so initially no one in the opposition seemed to have objected to the policies that he put forward, pointing out that for achieving integration the priority should be policies like nationalization of the goldmine (which Patel had in mind) and not free education. No one seemed to have understood how the policies he was advocating would adversely affect multiracialism and lead to ethnic polarization.

So when there was a split in the NFP, most, including senior members of the party, saw it as a clash of personalities rather than a clash resulting from the differences in policies. K. N. Rao, who was elected to Parliament in 1977, said that he had been asked by people throughout the country what the differences

were between the leaders and all he could say was that he did not know (*Fiji Times*, 24 June, 1977). The only leading member of the party who noticed the change in policy and remarked on it was R.D. Patel who resigned from the NFP in 1975, complaining that the NFP under Koya had changed beyond recognition (*Fiji Times*, 11 October, 1975).

Then in 1976 when the party split in Parliament over ALTO, the difference was not so much in what they wanted, but more in the approach taken by the two factions (who both wanted security of tenure for the sugarcane farmers). The group opposing Koya believed in co-operating with the government on policies which were for the good of the people, while Koya became confrontational.

With independence, the NFP's two primary targets vanished overnight, with the withdrawal of the colonial government and the CSR from the scene. Exploitation by another Australian company, the Emperor Gold Mining Company in Vatukoula, was still going on and Patel was just coming to grips with this issue and formulating his policy when he died. After Patel's death the NFP was not interested in helping the exploited mineworkers, the majority of whom were ethnic Fijians. The party started to concentrate only on issues that affected the Indians, such as sugar. Not everyone in the party agreed with this change in policy so it became fragmented. Therefore it failed to continue as the effective and strong Opposition that it once was.

Although at the time of independence Koya appeared very conciliatory he started showing his true colours soon after. He indulged in personal attacks on people inside and outside Parliament. This was in sharp contrast to Patel who attacked policies rather than people. Koya had, in fact, shown a tendency for personal attacks during Patel's time when he attacked doctors and nurses at Lautoka Hospital, but Patel was able to arrest it (LC Debates, 1965). He had also attacked and ridiculed Andrew Deoki, another Indian member in the Legislative Council (21 July, 1966, pp.612-613). A few months before that the Colonial Secretary had

accused Koya of “pursuing a personal vendetta ... in this House” (LC Debates, 10 December, 1965, p.561).

Now as the leader, rather than setting a high standard for other members to emulate, Koya gave free rein to his passion for personal attacks. After regularly attacking Len Usher, Charles Stinson, John Falvey, Vijay Singh and K. S. Reddy, Koya then turned to Ratu Mara. In the early years of independence Koya used to often praise the Prime Minister but from the mid 1970s he started attacking Ratu Mara and refused to co-operate with the Prime Minister even on important issues like the motion by Butadroka calling for the repatriation of all Indians from Fiji (see Chapter 6).

Ratu Mara said in Parliament in 1977 that under the constitution he had to consult the opposition leader on a number of matters, but from 1974 Koya had not had the courtesy to acknowledge any of his letters. Koya interjected and asked about consultation on ALTO which was passed the previous year. Ratu Mara replied that Koya had not even consulted his own members on ALTO (*Fiji Times*, 1 June, 1977). This clearly showed that Koya was not only missing many important sessions of Parliament (which was often pointed out by the government members) but he was failing to fulfil his duties as the Leader of the Opposition in other respects also.

In many ways the 1972 general elections marked the turning point in independent Fiji's political history, though hardly anyone seemed to have noticed the important changes taking place. This was because the elections did not have any drastic effect on the country as they returned Ratu Mara's Alliance government with a comfortable majority. More importantly, multiracialism seemed to have been working in politics as about a quarter of the Indian voters had voted for the Alliance Party, although the Fijian support for the NFP remained negligible (only 2 per cent). It was in the 1972 elections that Koya started playing sugar politics by promising the farmers that if the NFP came into power, the land that the CSR

owned would be sold as freehold to existing tenants when the company withdrew from the country.

Leaders or a ‘gaggle of squabbling lawyers’?

One major problem identified by Brij Lal as an important factor in the NFP's lack of effectiveness had been its “largely self-seeking leadership which [had] rested almost exclusively in the hands of 'a gaggle of squabbling lawyers' unwilling to sacrifice their flourishing legal practices to devote more attention to party matters" (1986, pp.92-93). Steven Ratuva, a Fijian academic, described the NFP leaders as "professional lawyers with limited political vision and regressive ideologies" which were "politically myopic and racially parochial" (1993, p.59).

There was a reason for Indian leadership resting mainly with lawyers until independence. Manilal, the first leader of the Indians in Fiji, was a lawyer who used law and the legal principle as a political weapon. Those who succeeded Manilal, such as Badri Maharaj, Vishnu Deo, S. B. Patel and A. D. Patel, continued this tradition, started by Manilal, of inquiring into government records, making arguments on sound principles, and seeking specifications on Indians' rights and status. This was in spite of the fact that Maharaj and Deo were not lawyers. They, however, used the formal equality of the Indians before the law as a leverage for improving their substantive position elsewhere. “Thus political work was always in large measure legal work” (Sanadhyay, 1991, pp. 206-207).

Indians were given equal rights for the first time at independence through the 1970 constitution so there was nothing more to fight for. But the tradition of having lawyers as leaders of the National Federation Party continued. Unfortunately, Patel's successors did not “inquire into government records” or make “arguments on sound principles”. Reddy, for example, accused the government in the 1980s of practising discrimination against the Indians without providing any concrete examples. This won him added electoral support from the

Indian community as they saw him as a fearless leader who championed their cause, but it did not promote ethnic harmony.

As sugar remained the most important economic base of the new nation the Indian leaders in particular (because the majority of the farmers were still Indians) continued to play political football with it. Consequently the industry continued to face problems after independence. The new company (FSC) did very well initially and production and profits more than doubled by 1986. Swamiji had pointed out that in the CSR days Fiji produced only 140,000 tonnes of sugar but in 1983 the production was approaching 500,000 tonnes (Fiji Sugar, vol.8, no.1, March, 1983). Others have also pointed out a similar trend (see Narsey, 1979, pp.136-137; Tarte. 2001).

The lifestyle of the farmers improved considerably in the 1970s as they enjoyed a measure of prosperity. The agreement with the European Union which gave a guaranteed price for Fiji sugar was an important factor in its increased profits, and the Denning Award made sure the farmers got their fair share, but unfortunately the prosperity enjoyed by the farmers did not last. This was because there was renewed exploitation of farmers from the mid-1970s, leading to a slow decline in efficiency in the industry.

Perhaps this was what made one scholar claim that “apart from periodic feuds with the CSR, over cane contracts and share of cane proceeds, these unions [in the sugar industry] did little to improve the conditions of the peasantry” (Naidu, 1987, p.218). This may have been true under the CSR during the colonial days when the unions had little success in improving the lives of the farmers but this was not true after Fiji became self-governing. Fiji got a very good price for its sugar through the European Union and the Denning Award, as mentioned earlier, ensured that the farmers got the major share.

Daryl Tarte has described how the quality of life of farmers changed radically: “Solid concrete homes replaced flimsy shacks. Tractors replaced horses and bullocks. Farmers acquired cars and television sets. They set up businesses and their children went to universities and entered the professions” (2001, p.133). If they still had problems it was because the expatriate exploiters were perhaps replaced by those from their own midst as Wadan Narsey has suggested.

Narsey noted that “our people who are in positions originally occupied by whites cannot expect the incomes and standards of living that whites previously expected and obtained only through the exploitation of our labourers and farmers. To do so would be merely to replace one class of exploiters by another class derived from our own ranks, but whose behaviour is identical and equally inexcusable” (Narsey, 1979, p.136).

Unfortunately this is what seemed to have happened. Not only did the local staff continue to have the perquisites enjoyed by the expatriates whom they had replaced. There were greater problems too as the Indian politicians started exploiting the sugarcane growers. This was because they wanted to have control over the farmers to retain the farmers’ electoral support. The reorganization in the sugar industry gave these politicians the opportunity to be involved in the Sugar Cane Growers’ Council. These politicians (from both the NFP and the Alliance) now stepped into positions which became paid positions with several other benefits, whereas until then Swamiji had given free service to the farmers. Sugar became a major political issue and the farmers and the industry itself suffered as a consequence.

When the NFP became an ethnic party concentrating on promoting the concerns of the well off Indians rather than the poorer sections of society, sugar politics took a back seat at least temporarily in the 1980s. This unfortunately meant that the cane farmers were leaderless after the 1987 military coups until Mahendra Chaudhry revived the National Farmers’ Union which had been inactive. The

farmers now gave their allegiance to Chaudhry who had by then become the leader of the Fiji Labour Party.

National Farmers' Union had been established in 1979 with a constitution providing for rural labourer membership, but little happened until the military coups of 1987 (Hince, 1996, p.6). After 1987, the National Farmers' Union became the power base of the Fiji Labour Party to the rude shock of the NFP in the 1992 general elections. In those elections almost half of the Indian communal seats were won by the FLP. This led to the formation of the Fiji Sugar Cane Growers' Association (FSGA) backed by the NFP, in their effort to win back the farmers for their own political ends. Both the political parties had neglected them in the 1980s, but in the 1990s the politicians once again realized their importance as voters. They once again became aware of the importance of sugarcane farmers for their electoral success. Rather than putting up a united front to fight for the rights of the Indian community, which had become second class citizens in the country after 1987, they revived sugar politics by establishing the FSGA in opposition to the NFU.

Unions still play a very important role in the sugar industry and consequently in national politics. Narsey claims that rival unions are fostered on "ethnicist lines by the state in order to reduce the strength of farmers" (Narsey, 1990, p.102). This is not true at least in the sugar industry where more than the state, the Indian politicians are behind the divisions. The formation of the FSGA as a rival to the NFU proves this. The NFP leaders, who were dismayed by the electoral success of the FLP in the Indian communal seats in the 1992 general elections, were behind this division which they caused for their own electoral gain rather than for the benefit of the farmers (Naidu, 2001, p.181).

Sugar politics continued to play an important role in Fiji's national politics even after the 2000 crisis, as the NFU and the FSGA continued to be at loggerheads, one supporting the Fiji Labour Party and the other the NFP. But in 2005, after a

change in leadership in the NFP, the two predominantly Indian parties seemed to come to an understanding. For example, in the May 2006 general elections, NFP shared preferences with both the ruling SDL party and the multiracial FLP, unlike in the 2001 general elections²⁹. Hopefully this would put an end to sugar politics and may also help to eliminate ethnicity from politics.

²⁹ In the 2001 elections the NFP gave its first preferences to the SDL which enabled it to win narrowly and form the government (fijilive, 25 April, 2006).

CHAPTER 6

Ethnicity in Politics

Fiji had its first party-based elections in 1966 and before that a membership system (see Chapter 1) as Britain started slowly handing over the reins of government to the local people. Decolonization had started in the Pacific in the 1960s but Fiji became independent only towards the end of 1970, after her Polynesian neighbours, Western Samoa and Tonga, as well as phosphate-rich, tiny Nauru to the north had ceased to be under colonial rule/oversight. This was not due to any reluctance on the part of Britain to leave but because ethnic Fijians were wary of independence as they feared the consequences of the numerical supremacy of the immigrant Indians, once the colonial rulers left, ushering in democracy.

Ratu George Cakobau, the highest ranking chief of Fiji in its rigid hierarchical chiefly system, who was later knighted and became the first local Governor General, put it bluntly: "Fijians don't want independence. The main reason is fear of domination by the Indian majority [who] don't adapt themselves easily enough to the country they've come to adopt as home" (Turnbull, 1977, p.131).

Ratu Mara, who became the first Prime Minister at independence and who stood for racial cooperation, acknowledged that Indians had made a contribution, and was willing to share power with Indian leaders, but even he was not sure of the future aims of the Indians: " ...if only they were satisfied with participation, not domination . . ." He explained that the Fijians resisted very strongly "the danger of being dominated by another race in a part of the world they call their own" (Turnbull, 1977, p.131).

With an ethnic problem simmering in the background, most observers of the Fiji scene in the 1960s were unsure of the direction it would take and they saw the future of the country as bleak (see Mayer, 1963 and Coulter, 1967). Most writers agreed that the most important prerequisite for the survival of the nation as a

peaceful, multiracial one was enlightened and selfless leadership. One writer even warned that if the leaders of the major ethnic groups did not act with vision, and sacrifice and subordinate their narrow, sectarian interests to the interests of the country as a whole, then Fiji might become “something like a Cyprus in the South Pacific” (Watters, 1969, p.269).

When party politics emerged in the 1960s after the start of self-government, the system worked well initially, because the parties were divided on ideological lines and had clear policies. This proved the scaremongers wrong as it became clear that “the Federation leaders performed the Opposition role well” (Norton, 2004, p.165). With Patel’s death, however, the NFP no longer had a clear ideology and this affected the performance of the opposition.

I begin this chapter by looking at the aims and policies of each of the main political parties from 1966 to 1987 and then describe how party politics over the years degenerated into ethnic politics, leading to ethnic tensions and the prospect of ethnic conflict. I conclude by looking at the political scene today.

The Alliance Party

Fijians were given the franchise only in 1963 and the Fijian Association was revitalised for party politics in 1966 and became the base of the Alliance Party. Soon a conflict developed “between the established [Fijian] political leaders and a group of young [Fijian] men fresh from tertiary studies in England” (Norton, 1990, p.81). These men were mainly from non-chiefly families, although this group also had a few chiefs like Ratu Mosese Verasikete and Ratu David Toganivalu. Their outlook was aggressively racial in contrast to the moderate stand taken by the chiefly leaders. They urged the chiefs to strive for a "Fiji for the Fijians" (Norton, 1990, p.81 and Lal, 1997, p.232).

The chiefs for the most part emerged as mediators. Ratu Mara, in particular, was

for multiracialism and equal rights for all the ethnic groups (with a general acceptance of Fijian hegemony based on the notion that they were first among equals), while most of the other chiefs, especially Ratu George Cakobau, were less responsive to Indian demands. Ratu George was for Fijian hegemony while in the Legislative Council he supported the policies for accommodating the interests of the other ethnic groups, especially the Indians. In a way Ratu George might have been contradicting himself but Norton believes he was making a symbolic stand for an audience of Fijians while in the Legislative Council making pragmatic concessions to non-Fijians (Norton, 1990, p.82).

Under Ratu Mara's leadership, the Fijian Association went into a coalition with those Indians who stood for moderation and cooperation with Fijian chiefly leaders. These Indians were mainly from the Kisan Sangh (a farmers' organization) and they formed the Indian Alliance, which became a constituent of the Alliance Party. The Fijian Association also joined with the General Electors' Association as well as the Rotuman Association, the Chinese Association, the Muslim Political Front and the Tongan Association to form the multiracial Alliance Party. All these associations were moderate in their outlook and wanted gradual change with communal representation continuing (Lal, 1997, p.208 and Norton, 1990, pp.85-86).

Ratu Mara maintained that race was a fact of life in Fiji and as long as it remained so, communal representation was necessary. Until the population became integrated this system of election to the Legislative Council had to continue to ensure that all the communities were represented fairly. A.D. Patel, the National Federation Party leader, believed integration could only be achieved by having a common electoral roll but Fijians, Europeans and some Indians disagreed.

Ratu Mara tried to bring about political integration through the multiracial political party, the Alliance, which was officially founded on 3 February 1966. Ratu Mara had claimed that the Alliance Party, was Fiji's "first and perhaps only

genuine multiracial party” (1997, p.80). This is a justifiable claim based on election results. The Alliance might not have won an Indian communal seat but it attracted 25 per cent of Indian votes, in some constituencies even over 35 per cent (Lal, 1986, p.90), and had the support of most other ethnic groups in the country. No other political party so far has had this support from the greatest range of ethnic groups found in Fiji.

By contrast, the NFP used to attract only about 2 per cent Fijian support throughout its history so far. The Fiji Labour Party which was multiracial in composition and had (and still has) policies which appealed to all ethnic groups became reduced to an Indian party in 1987 because of its coalition with NFP.

The Alliance Party was in power from 1966 (when Fiji became self - governing although the colonial government was still ultimately in control) until 1987 when it was defeated by a coalition between the National Federation Party and the Fiji Labour Party. During its rule of two decades the Alliance government provided good governance which resulted in all round progress and prosperity as marked by expansion in education, health services and housing. There were also developments in agriculture, tourism and other industries like fisheries and dairy with most of them experiencing strong expansion and strengthening of the national economy.

In 1980 Ratu Mara identified political stability as the most important factor for the great advance made in economic development during the first decade of independence (Fiji Ministry of Information , 1980, p.13).He believed that a coalition government or a government of national unity offered the best chance for maintaining stability as it gave all major interests a voice in the affairs of the country. He further believed that political problems could be better solved by cooperation between the political leaders rather than by confrontation. The leaders of the opposition, Koya (1969- 1977) and Reddy (1977 – 1983) did not seem to recognize the importance of cooperation as they turned down Ratu Mara’s offers

for a coalition government/a government of national unity.

The Alliance and the Policy of Multiracialism

The Alliance government offered ‘multiracialism’ as the way forward for the country. That the government’s policy of multiracialism was working was evident as early as 1977 when, after the narrow defeat of the Alliance Party in the first general elections, though there was rising anger in the Fijian mind, there was no threat of violence unlike in 1968 after the by-elections. In 1968 there was no threat to Fijian status quo as the by-elections were only for the Indian seats which were regained by the National Federation Party who had walked out of Parliament the previous year. But there was general agreement that Fiji was on the verge of ethnic conflict then and the chiefs saved the day. In 1977, the Fijian-dominated Alliance Party lost the elections narrowly to the Indian-dominated NFP because of the split in Fijian votes caused by the Fijian Nationalist Party. But the situation remained outwardly calm, though it could have been the calm before the storm which was perhaps astutely prevented by the Governor General (see Chapter 5).

That ‘multiracialism’ was working was further demonstrated in 1987, after the Alliance defeat, when the Indian dominated coalition came into power. Though the Fijians were clearly not happy with the turn of events, there was hardly any violent reaction. Even after the military coups there was little violence and the country was able to get back to a semblance of democracy soon after. Within the short period of twelve years, the country had a fully democratic government with an ethnic Indian as the Prime Minister. This was partly possible because of the strength of ‘multiracialism’ which had survived two coups and associated racism.

From the mid-1970s, the Alliance government met with steady opposition from many fronts. This started with the Fijian Nationalists who were disgruntled with the multiracial policies of the government which they believed favoured the Indians and disadvantaged the Fijians. On the other hand, the Indian opposition leaders felt that the Indians were being unfairly treated by the preferential policies

in education for Fijians. These preferential policies were for raising the level of achievement of the Fijian students so that there was no disparity between the Fijian students and students of other ethnic groups but the opposition NFP started attacking these policies at election times as anti-Indian even though they had not attacked them in Parliament and had given their silent consent (see Chapter 3).

In the 1980s the trade unionists also joined in the attack of the government when it introduced a wage freeze. These union leaders were, moreover, supported by several activists (local and expatriate) on the staff of the University of the South Pacific. With the encouragement of these academics the trade unions formally entered politics in 1985 by forming the Fiji Labour Party.

At the same time the foreign media, especially the Australian journalists, started coming up with stories that claimed that the government was corrupt. The Opposition took up the cry during election campaigns rather than in Parliament but hardly any actual evidence was produced. Even when the government was buffeted from all directions, it continued to look after the interests of all the groups (see Premdas, 1986, p.115) and to hold free and fair elections (see Nandan, 2000, p.13).

It may be argued that the Alliance government was only discharging its constitutional responsibility. But it must not be forgotten that Ratu Mara was first and foremost a Fijian chief and his main concern had always been ensuring Fijian rights as shown by the Wakaya letter³⁰ in 1965 to which he was a signatory (Mara, 1997, Appendix). He, however, realized that Fiji had to move with the times and follow democratic practices, not to be left behind in the modern world.

The Fijian chiefly leadership had entrusted him with the difficult task of making Fiji part of the modern world and at the same time preserving Fijian rights. He

³⁰ This letter was written by the leading Fijian chiefs, to the British government, after they had a meeting on Wakaya Island, emphasising that Fijian interests should be paramount

was the youngest and lowest in rank among the “Big Four” chiefs at independence but he was made the leader because he was seen as the only one who could successfully reconcile these seemingly contradictory demands. Further, this could only be achieved with Indian leaders accepting Fijian rights.

A. D. Patel, the main Indian leader before independence, acknowledged Fijian paramountcy and gave his word that Fijian rights (especially land rights) would not be questioned. With Patel’s death in 1969, there was a change in the attitude of the Indian leaders. Ratu Mara held on to his commitment to give equal rights to all the citizens until 1987 when a predominantly Indian coalition came into power which over 90 per cent of the Fijians had rejected.

The Alliance now became the Opposition, with Ratu Mara becoming the Leader of the Opposition. A month later the coalition government was overthrown in a military coup led by Sitiveni Rabuka. Soon the Alliance Party ceased to exist but during its 21 years of dominance, it achieved a great deal for the country. One of its major priorities was trying to bring the major races together and forming a distinct national identity which would lead to integration. If the Alliance government did not wholly succeed in its efforts in this, it was because it did not get the support of the Opposition NFP which had over the years become a ‘confrontational’ opposition rather than the ‘thoughtful’ opposition it was under its founder leader, A.D. Patel. Patel died just before the country became independent and “the Indian Fijians never recovered from the death of their leader” (Nandan, 2000, p.136).

National Federation Party

Technically speaking, the first political party to be formed in Fiji was the Federation Party, although there were other political groupings earlier. It was born in the cane fields to fight for the rights of the sugarcane farmers. It was established in 1963 by the militant cane growers' associations headed by A. D.

Patel. Since it had its origin in the cane fields, and the major aim was to fight for the rights of the growers, it was predominantly Indian. Though its membership was open to all ethnic groups, it never attracted much Fijian support or the support of any other ethnic group in the country. As Norton notes: “A striking paradox of Fiji’s politics was that, despite its universal ideology, the Federation Party was indeed a communal body, whereas the Alliance, though stressing the need for separate and unequal political representation, was nonetheless a multiethnic organization” (2004, p.168).

Under its founder leader, Patel, the NFP was a highly disciplined party (Norton, 1990, p.89). It also had a clear ideology. The NFP claimed to be fighting for the downtrodden of all ethnic groups and their main aim was to stop exploitation of all kinds. It was fighting against the establishment as represented by the colonial government and the CSR Company for the rights of the common people. It also acknowledged the privileged position of the Fijians in the country as the indigenous people and accepted the notion that they were first among equals (Norton, 1990, p.103).

Patel and Common Roll

During a debate in the Legislative Council, Patel had said that the “aim and the object of the [Federation] Party is to integrate the people of this colony in one nation” (LC Debates, 15 December, 1965, p.630). Patel believed that the only way to bring about political integration and change a plural society into one nation was by having a common electoral roll (LC Debates, 15 December, 1965, p.635). Ronald Kermode, a European member in the Council, noted that integration could not be brought about with a ‘political device’ such as common roll. What was needed was trust, he said. Kermode urged the Indian leaders to work towards creating trust which was essential for building a single nation (LC Debates, 15 December, 1965, p.633).

The Fijian leaders agreed that common roll was the ultimate goal but none of them could agree to its immediate introduction because they agreed with Ratu Edward that it would be “disastrous under the conditions existing in Fiji” (LC Debates, 16 December, 1965, p.656). They accepted it as an ideal "but insisted that in the prevailing circumstances of economic, educational and numerical inequality [between the Indians and Fijians] the time was not ripe for change" (Lal, 1986, p.65).

Ratu Mara demolished Patel’s arguments in a brief contribution. Ratu Mara said that Patel was contradicting himself because he claimed that communal representation had not given Fiji unity. “Yet in the next breath he said: ‘This is a wonderful country; for 90 years we have enjoyed racial harmony’. There does not seem to be any logical sequence to this type of thought”, Ratu Mara said (LC Debates, 16 December, 1965).

Ratu Mara also accused Patel of arrogance, which prevented him from coming down and sitting and talking with people whom he thought beneath his status. This arrogance prevented him from finding out more about the Council of Chiefs and declaring it “a little group of men”. His refusal to learn more about the Council of Chiefs showed that he could not be a national leader, “but only of one section of the population.”. Patel constantly refused to compromise, Mara said. This again was the attitude of a sectional leader, not of a national leader. “Compromise is the solution for this country, and people who do not believe in compromise are not leaders of this country”, Ratu Mara concluded (LC Debates, 16 December, 1965).

Later the Federation Party made a genuine effort to win Fijian support and launched "Operation Taukei" in 1967 aimed at attracting more Fijians to the party. The Federation Party which now became the NFP still failed to win much grassroots support from the Fijians.

In fact, there was heightened inter-ethnic tension after the by-elections of 1968 during which the NFP was highly critical of the Fijian chiefs. The Fijian anger did not erupt in violence and destroy the peace of the country because the Fijian chiefly elite mediated and the Indian leader, A. D. Patel, realized that he had made a mistake in challenging the Fijian chiefly system. It was "cultural capital" (Norton, 1990, pp.9-10) for the Fijians and it shaped their thoughts, feelings and attitudes. It was a source of strength for the Fijians rather than oppression, contrary to what Patel had thought.

Patel was now willing to co-operate with Fijian chiefly leaders because he realized that what was at stake was the survival of the nation. In Ratu Mara's words, Fiji "sailed so close to the rocks... we came so near to the edge of the abyss that we could see with unmistakable clearness the danger that lay there if we did not change course. So we changed course" (quoted in Lal, 1986, p.127).

Patel acknowledged that he had made a mistake. This impressed his opponents and helped to create a cordial atmosphere not only in the Legislative Council but throughout the country. Patel and Mara agreed to hold talks on independence. The major area of disagreement was the idea of a common electoral roll to which Patel still clung.

Siddiq Koya who became the NFP leader after Patel's death cooperated with Ratu Mara and both parties made concessions which saw a rapid transition to independence. It has been noted that there had seldom been a transition with such aplomb (see Norton, 2004). This was attributed to the greater willingness of the new NFP leader to compromise than Patel had been. The NFP now agreed not to press for the immediate introduction of a common electoral roll, so the Alliance agreed to immediate independence.

On common roll, which had been the major stumbling block when Patel was alive, the two parties agreed to have a Royal Commission later to work out a

permanent electoral system for Fiji. Koya had hoped that it “would probably be possible within 15 years” (Norton, 2004, p.178). A Commission of Inquiry into the question of franchise was to be held after the first post-Independence elections and “its recommendations was to be inserted in the constitution if supported by two-thirds of the House of Representatives” (Norton, 2004, p.182).

The Royal Commission, headed by Prof. Harry Street, recommended in 1975 a common electoral roll and removal of racial reservation for the 25 national seats, with elections for these seats on a Single Transferable Vote (STV). Ratu Mara rejected this and he was accused of shifting his stance because the 'interim arrangement' had preserved his party's advantage in the 1972 general elections (Lal, 1986, p.78).

Mara had reasons for rejecting the recommendations of the Street Commission. Fijian leaders had accepted common roll only as a long term goal (when certain conditions were fulfilled. Economic and educational inequality between Fijians and Indians remained, though with increased migration from Fiji of the Indo-Fijians and their lower birth rate the gap in population had started narrowing. The five years of independence had not integrated society. The foundation for such a society, which was to have been multiracial/multicultural education, was still not laid.

There was also no consistency between the words and actions of the NFP leaders. They talked of a common roll but none of the leading members of the party risked standing in a national constituency, which was the closest to a common roll, during the 1972 general elections (Mamak, 1977, p.165). Moreover, using their numerical advantage, the NFP defeated the second highest chief in Fiji in a national constituency, thus showing that a common roll would not bring about national integration as Patel had envisaged.

In a way it was a test of how a common roll would work by one of the leading

chiefs, standing in a national constituency where Indians were the majority. The chief was Ratu Penaia, whom the NFP always praised in Parliament, who was later knighted and became the second governor-general. The NFP fielded a little known Fijian commoner against Ratu Penaia and defeated him with the Indians overwhelmingly voting for the NFP candidate seemingly without any consideration for who was the more able of the candidates. Rather than voting for the candidate who had a proven record of service to the country, the NFP made the national constituency into an extension of its communal constituency encouraging people to vote on ethnic lines – e.g., Indians voting for the NFP. If that was how the common roll was going to work, it was to be expected that the Fijian leaders and the Fijian voters would have none of it.

The 1972 election result proved that Patel had been wrong in his expectation that common roll would lead to integration with people voting for the candidate who was more able rather than looking at communal considerations. Patel seemed to have been sincere in his belief that a common electoral roll would lead to integration as he believed ability should be the criterion for the election of a candidate, not ethnicity or anything else (Lal, 1997, p.50) but he failed to realize that the majority, including leading members of his own party, did not share his idealism.³¹

Ratu Mara could be accused of not debating the Street Commission's recommendations in Parliament but the only thing it would have achieved was to give an opportunity to the members, especially the opposition, to express their strong views on the proposal. A debate of that nature could have stirred up Fijian

³¹ Brij Lal, who had earlier agreed with Patel's view on the importance of common roll, had argued: "The failure to break ethnic barriers and transcend communal consciousness which a common roll would have facilitated would come back to haunt and eventually consume Fiji" (1992, p.196). A few years later he seemed to have changed his views as he talked of "the mistaken idealistic belief that a complete Common Roll system of election ... will by some magic power unite and integrate the different peoples of Fiji into 'one people, one nation'. This is a naïve political belief that has no correspondence with realityA study of electoral results in Fiji will show that the vast majority of the people have always voted along communal or racial lines" (1998, p.146). Lal, however, was not referring to Patel, in particular, here.

emotions and affected the ethnic harmony that had prevailed so far after independence. With the comfortable majority that the Alliance government had in Parliament it was a foregone conclusion that the proposal would not get a majority support, leave alone a two-third majority that was required to pass it (see Ali 1979, p.74 and Norton, 2004, pp.181-182).

"The Alliance's new position marked the end of the 'honeymoon period' between Koya and Mara", Brij Lal claimed (Lal, 1986, p.79). Lal was, however, wrong in suggesting that the Alliance had a "new position" because, as mentioned earlier, the Fijian leaders had accepted common roll only as a long term goal (when certain conditions were fulfilled). Since the conditions had still not been fulfilled Mara had justification for rejecting the recommendations. The defeat of Ratu Penaia in a national seat in the 1972 general election clearly demonstrated that Fiji was not ready for a common roll electoral system yet as it would not bring about integration. On the contrary it would cause heightened ethnic tension.

The NFP under Koya

The NFP continued to perform effectively as an opposition for a few years after Patel's death. Koya was often away from Parliament, but there were other able members like R.D. Patel, K.C. Ramrakha and Mrs. Narayan who continued as a 'thoughtful' opposition. After the first general elections following independence, R.D. Patel was made the Speaker of the Parliament. This reduced the debating strength of the opposition, but with their number increased from 9 to 19 the loss was not greatly felt.

Koya's continued absence from parliament was observed and commented on, not only by the members on the government side. Ratu Julian Toganivalu, a leading Fijian member of the NFP, called on Koya to resign from his position as the Leader of the Opposition as he (Koya) could not find time to devote to his work in that capacity (*Fiji Times*, 20 October, 1976). The best example was his absence from Parliament when Butadroka introduced his notorious motion in 1975 asking

for the repatriation of Indians from Fiji. A few days before Butadroka introduced his motion, R.D. Patel had resigned from the party because of differences with Koya (see Chapter 5) claiming that the NFP under Koya had changed beyond recognition (*Fiji Times*, 11 October, 1975).

Koya was not willing to cooperate with Ratu Mara even on issues of vital importance to the nation like the Butadroka motion which clearly showed that he had changed since independence when his cooperation with the Prime Minister brought about a smooth transition. While rejecting Butadroka's motion, Ratu Mara moved an amendment which "embodied [his] multiracial philosophy" as it acknowledged the contribution made by "all races in their own separate ways ... to the economic development of Fiji" (Brown, 1978, p.8).

Ratu Mara drafted and circulated the amendment to all members of the House long before he moved it in Parliament. But Koya, was not in Parliament as he was arguing a case at the Supreme Court. It is noted that Koya did not see the Prime Minister's amendment until it was too late (Brown, 1978, p.5).

The natural expectation of the Government was that on such a "serious and destructive" issue the Opposition would support the Government in unanimously condemning the mover of the motion. This would have helped to douse Fijian nationalism for the future well being of the Indians whom they represented. The next day Koya surprised everyone by opposing not only Butadroka's motion but also Ratu Mara's amendment and moving another stronger amendment reaffirming the Indian position but not mentioning any other race by name.

Ratu Mara rejected Koya's amendment. Ratu Mara's amendment was passed 27 to 10 but almost half the members of the NFP were not there to vote for Koya's amendment while Butadroka abstained. Later Koya told a meeting of his supporters at the Suva Civic Centre that he had information that "there were elements in the Alliance Party who wanted to do legally what Butadroka tried to

do illegally” (quoted by Brown, 1978, p.11). When he was asked to produce facts to prove his wild allegation, Koya rather lamely declared that he would do so only to a Commission of Inquiry.

If Ratu Mara had hoped that the Butadroka motion, by being thoroughly debated in Parliament, would signal the end of Fijian nationalism it proved otherwise. Instead it marked the strengthening of ethnic politics in Fiji. Two years later it became clearer in the first general elections of 1977 when a significant number of ethnic Fijians voted for the FNP, with the Indians overwhelmingly supporting the NFP.

The multiracial Alliance Party found itself isolated as the NFP which had so far supported ‘multiracialism’ started degenerating into an ethnic party. It must, however, be emphasized that it was only the Leader of the Opposition and his staunch supporters who turned ‘confrontational’ as many of the NFP members of parliament still continued as ‘thoughtful’ opposition as was proven by their support for ALTO in 1976 (see Chapter 5).

Koya seemed to overlook the harm the nationalists could do to the Indian settlers by arousing the anti-Indian sentiment. In fact, initially the NFP welcomed the nationalists and even worked closely with them in the first general election in 1977 (see Chapters 3 and 5). In that election though the FNP polled an unexpected number of votes and even managed to win a Fijian communal seat, by the second general election that year most of those who voted for FNP in the first instance withdrew their electoral support for fear of NFP winning again by default. This did not mean that they had withdrawn their support for the party's policies which remained dormant but intact (see Lasaga, 1984, p.188).

Through his actions Koya, rather than trying to douse Fijian nationalism, helped to foster it. According to Ramrakha, “multiracial harmony in this country” was brought to a fever pitch in 1970, but by the end of 1975 the spirit of 1970 seemed

to be slipping away, so he pleaded for the revival of that spirit (Parliamentary Debates, 2 December, 1975?). James Shankar Singh, the leader of the Indian Alliance, claimed that Koya had been “a major contributor to the deterioration of race relationship in Fiji in recent years” (*Fiji Times*, 1 July, 1976). The best example of this was in 1977 after the first general elections when Koya deliberately whipped up Indian sympathy by claiming that Ratu Mara and the Alliance Party did not want an Indian Prime Minister in Fiji and that was why he (Koya) was not appointed the Prime Minister after the NFP’s narrow win (see Chapter 5). In 1987 Koya, however, contradicted himself when he said, “It is our people [Indians] who went against me [in 1977]” (V. Lal, 1990, p.56).

It must, however, be noted that it was not only Koya and his followers in the NFP who contributed to a deterioration in race relations in the country. Butadroka and his Fijian nationalists played an even greater part. Moreover, they were supported by the Fijian publication of the *Fiji Times*, the *Nai Lalakai*. In 1977 Ratu Mara talked of the “enormous damage” *Nai Lalakai* had done to racial harmony. He claimed that over the past five years it had done a lot to “foster, encourage and disseminate the views of the Fijian Nationalist Party” (*Fiji Times*, 6 June, 1977).

Since these views appeared in the Fijian weekly, the Opposition NFP, in particular, did not seem to have taken much notice of them (or been even aware of the problem) though they used to be extremely critical of the *Fiji Times* in the early 1970s. Such views would have had their desired effect (in fact, it would have been more effective than the *Fiji Times*) as they would have had a great impact on the Fijian commoners who were the focus of the propaganda.

Brij Lal had noted that the resurgent Fijian ethno-nationalism was part of a larger nativistic movement throughout the Pacific, which was asserting its voice and struggling for political dominance. In Fiji, it sought practical manifestation for the concept of Fijian paramountcy, as shown by the call for the revision of the constitution and the reservation of the position of the Prime Minister and the

Governor General for ethnic Fijians. The call for the reservation of two thirds of the Parliamentary seats for indigenous Fijians "found an astonishing amount of sympathy mainly among literate urban Fijians In effect it represent[ed] a concerted challenge to the notion of political co-existence that [had] long governed Fijian politics" (Lal, 1986, p.81).

Rather than trying to understand the implications of this 'resurgent' Fijian nationalism and responding to it appropriately, the NFP leadership countered it by emphasizing Indian rights. NFP's policies, which were national and universal, had been changing over the years to narrow communal ones. The change of policy of the NFP from one of championing the causes of the exploited in the country to fighting only for the rights of ethnic Indians became evident as early as the 1972 general elections when education and land (two issues close to the heart of the Indo-Fijians) both featured prominently during the election campaign. 1972 was crucial because it seemed to have marked the beginning of ethnic politics (although this became clear only in 1977). NFP for the first time started focusing on issues that would win them more Indian votes rather than looking at issues from a national perspective as Patel used to do.

The Change in Policy of the NFP under Reddy

With a change in leadership in 1977 NFP's ideology also changed. When Jai Ram Reddy became the NFP leader, he rejected NFP's original policies which were meant to improve the lot of the workers, and "openly embraced the capitalist philosophy of development In an effort to win a larger constituency, Reddy cut the NFP's umbilical cord with its past. In the end, the NFP became a shadow of the Alliance Ideologically at least, the Alliance now face[d] no opposition in the country" (Lal, 1986, pp. 94-95).

NFP was no longer a party of the poor people but one patronized by rich merchants, well off civil servants and the sugarcane farmers who were no longer

poor. It no longer fought for the lower classes, who were the victims of exploitation, but became a party for the capitalists and the well-to-do Indians. The main difference between the Alliance and the NFP remained in their racial composition. It became a party that fought solely for Indian rights and thus for all practical purposes, became the second ethnic party (after the Fijian Nationalist Party) in the country.

An Indo-Fijian scholar, Vijay Naidu, has noted that while “A. D. Patel perceived a class-divided colonial Fiji in which a minority benefited from the system that deprived and exploited a majority ... with his death in 1969, NFP’s search for a just Fiji society was replaced by the racial bargaining of ... elements from the two major ethnic categories in Fiji” (Naidu, 1987, p.220). This was not a sudden change in the NFP but a gradual one that started in 1972 and was completed by 1979. No one, including senior party members seemed to have noticed or understood it at the beginning because it was very subtle, not open like the FNP’s championing of Fijian rights.

Robertson and Tamanisau have also noted that in the 1980s the Alliance and NFP “policies varied little in substance” (1988, p.22). This, in effect, created the opportunity for the rise of the Fiji Labour Party in 1985.

The NFP at independence had endorsed Ratu Mara's multiracial stance as the way forward for the country, but from the beginning there was a fundamental lack of understanding about the multiracial ideology. Many NFP leaders saw it only as the removal of white dominance and privileges as manifested in the policies of segregation. With Reddy as the NFP leader the situation became even worse. As noted earlier, he seemed to think that multiracialism was having ethnic parties with each in turn being in power (see Chapter 2).

In 1974 Reddy had told the NFP convention in Nadi that “if the National Federation Party is aspiring to govern, then it must have broadly based support

among all the races in Fiji. Until the party acquires such support it must resign itself to being a permanent opposition” (quoted in Lal, 1992, p.243). When he became the Leader of the NFP, rather than trying to increase the party’s non-Indian support, which he himself had said was important if it wanted to be in power, Reddy concentrated his energies on going into coalitions with splinter Fijian parties during election times rather than having policies that appealed to all ethnic groups. Later he himself described these Fijian parties as ‘token’ parties (his election telecast before the 1999 general elections). He realized that he could not rule without some Fijian support but had no policies to offer that would attract the Fijian voters (such as nationalization of the goldmine). The policies Reddy offered were not different from those of the Alliance Party except that he concentrated on issues that affected the Indians and accused the government of practising discrimination against the Indians.

Unlike Patel, Reddy did not make use of the Parliament to raise issues that affected the nation and force the government to provide answers in true Westminster tradition. Under Patel the NFP was an effective opposition, acting as the watchdog, keeping the government under constant scrutiny. In the 1970s also the NFP parliamentarians like Ramrakha had used Parliament to make the government change its policies when they were found to be blatantly discriminatory. An example was the remission of fees for indigent students in schools when the government decided to provide fee remission only for Fijian students (see Chapter 3). If under Koya, it started degenerating from a ‘thoughtful’ opposition to a ‘hectoring’ one, in the 1980s it almost became defunct as an opposition, necessitating the emergence of the Fiji Labour Party.

Talking of the 1997 constitution, which almost tried to stifle opposition with its multi-party government, Sir Vijay Singh had noted the crucial role played by the opposition in the Westminster system: “...it is the watchdog that keeps the government under constant scrutiny. It exposes government’s dubious dealings and offers alternative policies and programs” (*Fiji Times*, 21 February, 2002). The

NFP in the 1980s had no 'alternative policies and programs'. They exposed what they believed were government's 'dubious dealings' but these were done outside parliament, so there was no effective opposition in Parliament. Moreover the aim was to consolidate their Indian support rather than to act as a watchdog of government policies.

Sensitive issues like affirmative action and a government of national unity were raised at NFP conferences rather than in the Parliament where the government could provide the answers. Mrs. Narayan, a leading member of the NFP, had raised the question of imbalance in the civil service in Parliament and the Acting Prime Minister had replied that the question of parity applied only at the point of entry and that promotions and other opportunities for advancement depended on merit (Lal, 1986, p.87).

Later at the NFP convention in Ba in 1980, Reddy asserted that the government was implementing a policy "designed to ensure that all strategic levels of government [were] staffed by loyal personnel which in effect meant that Fijians were placed in positions of command in order to deliberately create an 'out group' namely the Indians". The bitterness and distrust that this produced "conflict alone may resolve" he said, using PM Mara's words (Lal, 1986, p.87).

Both Mara and Reddy agreed that "ethnic politics [was] divisive, wasteful, destructive and unwanted" (Premdas, 1986, p.108). "But instead of stopping after merely pointing to racial cleavages [Reddy] went on to suggest that the Alliance-run government had embarked on a systematic policy of staffing the upper echelons of government with loyal Fijian personnel. In fact, he accused Ratu Mara of practising racial discrimination while publicly espousing a policy of multiracialism" (Premdas, 1986, p.109).

Premdas, however, has pointed out that it was practically inevitable that the government, dominated by Fijians (and effectively criticized by the FNP for

neglecting Fijian interests) would staff the senior levels of the Public Service with loyal ethnic and political personnel (Premdas, 1986, p.109). But in spite of the feeling within the Indian community that "power over the civil service [was] in Fijian hands" there had been "very few cases of systematic discrimination on the basis of race and political affiliation" (Lal, 1986, pp.87-88). Until 1987, the government had been quite fair to all, with ethnicity and political affiliation not featuring prominently as a basis for its civil service appointments. So Reddy's criticism of the government of practicing discrimination against the ethnic Indians seemed to have little basis as no sound evidence was provided.

Reddy shot into fame in the political arena after the first general elections of 1977 which resulted in a stalemate. He rose to prominence overnight when he went on air and declared that the NFP, though it had a two-seat majority, could not form the government, as it would not have the support of the army and other Fijian institutions, because it was predominantly an Indian party. His apparent sensible and moderate stand impressed everyone and he at once became widely acceptable as a future leader because people wanted an end to confrontation, which had become the order of the day. Ratu Mara and the Alliance Party welcomed him as a sensible and moderate leader. So did the majority of the Indians who thought that his advent would mark the end of racial tensions in politics and the uncertainties that prevailed as a consequence.

Unfortunately the opposite proved to be the case. There were not only racial differences now but religious differences also re-emerged in politics, as the tussle for NFP leadership was between Koya, a Muslim, and Reddy, a Hindu. Since leadership was a major issue, it was an ideal time to have an indigenous Fijian as the leader of the party. NFP was fortunate to have had such a person in its midst. As mentioned earlier (see Chapter 5) a leading member of the NFP, Ramrakha, suggested making Ratu Julian Toganivalu the Leader of the Opposition (Ali, 1979, p.79).

Ratu Julian would have been an ideal choice as he was one of the oldest members of the party. Having joined the NFP in the 1960s, after resigning from the Civil Service where he had risen to the prestigious position of a District Officer, he had stood loyally by the party during all the upheavals before and after independence. He was one Fijian member who seemed above reproach as his motives in joining the NFP did not seem dubious unlike that of some of the others like Apisai Tora and Ratu Mosese.

Ratu Julian was one of the four Toganivalu brothers who were in politics, but the other three were senior members of the Alliance Party who had all been elected members of Parliament. Having Ratu Julian as the leader would have benefited the party in many ways. First of all, it would have been able to shed its image as an Indian party. Secondly, there would not have been a party split on religious lines between its Hindu and Muslim followers. Ratu Julian also had much more experience in politics than Reddy, who was a newcomer to politics.

The NFP missed a rare opportunity to end the politics of ethnicity and make a new start, giving people of Fiji a genuine choice between two different ideologies - the Alliance, which protected the interests of the capitalists, and the NFP which stood for the working class people. With Ratu Julian as the leader, the party could have become a truly multiracial one as it could have attracted more indigenous members. The party officials failed to elect Ratu Julian to party leadership.

The NFP spent the years from late 1970s to 1987 trying to topple the Alliance government as Reddy believed that the Indian side should be given a chance to rule as well. Since he realized that the NFP could not rule without Fijian support he concentrated his energies in forming coalitions with 'token' Fijian parties to defeat the Government. Brij Lal warned in 1986 that the NFP in trying to get rid of the Alliance did not realize the dire consequences that awaited the Indian community when that eventuality took place (Lal, 1986, p.79). But no one seemed to have taken heed of this warning.

Foreign Interference?

In the 1980s the NFP claimed Australian involvement in Fiji's domestic politics. This 'involvement' was later exposed on the ABC's 'Four Corners' Programme (V.Lal, 1990, pp.121-123) but the programme itself became a source of the main interference as it tried to influence election results in Fiji. According to one writer the 'Four Corners' programme was "so one-sided in its opposition to Ratu Mara's government that the opposition parties in Fiji made videos of the programme and used them as election propaganda" (Thomson, 1999, p.137).

The NFP leaders showed lack of sensitivity to the feelings of the indigenous Fijians when in 1982 they widely showed this Australian TV programme alleging corruption in the Alliance government. The Fijians rejected this attempt and threw their support solidly behind the Alliance as they saw the TV programme (*Four Corners*) as an insult to them with its references to their cannibal past. If the idea was to expose corruption in the Mara government for the sake of good governance, it could have been raised in Parliament and answers sought from the government. Rather than doing that the issue was brought up outside Parliament. Perhaps it was incidents like this that "added fuel to the Fijian national sentiment" (Ratuva, 1993, p.59).

There were also allegations of Russian involvement in the 1982 elections. The Alliance government accused the NFP of getting the support of Russia through Mr. Kochar, the husband of the Indian High Commissioner in Suva. This finally resulted in Mrs. Kochar being transferred from Fiji (V.Lal, 1990, pp.129, 139-141).

Five years later, in 1987, an Australian magazine, *Penthouse*, claimed that Libya was also involved in influencing the outcome of the 1982 general elections by giving money to all the major political parties, the NFP, the Alliance and the

Western United Front (WUF) (V.Lal, 1990, p.137). These allegations and counter allegations were not proved but they raised the possibility of Fiji becoming another Grenada (V. Lal, 1990, p.153).

Whatever the truth or otherwise of these allegations, it showed the importance of national solidarity against any outside threat³². The government and the opposition in Fiji should have put up a united front to ward off such interferences, if there were any, but the NFP made it an election issue in 1982 which further polarized the country on ethnic lines and increased ethnic tensions.

Even after the awesome backlash of Fijian voters in 1982 through their rejection of the NFP and its coalition partner WUF, NFP leaders did not learn their lesson. In 1987 they decided to have a coalition with the newly formed Fiji Labour Party (FLP), led by a Fijian commoner, Dr. Timoci Bavadra. Reddy was not the Leader of the Opposition then as he had resigned from Parliament in protest against the Speaker's ruling (see Introduction). He was, however, mainly instrumental in forming a coalition with the multiracial Fiji Labour Party with disastrous results.

The claim by one scholar that Indians wanted political power including “political ascendancy” because that was the only way they could come to terms with the indignities of indenture (Mishra, 1990, p.616) was perhaps true of some of the Indian leaders who thought on those terms. It was, however, not true of the majority of Fiji Indians who only wanted security for themselves and their families. Those Indian voters who had supported the Alliance in the early 1970s switched to the NFP when they felt the Alliance would not look after their welfare.

³² An extreme example of such interference by foreign elements (governments and individuals) in the Pacific today and how harmful it can be to national interests is the case of Noah Musingku, the operator of the failed pyramid scheme, who has proclaimed himself the king of a part of Bougainville (in PNG) which is a no-go zone and is alleged to be involved in giving military training to rebels (fijilive, 5 January, 2006)

When the NFP failed to address their concerns, they started supporting the multiracial Fiji Labour Party but unfortunately it soon became another Indian party as the majority of Fijian members of the Labour Party had withdrawn their support for the party in protest against the coalition with the NFP. The small core Fijian support that remained with Labour and increased support from the General Electors, however, enabled the NFP to succeed in its long quest to get rid of the government of Ratu Mara. The over 90 per cent of Fijians who had not voted for the coalition waited in expectation for their leadership to act and Rabuka burst upon the scene as the new leader. The Fijians threw their support solidly behind him because it seemed to them that their chiefly leaders had failed to safeguard their rights.

Nationalist Parties

The Fijian Nationalist Party (FNP), the first and most important of the nationalist parties, was formed in January 1974, the first truly ethnic party with no pretence of multiracialism. Its main slogan was 'Fiji for Fijians' although it was not the first to suggest this idea (see Chapter 4). Less than two years after its inception, in October 1975, its leader, Sakeasi Butadroka, introduced a motion in Parliament calling for the repatriation of all Indians from Fiji.

Butadroka had no support in Parliament to even get his motion seconded but Ratu Mara wanted to wipe out the threat raised by him once and for all by everyone joining forces against him and giving him a sound thrashing from which he would not be able to recover. So the Prime Minister arranged to have the motion seconded by one of the Alliance backbenchers, the Indian Alliance member Kishore Govind, to give members a chance to air their views before unanimously rejecting it. Up to a point the strategy worked, as most members spoke strongly condemning the motion.

Ratu Mara pointed out that while Butadroka claimed to speak for the poor Fijians his new home was in Tamavua Heights, one of the richest suburbs, and not among the poor people. The FNP, however, had a lot of grassroots Fijian support as was proved two years later by its performance in the 1977 general elections, securing one Fijian communal seat and winning a large proportion of Fijian votes in other constituencies. Most Fijians seemed to agree with its policies of maintaining Fijian hegemony and curtailing the Indian advance in most spheres of life.

If Ratu Mara had hoped that the Butadroka motion, by being thoroughly debated in Parliament, would signal the end of Fijian nationalism it proved otherwise. Instead it marked the strengthening of ethnic politics in Fiji. Two years later it became clearer in the first general elections of 1977 when a significant number of ethnic Fijians voted for the FNP, with the Indians overwhelmingly supporting the NFP. Butadroka drew attention to this fact in Parliament after the elections (Parliamentary Debates, April 1977). The communal rolls made it easy to identify this ethnic polarisation. In the first general elections of 1977, though the FNP polled an unexpected number of votes and even managed to win a Fijian communal seat, by the second general elections that year most of those who voted for FNP in the first instance withdrew their electoral support for fear of NFP winning again by default.

Butadroka was a Methodist lay preacher and his message was often delivered from the pulpit which made it all the more acceptable to the grassroots Fijians. The Fijians believed that the policies of the FNP, which were invariably anti-Indian, had the sanction of the Church. Indeed, they had the support of some church leaders. According to a past president of the Methodist Church, Rev. Koroi, Butadroka was from the beginning in cahoots with the dissidents in the church led by Rev. Lasaro (Dropsy, 1993, p.53). This was when religion became entangled in party politics. There was a convergence of Fijian nationalism and Methodist fundamentalism, which has persisted to this day.

As had been mentioned before support for the FNP remained dormant but intact until the military coups of 1987 after which it (FNP) started becoming irrelevant. Soqosoqo ni Vakavulewa ni Taukei (SVT) and Soqosoqo Duavata ni Lewenivanua (SDL) are ethnic Fijian parties that were formed after the military coups of 1987 and the crisis of 2000 respectively. They are also nationalist parties in some ways.

The SVT and SDL are similar to the FNP in that they promote Fijian interests including Fijian hegemony. The main difference with the FNP and these parties is that they have never called for the repatriation of Indians from Fiji. This is because the leaders of these parties, unlike the nationalist leader Butadroka, realize how much the country would suffer economically if they followed such a policy. In spite of that the country has hardly made any economic progress under these parties so far as it did under the chiefly-led Alliance party after independence (see Chapter 7).

SVT lost its appeal during the 1999 general elections when it modified its stand and now it is almost non-existent. The decline in the popularity of the SVT led to the establishment of the SDL in 2000 which remained in power until December, 2006 when it was overthrown in the forth coup in Fiji in two decades. Apart from the SDL the other Nationalist parties did not win any seats in the last general elections in May 2006.

Fiji Labour Party

In July 1985, the Fiji Labour Party was founded. It was formed by the major trade unions in the country. In the early 1980s public servants gained substantial salary increases backed by their militant union leaders. By 1983 the economy started feeling the pressure. A job evaluation review (Nicol-Hurst Report) recommended further substantial salary increases. The findings were implemented after a lengthy and militant campaign by the Fiji Public Servants Association (FPSA). Pressure

on government expenditure produced strong government reaction and late in 1984 a wage freeze was implemented, resulting in more industrial problems.

The labour aristocracy that was formed in the urban areas in the 1980s politicized the union movement. Indo-Fijian scholar, Vijay Naidu has noted that the term 'labour aristocracy' gained currency in the latter half of the 19th century to designate a distinct upper stratum of the working class (Naidu, 1987, p.226). Naidu also noted that in Fiji the objective of wrestling power from the Alliance Party came from the labour aristocracy. "This privileged worker category derives from the relatively highly paid stratum of workers, predominantly white collar and labour bureaucrats" (Naidu, 1987, p.210).

The labour aristocracy in Fiji is made up of trade union bureaucrats, white collar workers and the better paid technicians (Naidu, 1987, p.216). More importantly, "the incomes of majority of full-time trade union officials place them among the higher earning brackets of Fiji people" (Naidu, 1987, p.217). These union officials earn much higher incomes than the average worker (both white collar and blue collar).

White collar union leaders were behind the politicization of the trade union movement in Fiji, which, led by the 'labour aristocracy', decided to launch a workers' party (Naidu, 1987, p.219). Many blue collar unions of Fiji did not join forces with the labour aristocracy in establishing the Fiji Labour Party as they had reservations about politicizing the union movement (Naidu, 1987, p.211). The party's commitment to improving the lot of the workers by challenging "ruling class hegemony" was in doubt from the beginning as the party leadership was in the hands of a "new, opportunistic labour aristocracy" (Hagan, 1987, p.134).

Before the general elections of 1987, Vijay Naidu had urged the Fiji Labour Party to increase its membership among the rural workers rather than having a coalition with the NFP which was ideologically opposed to the Labour Party (Robertson

and Tamanisau, 1989, p.26). This was sound advice as the Labour influence was confined to urban centres while the majority of the population lived in the rural areas. Naidu further pointed out that any deal with the NFP smacked of opportunism. This view of Vijay Naidu about a coalition was initially shared by some leading members of the party such as Mahendra Chaudhry and Krishna Datt.

Labour was hoping to be in the opposition for two terms and then form the government only in 1997. Bavadra formed the coalition despite the objections from the majority of delegates at the founding conference (Robertson and Tamanisau, 1989, p.40). Bavadra did not take heed of the advice given by Naidu and reject the idea of a coalition with the NFP as ‘opportunistic’; nor was there an attempt to increase the membership among the rural workers. The FLP leaders were more interested in a labour aristocracy in the urban areas than in making sure that the concerns of the rural dwellers were addressed. According to one scholar, the FLP was “the product of a frustrated aristocracy of labour which was prepared to challenge the whittling away of gains made by the labour movement” (Naidu, 1987, p.226).

The union leaders used the union movement for their own individual advancement, with the result that “the incomes of majority of full-time union officials place them among the higher earning brackets of Fiji people” (Naidu, 1987, p.218). So USP activists like Atu’ Bain, if they were genuinely concerned about the lot of the workers (in the goldmine, for instance) might have had more success in achieving their goals by sticking with a proven leader like Ratu Mara who had over the years helped to improve the lot of the workers rather than joining hands with a new labour aristocracy.

Jacqueline Leckie, however, describes the attempt to discredit the Fiji Labour Party because of its domination by the ‘labour aristocracy’. She argues that “such analyses fail to take into account the advances some public sector unions have made for members who do comprise a large proportion of the workforce” (Leckie,

1988, p.166). While she is right in pointing out that the unions have done a lot to benefit their members it was also true that the majority of the blue collar workers were against politicizing the union movement.

Bavadra's Contradictions!

Apart from 'elitism' and 'opportunism' the newly formed Fiji Labour Party also revealed other problems. Naidu noticed several contradictions in Dr. Timoci Bavadra's speech accepting the leadership of the party as well as in the draft FLP constitution. He gives as an example FLP's support for nationally-owned enterprises by private interests ("currently amongst the most exploitative") which contradicted its goals for an equitable society (Naidu, 1987, p.225).

Bavadra entered into a coalition with the NFP ignoring the wishes of the rank and file of the party. On getting elected as Prime Minister one of the first decisions that Bavadra made was to appoint a USP lecturer as his permanent secretary. The civil servants protested, but Bavadra ignored their protest.

Bavadra had earlier described the NFP leaders as "self-serving characters" (Naidu, 1987, p.224). Now he justified the coalition with the NFP on the basis that the two parties shared a common objective, "to get rid of the Alliance Government" (Hagan, 1987, p.135). The reason for getting rid of the Alliance government was the allegations of corruption against it which were never substantiated. Moreover, after the election victory, the Alliance member who was considered the most corrupt, Militoni Leweniqila, was wooed by the coalition to be the Speaker. This further raised the question of the extent of the commitment that Bavadra had in rooting out corruption.

Another major platform of the Labour Party was multiracialism. It claimed to want to get away from ethnic politics which had become prevalent in the country. But by forming a coalition with the predominantly Indian NFP, it lost most of its

Fijian support and thus forfeited its claim to multiracialism. One scholar noted that the most important test for the FLP in respect of its multiracialism would be the 1987 general elections (Hagan, 1987, p.135). The FLP failed the test by polling below ten per cent of the Fijian votes which was less than the Indian votes (15 per cent) that the Alliance Party got in the same election.

David Robie calls the FLP "Fiji's first *real* multicultural political party" (1989, p.213 - his emphasis). There is some truth in this claim as from the beginning it was multiracial unlike the Alliance and the Federation Parties, which went into coalitions with ethnic parties to make them multiracial. In contrast, the Fiji Labour Party emerged as a multiracial party, but soon lost its multiracial image by joining with a predominantly ethnic party. So the Labour-NFP coalition of 1987 became a predominantly Indian one, with a Fijian leader who was seen by many as just a figurehead.

Bavadra also did other things which were against the wishes of the majority of the party members. Although an assurance was given that policies would be determined at the delegates' conferences, in reality they were decided by the National Council and its smaller Management Board. Labour's leaders also ignored suggestions that branches have a say in the selection of candidates (Robertson and Tamanisau, 1988, p.40).

Many of the branches established during the next one and a half years "never functioned as the constitution stipulated The first annual conference did not receive remits; instead it acted as a platform for disseminating new policy initiatives which the wider body then endorsed, thus contradicting the founding conference's explicit declaration that policy be determined by the delegates' conference To our knowledge the draft constitution has never been re-written, nor amendments endorsed by a delegates' conference" (Robertson and Tamanisau, 1988, p.40).

FLP also abandoned (or modified) some of its policies when it went into a coalition so much so that there was no longer any difference between the FLP and the NFP. This meant that there was no difference between the Alliance and the Coalition as there was no difference between the Alliance and the NFP as has been pointed out by scholars (Lal, 1986, p.95; Robertson and Tamanisau, 1988, p.22). [Lal also points out that the FLP policies were almost the same as the NFPs in the 1982 general elections. He gives this as a re-assurance that there was no threat to Fiji from the policies of the coalition.]

Even the 9 per cent Fijian support that the Coalition got in the 1987 general election would not have been sufficient for it to win the election. It was the swing from the Alliance of the general electors, especially in the Suva area, that contributed to the coalition's narrow victory. The actual numbers of general electoral votes were small but the margin of victory of the Coalition over the Alliance in four of these national seats ranged from 500 to 939 (Hagan, 1987, p.133). So it was the Indian and general elector votes that won the elections for the Coalition rather than the Fijian votes. Moreover, though the coalition won more seats, the Alliance had received more votes on the whole.

At the end of April, 1987, when there were protest marches by those who were against the coalition government, "Bavadra warned Fijians in a national radio broadcast not to allow a 'disgruntled few' to sabotage the country" (Robie, 1989, p.216). Ironically, Bavadra was also leading a disgruntled few Fijians and General Electors as he went into an opportunistic coalition with the predominantly Indian NFP. So Robie's claim that Bavadra "had greater credibility than the man he ousted" (Robie, 1989, p.215) cannot be substantiated. For the indigenous community was still in the minority and majority rule worked against them when parties were organized on ethnic lines.

Not only was an overwhelming majority of Fijians against the FLP; but as mentioned earlier, the coalition also had not polled the majority of the votes cast.

Alliance had polled 49.5 per cent votes while the coalition had only 47.1 per cent (Fraenkel, 2000, p.105). So Bavadra was in fact providing token leadership to the majority of Indians and a few disgruntled Fijians and General Electors.

Moreover, many of the Fijians who had voted for the coalition, perhaps with the hope that it would provide a strong opposition, seemed to have been shocked by its win and withdrew support for the new government. An example was that the leaders of the two teachers' unions played a leading role in the formation of the Fiji Labour Party. Both FTA and FTU were represented in the Parliament and in the cabinet of the Bavadra government. Despite that FTA responded to rank and file pressure after the military coups and withdrew affiliation from FTUC in 1987 (Hince, 1991, pp.22-25).

According to Robie, Ratu Mara "became increasingly autocratic, aloof and unresponsive to his people" (1989, p.208). This also seems to have been true of Bavadra during his short stint at leadership. Bavadra started acting in an autocratic manner in forming the coalition and not consulting the views of the branches when making important policy decisions. He was guilty of not following procedures in other respects also. His appointment of Sutherland as his private secretary was a case in point. The civil servants objected but Bavadra refused to budge (Bain, 1989, p.14).

Was Bavadra naive or was he a selfish, power hungry person who did not care a hoot for the country or its people but had his eyes set on becoming the Prime Minister at all cost? It is difficult to believe the latter because even people who were strongly opposed to the FLP - for example, Deryck Scarr - do not see him as power hungry and selfish. So the only alternative seems to believe Peter Thomson that his "naivety was breathtaking" (Thomson, 1999, p.64). (Perhaps the truth came somewhere in-between.)

After the overthrow of his government, Bavadra became very ill and two years later, in 1989, he died. For a while, his widow, Adi Kuini, became the leader of the FLP. After a while she left Fiji and Mahendra Chaudhry became the new leader. Soon the coalition with the NFP broke up. After the coups of 1987 cane farmers were virtually leaderless as most of the Indian leaders had moved away from Fiji at least temporarily. Chaudhry was able to muster the support of the sugarcane farmers through the National Farmers Union which had been largely inactive until then. When elections were held in 1992, as mentioned earlier (see Chapter 5) the NFP received a shock, as it lost many of the Indian seats to the FLP which won almost as many seats as the NFP.

To win back Indian support, the NFP encouraged the formation of a rival farmers' union, the Fiji Sugar Cane Growers' Association (see Chapter 5). Both the political parties had neglected the cane growers in the 1980s but in the 1990s the politicians once again realized their importance as voters. Two years later, when elections were held in 1994, the NFP was able to win back many of the seats it had lost earlier to the FLP.

Rather than putting up a united front to win back the rights that the Indians had lost through the 1990 constitution, the Indian leaders were concentrating on consolidating their own positions. After 1987 FLP became a predominantly Indian party, though the core support that it had from ethnic Fijians still remained. It also continued to follow policies which were broad rather than communal based, which was the reason for its outstanding success in the elections in 1999 when democracy was fully restored in the country.

The Fiji Labour Party-led People's Coalition won overwhelmingly in that election while the NFP and Rabuka-led SVT suffered greatly (NFP was almost wiped out as it failed to win a single seat). According to one scholar it was due to their following moderate policies as they [the NFP and SVT] were "outflanked by more extremist parties" (Lal, 1999). This conclusion is wrong because the party that

won the most Fijian seats was the Adi Kuini- led Fijian Association Party (FAP) which did not advocate any extremist policies (while Indians overwhelmingly voted for the FLP). On the contrary, the nationalists did not gain much support. FAP later joined the People's Coalition to form the multiparty government. Another scholar sees the defeat of the SVT as the result of its "failure to improve conditions for indigenous Fijians" (Palmer, 2005, p.212) which seems to be the real reason for its rejection by ethnic Fijians.

After the 2000 crisis, though the FLP once again became a predominantly Indian party it still followed policies which have relevance for the whole population rather than for any particular community.

Ethnicity still plays a major role in politics in Fiji today as the general elections of May, 2006 have proved beyond question with indigenous Fijians voting for the SDL party under Laisenia Qarase and the Indo-Fijians voting for the FLP. It may be argued that the Indo-Fijians voted for the FLP which is not communal in its policies rather than for the Indian NFP which was completely rejected by the voters. This was because the NFP has no proven leaders while the FLP has an experienced leader in Mahendra Chaudhry. Although many Indians were wary of Chaudhry's style of leadership they perhaps decided to stick with him because probably they see him as a committed leader who is willing to endure personal suffering for the cause he champions.

It is also significant that the new multiracial National Alliance Party under Ratu Epeli Ganilau was rejected by both ethnic Fijians and Indo-Fijians. This shows that it may be a long time before ethnicity can take a back seat enabling the people of Fiji to begin to focus on policies of the parties and the ability and dedication of the candidates while electing their leaders.

Chapter 7

Leadership for Preserving Fiji Fijian

Scholars who have written about governing multiethnic countries invariably talk about the importance of leadership. ‘Consociationalism’, which is recommended by Lijphart as the best form of government for such countries, involves co-operation between leaders of various ethnic groups for the good of the country. This requires a lot of give and take. Futa Helu believes that for democracy to work in small Pacific countries, leaders have to abide by the principles of Socrates rather than following the Sophists. Socrates believed leaders should work for the good of the country unlike Sophists who believed only in having personal power. Michael Goldsmith sees having a ‘thoughtful’ opposition rather than a ‘hectoring’ one as important if the Westminster system is to succeed in the Pacific. That again stresses the importance of leadership as it requires the opposition to co-operate with the government when it comes to issues that are for the benefit of the nation.

In the 1960s, when Fiji became self governing, fortunately Fiji enjoyed enlightened leadership from the leaders of both the major ethnic groups. Ratu Mara and A. D. Patel were both prepared to “subordinate their narrow, sectarian interests to the interests of the country as a whole” (Watters, 1969, p.269). The reorganization of the Fijian Association in the 1960s, which was initially formed in 1956 to safeguard Fijian interests under the leadership of the chiefs, showed Ratu Mara’s willingness to accommodate other ethnic groups while Patel made attempts to reach across to the Fijians and always accepted the special rights of the Fijian people as the autochthonous community.

With Patel’s death, however, the NFP degenerated from the ‘thoughtful’ opposition that it was to a ‘confrontational’ one. The party he (Patel) founded and led to look after the welfare of the exploited people of all ethnic groups in the country slowly turned into an ethnic Indian party because it no longer had a clear ideology. This marked the real beginning of ethnic politics. This also meant that

the NFP could no longer continue as the effective opposition that it was and it slowly became reduced to a nominal one.

This chapter argues that leadership has played a major role in Fiji's rise and fall (in a wide range of areas which include politics, economy, and race-relations) during the decades under review. I begin by looking at indigenous Fijian leadership in this period, its aims and how successful it was in achieving them. While on the whole the ethnic Fijian leadership during this period had been positive, there had been some lapses which affected the whole nation. I then look at ethnic Indian leadership and how initially it was difficult to provide leadership to the whole community because of the divisions among the Indians until A.D. Patel emerged as a leader of national stature. After Patel, leadership again became problematic as most of those who succeeded him lacked his broad vision. My conclusion is that leadership (or its lack) was a major contributor to the crises that Fiji faced in its recent history.

The Major Aim of Fijian Leadership

In the colonial days the major concern of the indigenous Fijian people was ensuring that Fiji was preserved as a Fijian country (Mara, 1997, p.62). This was because there was a fear lurking in their minds that it might become a "Little India of the Pacific" as one writer had predicted (Coulter, 1942). From the 1940s, because of the growing Indian population which overtook the Fijian population, this fear became acute. The Fijian people left to their leaders, mainly the chiefs, the task of keeping Fiji Fijian. At the same time the new leaders who were emerging from among the Fijian commoners articulated these concerns more openly. Two of the most vocal were Rauama Vunivalu and Semesa Sikivou who both often brought out these issues in the Legislative Council.

Fijians often discussed these 'problems' in their villages (Manoa, 1979). This was the reason for their reluctance in even having multiracial schools because they

feared that that would lead to the loss of Fijian culture as expressed by Sikivou and Vunivalu in 1959 (Legislative Council Debates, 19 June, 1959, pp.279 & 282; see also Gaunder, 1999, p.120). This also made them hesitant about independence, especially if it meant democracy on the principle of one person, one vote.

At the time of independence many Fijians wanted the country to be handed back to the Fijian chiefs who had ceded it to Great Britain in 1874 rather than having a parliamentary democracy with rights for everyone, with the majority being in control of the government (see Chapter 1). Dr. Timoci Bavadra, who used to be the Assistant Director of Primary and Preventive Health Services in 1985, and later became the Prime Minister in the short-lived NFP/FLP coalition government of 1987, had come across similar concerns among the ordinary Fijian people even after independence and they were reluctant to practise family planning for fear that the disparity in numbers between the two major races would work to their disadvantage when they faced the Indian ‘threat’ (*Daily Post*, 25 July, 1992).

By 1963 Ratu Mara had become “the undisputed leader of the Fijians” because of “his intellectual ability” (Norton, 2002, pp.142-143). He was the most “progressive” among the Fijian leaders and the colonial administration found him important as a “moderating force” (Norton, 2002, pp.142-143). He was not the most popular among the Fijian people, and other leading chiefs did not always agree with him “because of his conciliatory attitude to the Indian leaders” (Norton, 2002, p.142). But because he was a paramount chief the Fijians commoners did not question him and accepted his decisions, because it was against the Fijian tradition to question the chiefs or go against their decisions (see Ravuvu, 1983, p.7).

The colonial officials found the senior Fijian leaders, who were mainly the high chiefs, more open to change than ordinary Fijians. Ratu Mara and his fellow chiefs who became the national leaders at independence persuaded their people to accept democracy with equal rights for everyone. The Fijian chiefs were prepared

“for the sake of Fiji’s stability and economic advancement” to share power with other ethnic groups “but not to relinquish it or to subordinate themselves to the will of others” (Ali, 1978, p.153). The other Fijian paramount chiefs, while they were not happy with some of Ratu Mara’s multiracial policies, still were prepared to give him a free reign because they knew that he would never do anything that compromised Fijian rights or marginalized the Fijian people in any way.

Rejecting Patel’s call for a common electoral roll, Ratu Mara had made the views of the Fijian people clear just before the start of self-government. Fijians were very proud of their culture, and if they abandoned some of their culture, it would be to adopt the best of western culture, Ratu Mara said. Condemning Patel’s constant criticism of the Europeans, he said: “Remove the ‘buffer’ as it were of European culture in Fiji and there will be conflagration because we will have to come to a decision which culture dominates in the country - will it be a Fijian culture or an Indian culture. Until we agree to a compromise to all these cultures there will be no peace in this country”, Ratu Mara warned (Legislative Council Debates, 16 December, 1965, p.662).

A major priority of the Alliance Party under Ratu Mara which was in power at the time of independence was, therefore, making the country integrated with a common identity and no major disparity in educational or economic achievements between the two major groups. As long as there was a disparity, there was the threat of Fijians becoming marginalized and the country becoming a “Little India of the Pacific”.

The Fijian leaders, including Ratu Mara, were not going to let that happen. On the contrary, they would stop it at all cost as their main concern was to see that Fiji remained Fijian. The Fijians were not only concerned about their land rights and security in the country. They were equally concerned about the ethos of the country which they wanted to remain Fijian. The question was one of identity, Little India of the South Pacific or Fiji – “should Fiji promote a Fijian image or an

Indian image?” (Scarr, 1988, p.117). This was a point the Indian leaders had to understand and accept. The disparity in numbers was closing in with higher migration and lower birth rate of the Indians. So one of the major tasks for leaders of the country at independence was working to eliminate the educational and economic disparities that existed at that time and building a nation with a distinct Fiji identity.

From Paramount Chiefs to National Leaders

In pre-colonial days leadership among the indigenous Fijians was mainly determined by strength of arms. After European contact the vital question was who had access to firearms. The coastal villages were the ones that had this advantage. So some of the coastal villages like Bau became very powerful and soon most of the other tribes accepted its rule though there was still some resistance from the hill tribes in the interior of Viti Levu.

After cession, the colonial government decided to formalize the rule of the chiefs in the villages by establishing a Council of Chiefs and bringing the chiefs from different areas together to meet and work together under the colonial administration. At the outset this ‘indirect rule’ under the village chiefs was set in place by the British colonial government which also emphasized from the beginning the division between chiefs and commoners. The administration dealt with the Fijians through their chiefs.

Soon western education became more important than anything else for acquiring leadership qualities. The colonial government made provisions for educating the sons of chiefs so they could take up positions in the colonial service to help to administer the Fijian people. They did not consider it necessary to educate the commoners so high schools were not established in Fiji for ethnic Fijians other than the Queen Victoria School (QVS) which was opened for the education of the

sons of chiefs. After that many of the young chiefs were sent abroad to the United Kingdom, Australia and New Zealand for further studies.

Those sons of chiefs who demonstrated ability in providing leadership to their people in the modern setting became prominent. Ratu Sir Lala Sukuna was the most distinguished of them all as he excelled himself academically as well as in the army (French Foreign Legion). He was able to hold his own with the colonial administrators while at the same time retaining his control over his own people. By the time Ratu Sukuna retired from public life, there were a few young chiefs who were groomed to take over from him.

At the time of independence, ‘the Big Four’ chiefs, as they were popularly known, dominated national politics. They were Ratu Edward Cakobau, Ratu George Cakobau, Ratu Penaia Ganilau and Ratu Mara (all of whom were later knighted). They could speak with authority for the Fijian people because Fijians from every corner of the nation accepted their leadership unquestioningly and Indians also looked up to them as leaders of the nation. There was no one of comparable stature among the Indians after the death of A. D. Patel. As Ratu Joni Madraiwiwi noted, “together [the Big Four] assured the good governance of the Fijian people and the other citizens of Fiji for a considerable period. They were assisted by well-educated non-chiefly persons in their leadership” (2004).

Maintaining the Fijian Ethos/Safeguarding the Fijian Heritage

Simione Durutalo has rightly pointed out that it was “only a certain category of chiefs who mortgaged away our future by signing the so called Deed of Cession” (1983, p.12). But in 1970, most of the ordinary Fijian people seemed to have been united in their desire that Britain give back the country to the chiefs, rather than it becoming a multiracial democracy (LC Debates, 18 June, 1970, p.242). Similarly in 1968 the Fijian commoners were united in their anger against the Indian leaders for attacking their chiefs and it was acknowledged (even by the Indian leaders)

that the chiefs played an important role in containing ethnic tensions and averting conflict (see Chapter 1).

In 1977 it was the ordinary Fijians who supported Butadroka and his ideology of 'Fiji for the Fijians' and elected him to Parliament in the first general elections that year. When they realized the consequences of their actions (that it made the Indian dominated NFP win by default) a few months later in the next general elections they threw their support solidly behind the Alliance Party which was led by the Fijian chiefs. In 1982, the Fijian commoners en masse rejected attempts by the foreign media (the Australian Four Corners Programme, in particular) to influence the results of the general elections and gave a clear mandate to Ratu Mara (see Chapter 6).

In 1987 again many of the Fijians who had earlier supported the Fiji Labour Party withdrew their support as soon as it entered into a coalition, before the election, with the predominantly Indian NFP (see Chapter 6). The Fijian people in general rejoiced at Rabuka's overthrow of the elected government. It was not just the eastern Fijians or the Taukei supporters but the majority of Fijians from all the provinces. The chiefs and the commoners were one in their wish that Fiji remain predominantly Fijian. So long as the politics of ethnicity prevailed, this was only possible if there was a Fijian-dominated government.

Martha Kaplan has noted that village Fijians linked Fijian paramountcy with chiefly leadership. During her field work in Fiji she worked with Fijians whose ancestors were deported in the colonial period both by British officials and by chiefly Fijian officials. "Yet most nowadays are far more willing to cede leadership of the modern state to the descendants of those colonial chiefs than to consider any commonality of experience with the descendants of the indentured Indians" (Kaplan, 1988, p.109).

A lot of criticism was also directed at the chiefs who acquired power after independence. There was a reason for this predominance of the chiefs which was that most of the educated Fijians at that time were chiefs. This was the direct

result of colonial policy which believed in educating only the sons of chiefs. So there were no facilities for the higher education of ordinary Fijian children while the sons of chiefs were sent abroad.

David Robie has noted that “power was not intentionally handed over to the partnership of [Fijian] chiefs and general electors in the Alliance” at independence though “this group became an oligarchy” (Robie, 1989, p.208). The chiefs taking charge after independence was more the direct result of the education policy followed by the colonial government than they (Fijian chiefs) trying to preserve old hierarchies (see Norton, 2002, p.143).

During most of the colonial period, the Europeans dominated in business and industry and they were also leading in professions like law. Soon Indians started replacing the Europeans in most of these areas as the Indians gave high priority to education and made sacrifices to educate their children against several odds (see Chapter 3). Besides there was the Gujarati community which had come as free migrants mainly to trade and who already had small businesses. They started competing with the Europeans in business, and soon began replacing them, especially in the retail sector. Fijians meanwhile lagged behind in education and in business.

The Role of Education in Fostering Leadership

With the establishment of the University of the South Pacific, tertiary education became available to all Fijian students who qualified. A new generation of educated Fijians was emerging who came from all the provinces and included both chiefs and commoners. However, USP failed to produce a new generation of leaders who were able to think clearly about issues facing the nation. The most important question facing the country was reconciling Fijian and Indian aspirations to bring about genuine integration. Ratu Mara was the only leader who had considered this problem seriously and in the early years talked about it and had policies for achieving the goal. Unfortunately, others like Butadroka and to some extent the NFP leaders started pulling in the opposite direction.

It was also not true that the Fijian chiefs did not want any change so that they could hold on to power. On the other hand, the Fijian commoners did not want democracy but it was the chiefs who persuaded them to accept it with rights for everyone (see Chapter 1). What the chiefs were working towards was a gradual change so that they could preserve the major aspects of their culture rather than being overwhelmed by the other cultures present in the country. Like Sir Geoffrey Henry of the Cook Islands, they seemed to have believed that “if we facilitate peaceful change, we make violent revolution unnecessary” (quoted in vom Busch, Crocombe et al, 1994, p.1).

Unlike the colonial government, the Alliance government under the chiefs did not deny Fijian commoners educational opportunities in order to subjugate them. On the contrary all Fijian students who qualified to enter university were given scholarships to pursue their tertiary education. This was an attempt to elevate them all to a higher level not to suppress them. Unfortunately USP failed to produce any national leaders, Fijian or non- Fijian, who could address the issues facing the nation.

Butodroka often accused Ratu Mara of developing his home province of Lau at the expense of other provinces, especially Rewa (see Chapter 2). Bavadra and his colleagues in the Labour Party embarked on a similar line of attack. Brij Lal noted that at the FLP’s first annual convention in 1986, Bavadra had set the theme (Lal, 1988, p.53). For Bavadra and his colleagues in the Labour Party, the difference between the Alliance and Labour was not just class, but the difference between the western provinces and the eastern provinces. They complained that while the western districts were the main producers of wealth for the country the eastern chiefs were ruling.

This again had to do with education. The highly educated chiefs were all from the east, though it is not clear what the reason for this was. One reason perhaps was that the Provincial School Western was closed during the Second World War and was not reopened. It had also been suggested to me that schools such as, QVS,

Ratu Kadavulevu School (RKS) and Adi Cakobau School (ACS) were all established in the east (during the colonial days) and this also had an effect on the education of the people from the west not going for higher education. This does not seem to be a plausible explanation as these schools were all boarding schools and western chiefs also attended these schools.

For example, Ratu Mara and Ratu Iloilo (the current President and Tui Vuda, one of the highest chiefs from the west) were contemporaries at QVS. It is not clear why the western chiefs did not distinguish themselves in education although the closure of the Provincial School Western may have had some effect as the provincial schools normally prepared the students for QVS.

As for the claim that the government was pouring money into the eastern provinces at the expense of the west, this was far from the truth. In the early years of the Alliance rule most of the major developments were in the west (see Chapter 2).

Bavadra could have been excused for highlighting the regional differences if the western Fijians had been really suffering under the Alliance rule and there was discrimination practised against them. But the evidence showed that the western provinces were in no way relegated to a subordinate position. So creating divisions between the eastern and western Fijians was in no way justified.

The coalition also accused the Alliance government of corruption. The example they gave was unequal regional development in education. They alleged that Lau received \$1.3 million over three years for its 14,000 people while Ba province received \$400,000 for its 59,000 Fijians. Besides, they claimed, most monies went to Mara's village of Tubou and surrounding areas. The Ministry of Fijian Affairs quickly denied the allegation, claiming that scholarship awards, half of the sum involved, were always based on merit (Robertson, 1988, p.49).

Lakeba had an early start in western education with both the Methodist and Roman Catholic missionaries landing there first. As mentioned earlier (Chapter 2)

Lau Provincial School was one of the earliest provincial schools to be established (the only one to have English as the medium of instruction) and in the early years it had an Oxford scholar, A.M. Hocart, as its headmaster (see Chapter 2). It is not clear if this early start had given the province an advantage over other provinces when it came to educational achievement. In independent Fiji many of the educated Fijians hailed from Lau. Deryck Scarr noted that the Lau Provincial Council represented probably the best educated Fijians in the country (1988, p.112).

So instead of trying to understand the historical reasons behind the prominence of Lau and trying to raise other provinces to that level, Bavadra, with encouragement from his ideologues, tried to bring Lau down. Bavadra's scholarly advisers based at USP, many of them expatriate, seemed to have had limited understanding of local realities.

Many of the academics at USP, both local and expatriate, took an active interest in Fiji's local politics. They should have been able to conclude that at least from 1977 the Westminster system had not been working well for Fiji as ethnicity became more important than policies for the political parties. Surely the academics should have realized the dangers such a situation would lead the country into.

Some Indo-Fijian scholars sounded a note of warning against the continuation of ethnic politics. But no Fijian scholar, however, spoke about these issues dispassionately from a Fijian point of view. Professor Ravuvu was the foremost among those who took an anti-Labour stand but he failed to objectively talk of Fijian fears and perceptions, by giving the reasons behind them and examining their validity, and suggesting what should be done to bring about genuine multiracialism.

Fijian Leadership Lapses

The majority of Fijian people, including the high chiefs, did not agree with Ratu Mara's policy of multiracialism. The only other high chief who had a similar outlook and was happy to give equal rights to the Indians was Ratu Sir Edward Cakobau (see Lal, 1986, p.27). After Ratu Edward's death in 1973, although no one openly raised any objections to the policies followed by the Prime Minister, they were not wholly behind him. This seemed to have been the reason for no high chief speaking against Butadroka or rebuking him when he started his attack on Ratu Mara and the Indians to whom he gave equal rights in the country.

If the chiefs had been united in their condemnation of Butadroka he would have been soon silenced as the chiefly system was still very strong and Butadroka was a traditional Fijian. The others did not speak against Butadroka because they seemed to have shared his anti-Indian sentiments. The only other chiefly leader who seemed to have supported multiracialism was Adi Losalini Dovi who always spoke in favour of these policies in Parliament, especially multiracial education (see Chapter 3).

The first mistake made by the chiefly leaders was in not putting up a united front against Butadroka and attacking his policies which were not in the best interests of the young nation. Ratu Sir George Cakobau, in particular, failed to silence Butadroka when the latter dragged the former into the controversy by saying that Ratu Mara was overriding Ratu George in implementing policies which worked against the Fijians and benefited the Indians (see Chapter 2). This was a very costly lapse because not condemning Butadroka when he started his attack on Ratu Mara led to the erosion of Fijian culture. In Fijian culture a chief is not questioned or criticized let alone attacked as Butadroka did.

Apisai Tora noted (with regret?) in Parliament Butadroka's attack on Ratu Mara and rightly predicted that it was a sign of things to come. Chiefly system was still very strong and Butadroka could have been easily made to toe the line. Since the problem was not nipped in the bud a few years later others like Rabuka followed

suit and Butadroka's Fijian Nationalist Party even called for the abolition of the chiefly system. After 1987 Fijian culture became so eroded that it lost its uniqueness.

Soon the difference of opinion between Ratu George and Ratu Mara led to greater problems that affected the whole country as was seen in the appointment of the new chief justice in the late 1970s. Ratu Mara as Prime Minister was in charge of localization. When suitable local people were available for positions held by expatriates, the posts were slowly localized. The Prime Minister had assured that localization would be done with sensitivity (Legislative Council Debates, 25 February, 1970, pp.52-53).

So when Ratu Mara identified a suitable local person for the post of the Chief Justice, he made the 'mistake' of asking the expatriate Chief Justice how he felt about retiring and making way for a local person. Whatever the real reason for his taking offence was, the Chief Justice gave a curt reply that he came under the Governor General and not the Prime Minister. It was most unlikely that Ratu Mara intended to override Ratu George or interfere with the judiciary. However, the Chief Justice went to the press about it. When Ratu George came to know what had happened he was also offended that Ratu Mara had by passed him.

If the Chief Justice had hoped that by creating a rift between the Governor General and the Prime Minister, he could retain his post, he was mistaken. Ratu George, to assert his authority, refused to appoint the person Ratu Mara had in mind (see also Kumar, Vijendra 2005). The Prime Minister had identified the former Speaker of Parliament, Ron Kermode, a man of proven integrity and acceptable to all sides, as the ideal choice for the first local Chief Justice. Instead Ratu George made the grave mistake of appointing Timoci Tuivaga, the only Fijian judge, but a very junior person, far from suitable for the post at that time as he had little experience. It was a very poor and unwise choice and set the precedent, especially from 1987, for having Fijians with little experience and ability for important posts, with ethnicity becoming the major consideration.

Ratu Joni Madraiwiwi noted in 2004 that in their respective desire to assert themselves, “it is apparent that the chiefly relations among the chiefs of Fiji have frayed”. This incident, more than anything else perhaps, marked the beginning of that ‘fraying’ of that relationship.

Ratu Penaia and the Army

Ratu Penaia Ganilau, who became the Governor General after Ratu George, was considered more able by the colonial administration which had made him the first (or second, after Ratu Sukuna?) local to be the Secretary for Fijian Affairs. Ratu Penaia, however, made an even greater mistake by interfering in the internal matters of the army. According to Deryck Scarr, Ratu Penaia “struck some observers as rather simple, for all his years in politics. Once elevated to Government House he had reportedly been inclined to attempt to interfere in civilian appointments as well as military matters in a manner not constitutional” (Scarr, 1988, p.93).

According to another writer, Ganilau “personally backed [Rabuka’s] promotion through the ranks because the colonel was also from Cakaudrove province” (Robie, 1989, p.227). After the coup, the “Governor General not only granted Rabuka an amnesty for treason (which carries the death penalty) but also promoted him to full colonel. Rabuka was later promoted to brigadier after his second coup on 25 September. A year after the coup he became major-general” (Robie, 1989, p.229).

As Governor General, Ratu Penaia was the Commander in Chief of the army, but it was only an honorary position. So it was unethical and imprudent to override the decisions of the Commander of the Army. This Ratu Penaia did when the Commander, Ratu Epeli Nailatikau, wanted to court martial Sitiveni Rabuka for disobeying orders (Scarr, 1988, pp.66 & 93; Robie, 1989, p.227). The Governor General supported Rabuka and by doing that he was affecting the discipline of the army. Later Rabuka felt confident to dismiss the commander of the army and another officer who was superior to him and to overthrow the elected government

and arrest and imprison the entire cabinet. He felt secure in his knowledge that the Governor General was there to protect him. A few months later, however, he dismissed the Governor General himself and appointed his own government, declaring Fiji a republic.

When it came to Fijian rights and perceptions, Ratu George in some ways proved more effective at enforcing those rights, and thereby restraining violent reactions from the indigenous Fijians, than Ratu Penaia. In 1977, when the Alliance Party lost the general election, Ratu George appointed Ratu Mara as the leader of a minority government as he believed that was the best course for Fiji.

Similarly, Ratu Penaia would have been justified in dismissing Dr. Bavadra's coalition government (after the first few weeks) when it became clear that the majority of Fijians were not happy with the outcome. It had not won a single Fijian communal seat and had polled less than ten per cent of the ethnic Fijian votes. As noted earlier, it had also "secured only a minority of overall vote", 47.1 per cent compared to 49.5 per cent for the Alliance Party (Fraenkel, 2000, pp.104-105). So the Governor General would have been justified if he had decided to consider alternatives such as a Government of National Unity with himself as the Chairman and then called for another election after a few months to get a clearer verdict from the electorate.

As long as the chiefs put on a united front and gave guidance to the Fijian people, with the interest of the nation as paramount, things moved smoothly. Things started going wrong not only for the ethnic Fijians but for the whole country when differences between the high chiefs and their personal preferences influenced their decisions at the national level. I have, however, not come across any evidence of the high chiefs trying to entrench their rule, establishing themselves as an 'oligarchy' and denying rights to the commoners as some scholars have claimed.

Durutalo, for example, claimed that the indigenous ruling class was acting "in the interests of its own class rule" (1983, p.12). He rightly pointed out that the indigenous people were discouraged from thinking for themselves. This was true

during the colonial rule when they were denied opportunities for higher education. But from 1970 onwards people of Fiji, of all walks of life, enjoyed all the freedoms.

Fijian people in particular had been making their own decisions as was evident from their voting pattern in the general elections. If one agrees with Bain that the “essence of democracy is choice” (Bain, 1989, p.215) then Fijians had been enjoying democracy ever since independence. They supported Butadroka in the 1970s when they felt that Ratu Mara’s multiracial policies were benefiting the Indians more than the Fijians. Similarly, Rabuka was adored by the Fijian people for what he did to re-establish Fijian supremacy in 1987. Ten years later, when he took a more moderate stand and revised the racist constitution, his popularity declined and in the next general elections, in 1999, the majority withdrew their support for his chiefly sponsored SVT party. Another reason for their withdrawing support was that they realized that Rabuka was acting in his personal interests which took priority over national interests.

Fijians had the right to choose their government though some scholars like Stephanie Lawson may claim that there was no democracy because there was no change of government. But surely if the majority does not want a change when free elections are held then they should be allowed to have the government of their choice. In Fiji even the opposition admitted that the elections were free. Satendra Nandan, a deposed minister in the Bavadra government, wrote: “During elections no one was imprisoned By and large, these elections were free and fair ... the political process wasn’t corrupted” (2000, p.13)

Ratu Mara and his Critics

Ratu Mara is much maligned³³ by academics, in particular, local and expatriate. But even his greatest critics are not able to diminish the greatness of his achievements. The writers are also forced to admit, however grudgingly, his

³³ He is even accused of murder (see Connew, 2001, p.73)

contribution (Bain³⁴, Harder, Robie). Ratu Mara's greatest challenge was "assuaging Fijian fears as well as addressing Indo-Fijian concerns ... Mara successfully balanced the competing demands of Fiji's ethnic communities for much of his tenure in power", Ratu Joni Madraiwiwi noted. His reputation declined in recent years for various reasons. "Young Fijians imbued with the arrogance of youth and the certainties of contemporary realities, consider he did not do enough to address Fijian failings in education, commerce and politics", Ratu Joni said (fijilive, 16 May, 2003).

Ratu Mara was also behind the formation of the South Pacific Forum in 1971 and "he argued strongly that the islands needed trade before aid if they were to survive economically" (Robie, 1989, p.208). Robie also acknowledged the important role Ratu Mara played "in establishing the region's role and reputation abroad through his eloquence" (Robie, 1989, p.208).

Ratu Mara succeeded in bringing Fijians and Indians closer together through the policies of his government. This I would say was the reason that even after the military coups there was very little violence. This, when contrasted with 1968, when the country was on the verge of violence though there was no threat to Fijian rights at that time (see Chapter 1), gives an indication of how the country had changed in less than 20 years.

Another reason that contained violence was that Ratu Mara made sure that firearms were kept out of civilian hands as Christopher Harder³⁵ had acknowledged. So people did not have access to firearms to start an armed

³⁴ Bain noted: "The 1970 Constitution embraces all the conceptual protections for human rights and dignity that can be conceived to prevent man doing evil unto man, and it is entirely proper for Ratu Mara to take credit for being one of its principal intellectual architects" (1988, p.134).

³⁵ Harder wrote: "Whatever other criticisms had been leveled against the 17-year-old Government of Ratu Sir Kamisese Mara, who had been Prime Minister since independence, until now they had done a good job keeping firearms out of Fiji In particular they were tough on visiting yachties They were given no option – hand the weapons over for storage in bond until they left or head back out to sea immediately. The authorities had always feared what might happen in such a volatile society if people were able to arm themselves with anything more than sticks, stones and cane knives" (1988, pp.159-160).

revolution, though after the 1987 coups there was an attempt to import firearms into the country, which was detected before they reached Fiji. It is, however, not clear who was behind that attempt.

All in all the Fijian chiefly leadership, which was mainly in control of the nation from 1970 to 1987, looked after the interests of all the people of the country to a great extent and kept the country stable and peaceful. The country also made all round progress. Economists seem to agree that Fiji had a strong economy until 1987. Australian National University economist Dr. Satish Chand said that Fiji was a lead economy in the region until the 1987 coup while Dr. Biman Prasad, Head of School of Economics at the University of the South Pacific said that the country's political instability since 1987 had not allowed it to grow at the rate that it should have. According to Dr. Prasad the civil service was 'uprooted' after the coups in 1987 leading to the 'culture of mediocrity' that set in across the civil service while mismanagement and bad governance became more pronounced (*Fiji Times*, 23 November, 2006).

Dr Satish Chand has also said that the country's leaders since 1987 failed to exploit the advantages in steering Fiji to greater heights. These comments were made in response to an Australian Treasury Department report which said Fiji was among the Pacific countries who had squandered \$US75million (\$F126.9million) since independence through poor governance.

The country had Fijian commoners leading the governments from 1992 to 2006 (except for 12 months from May 1999 to May 2000). The main reason for the lack of economic progress during this period seems to have been that these non-chiefly leaders who have been in charge of the country (Rabuka and Qarase, in particular) have been following nationalist policies emphasising indigenous Fijian hegemony. Such policies do not inspire confidence in the investors who are mainly non-Fijians. It remains to be seen if the investor confidence would return under the interim government the country has now.

From Manilal to Mahendra Chaudhry: Leadership Woes of the Fiji Indians

Unlike the indigenous Fijians who had their hereditary chiefs, leadership had always been problematic for the Fiji Indians, as Professor Subramani has observed (1995, p.179). This was partly because the Indians who came to Fiji did not form a homogeneous community. They came from different parts of the sub-continent; spoke different languages, followed different religions and had different customs. While the majority had come as indentured labourers, there were others who had come as free migrants, to farm and to trade.

Most of the people who came during the indenture period were illiterate, which caused problems as challenging their European employers required an understanding of the laws and their legal rights, so there were very few among them with the potential to provide leadership to the community. The few literate ones like Totaram Sanadhyay (1991) and Sadhu Kuppuswami tried to do whatever they could to alleviate the suffering of their fellow migrants in a country far away from their homeland.

On the other hand, some other time-expired labourers who were literate were used by the colonial administration for their own ends, promoting them as Indian leaders when they did not really represent the community. The best example was Badri Maharaj who was nominated to the Legislative Council in 1916 to represent the Indians. He had no popular support and “was little more than a puppet of the colonial government” (Narsey, 1979, p.122).

The few who could read and write, looked up to India for leadership especially to Mahatma Gandhi, who sent C.F. Andrews in 1914 while the indenture system was still on. Andrews successfully sought to end the system with the last batch of indentured labourers coming to Fiji in 1916 on a five year contract which ended in 1920. Even after that the colonial government did not take any measures to settle the Indians as permanent migrants which most of them had chosen to be. Instead

the administration left it to the CSR to do whatever it could with the time-expired Indian labourers.

C. F. Andrews visited Fiji for a second time in 1917, while the indenture system was in the process of being abolished and again in 1936 and he gave sound advice to the Indian settlers. He stressed the paramountcy of Fijian interests and advised Indians to remember that “Fiji belonged to the Fijians, and they were there as guests” (Gillion, 1977 p.154). He also emphasized the importance of multiracial schools for building bridges of understanding between the Fijian and Indian communities. Swami Avinashananda, who came from India after Andrews, held similar views and described the Fijians as ‘the Brahmins of Fiji’ (Gillion, 1977, p. 15). In India, Brahmins were not only the highest caste but they were the spiritual leaders as well, so perhaps Swamiji meant that the Fijians should be respected and their interests should take precedence.

Other Indian leaders also stressed the paramountcy of Fijian interests. S. B. Patel, a lawyer from India who settled down in Fiji, and who offered behind-the-scene leadership to the Indian community, said in 1929: “We do not wish or desire to dominate. We do not want to see the Fijian suffer. His interest in the colony is paramount and we want to maintain it”; while Kunzru, who visited Fiji in 1938 spoke of “the duty of the Indians to work for the advancement of the Fijians” (Gillion, pp.136 & 174).

It was difficult for anyone to assume leadership of the whole group because of the divisions among the Indians, so it led to the emergence of sectional leaders who formed their own cultural and religious organizations. The indentured labourers lacked the necessary skills and knowledge in providing leadership to even their communal groups, so most of them looked to India again for help. It goes, however, to their great credit that even with their limited abilities and resources, they were able to establish schools for their children and places of worship for their communities.

Manilal Doctor, a lawyer from Baroda who came through Mauritius, could be considered as the first leader of the whole Indian community in Fiji rather than of just one section. Totaram Sanadhyay described his arrival in Suva in 1912 as a ‘seminal’ event. What was more, the Fijians were almost as enthusiastic about his arrival in the colony and organised a grand reception for him (Sanadhyay, 1991). Unfortunately, because of some of his personal failings (see Gillion, 1977, p.21), the administrators found it easy to find fault with him and arrange for his deportation. He was held responsible for the 1920 strike by the Indian workers. However, during his stay of a few years, he was able to provide leadership to the Indian community by fighting for their rights. In doing so he challenged the European vested interests and the colonial administration.

Sadhu Bhashisht Muni was the next person to come from India and assume leadership of the Indians. This time it was the internal divisions among the Indians, which helped the administration to get rid of him. The Sadhu (Sadhu is a title given to someone who leads an ascetic life without formally renouncing the world) was a Sanatani (an orthodox Hindu) and the Sanatanis believed that the Arya Samajis (the reformed Hindus) had a hand in urging the government to send him away. He was blamed by the authorities for the 1921 strike and was also deported.

Pandit Vishnu Deo was the most important Indian leader in the 1930s. Unlike the other leaders so far, he was born in Fiji. Earlier he had dissipated his energies in trying to ridicule the Sanatanis (the orthodox Hindus) which impeded his progress as a leader (Gillion, 1977, p.110). He later became the first Fiji-born Indian leader to be accepted by the whole Indian community as their leader. Vishnu Deo was first and foremost an Arya Samaji (reformed Hindu) but Ahmed Ali had noted that he (Deo) “was pundit to all Indians irrespective of religion; the community as a whole accepted his position as the leader” (Ali, 1979, p.82).

Sadhu Kuppuswami, who came as an indentured labourer from South India, played an important role in providing leadership though he never became a leader of the Indian community as a whole. When he established the Then India Sanmarga Ikya Sangam (the South Indian organisation) he showed remarkable foresight in inviting the monks of the Ramakrishna Mission to come to Fiji to guide the activities of the Sangam. Swami Avinashananda came initially, and during his stay of about a year, helped in giving the Sangam direction and getting it registered.

Swami Rudrananda, who came after Swami Avinashananda's return to India, remained in Fiji for the rest of his life fighting to improve the living standards of the downtrodden in the country. Swami Rudrananda, who was sent by the Ramakrishna Mission as a resident monk to help the Sangam, became an important leader, not only of the South Indians but of the whole sugar cane farming community (which consisted of the majority of the Indians at that time). Swamiji worked tirelessly for several decades to improve the standard of life of the farmers. He also had a major role in getting A. D. Patel, a Gujarati lawyer practising in Fiji, who had been made the legal adviser of the Sangam, involved in the struggle to get a better deal for the sugarcane farmers of Fiji.

Patel's Fight to Stop Exploitation

A. D. Patel was the most outstanding among all the leaders Indians in Fiji ever had. He remained the most important leader of the Indians for several decades, until his death in 1969 just before independence. He was a lawyer, like Manilal, who had come to Fiji in 1928. He soon earned a name as an eloquent speaker and a brilliant advocate but he did not make a great impact as a politician (he was defeated at the polls twice) until after he joined hands with Swami Rudrananda and started working for the betterment of the sugarcane farmers. Together they formed the farmers union, the Maha Sangh.

According to one scholar, the more prominent leaders from the outset tended to use the union movement for their own personal advancement (Naidu, 1987, p.218). This was not true of Patel as even when farmers' leaders urged him to help the sugarcane farmers in their struggle Patel refused because he did not feel any commitment to them (Lal, 1997, p.59). It was only when Swami Rudrananda persuaded him to join forces with him that Patel was finally drawn in. This involvement undoubtedly helped him in his political career but he gave a lot of his time and energy for the cause so it was not one sided.

Naidu had further claimed that "these unions did little to improve the conditions of the peasantry" (Naidu, 1987, p.218). This was not true of the farmers' unions before independence. It was Patel's efforts on their behalf that won the cane farmers a better deal resulting in the withdrawal of the CSR Company and the establishment of the Fiji Sugar Corporation. If farmers' lot did not still improve it was perhaps because the outside exploiters were replaced by exploiters drawn from their own ranks as Wadan Narsey had suggested (Narsey, 1979, p.136; see also Chapter 5).

At first the Maha Sangh was supported only by the South Indian farmers while the North Indian farmers were members of the Kisan Sangh. Slowly, as Patel's popularity grew, farmers from all communities started supporting the Maha Sangh. It later became the backbone of the Federation Party (later known as the National Federation Party). Patel thus became the founder of the first political party in Fiji and remained its leader till his death. During his leadership, although the party was a predominantly Indian one in composition, its policies were not meant for any particular community. He was working to improve the lives of the poor people (mainly the farmers) and he was fighting against exploitation of any kind by anyone, be it the colonial government, the CSR Company or the Fijian establishment.

Patel was fearless and highly principled and even his opponents appreciated his sincerity and commitment to his ideals. Patel saw the Fijian commoners also as

victims of exploitation and genuinely wanted to help them as well just as he wanted to help the downtrodden Fiji Indians. At the time of his death he seemed to have been formulating his policies for helping the workers at the goldmine who were predominantly Fijian who were victims of exploitation by the Australian Emperor Gold Mining Company (see Chapter 4). Patel had already started co-operating with Ratu Mara from the time the membership system was introduced in 1964 paving the way for self-government. After the by-elections of 1968, this co-operation on issues of benefit to the nation strengthened (see Chapter 1). Unfortunately Patel died a year later and “the Indian Fijians never recovered from the death of their leader” (Nandan, 2000, p.136). I would say that Fiji as a nation suffered because so far it has not had an Opposition Leader to match Patel. In the Westminster system that Fiji followed the importance of the opposition could not be overlooked as the Fiji experience has proven.

Siddiq Koya, who succeeded Patel as the leader of the Opposition National Federation Party, continued this co-operation leading to the smooth transition to independence in 1970. Unfortunately, Koya was not consistent or dedicated as Patel used to be and these failings in the new leader became the bane of the Indian community and the country itself, leading to ethnic tensions and ultimately ethnic conflict.

Ratu Mara accused Patel of arrogance in 1965 saying he refused to learn about the Fijian chiefly system. If Patel was arrogant, his arrogance was directed against the European vested interests and the Fijian chiefs who he thought were exploiting the Fijian commoners. In 1968 when he realized how the ordinary Fijian people felt about the chiefly system, Patel’s attitude to the chiefs changed and he made a genuine effort at reconciliation (see Chapter 1).

In paying tribute to Patel at his death, Ratu Mara noted: “As the first Leader of the Opposition, he set a standard of dignity, of eloquence and of courtesy in the finest traditions of Parliamentary form of Government which we have inherited” (LC

Debates, 21 November, 1969). Ratu Mara further noted that there were deep divisions between Patel and himself, between the Government members and the Opposition under Patel. But all of them respected his sincerity and the devotion to the cause for which he fought.

Koya who succeeded Patel also stressed how dignified Patel was and how he did not let anything lower the dignity of the House. He further noted how Patel helped to emancipate a large number of people in Fiji and as counsel for cane farmers often accepted a brief without fee. Koya concluded that “with his abilities, knowledge and quality he could have amassed a fortune and lived a leisurely life, oblivious of the manner in which people around him were treated, lived and died or alternatively turned into an acquiescent conformer and won the favours of those in power for extra prestige and benefits. He, however, chose the painful path of sincere, dedicated service” (Legislative Council Debates, 21 November, 1969).

It was Patel’s sincerity in his dedicated work to make a difference for the better for the ordinary people of Fiji of all races that set him apart as a great leader. A proof of his sincerity was his willingness to admit when he had made a mistake and make amends (see Chapter 1). So in 1968, when he realized that he was wrong in challenging the Fijian chiefly system, he started a dialogue with Ratu Mara to resolve their differences and work towards self government. Ratu Mara noted that it was Patel’s assurance that the Fijian ownership of land, whether it was native or crown, would not be questioned that made Fijian leaders agree to self government.

When Patel demanded common roll his opponents accepted that he was sincere although mistaken in believing that that would bring about integration. Patel believed that the real “criterion for election should be ability, not one’s cultural background” (Lal, 1997, p.50) but he failed to realize that the majority did not follow that principle when casting votes and electing their representatives.

One scholar who seemed to be critical of Patel (though he does not mention him by name) is Vijay Mishra. He accuses the ‘expatriate’ Indian politicians of exploiting the Fiji Indians (1990, pp.609-610). This was far from the truth, especially if he was referring to A.D. Patel or his brother R.D. Patel. Patel, although not Fiji-born, did a lot to help the Fiji Indians and he was successful in stopping exploitation rather than exploiting anyone.

Change of Policy under Koya

When Koya became the leader, from the beginning he displayed a lack of dedication and sincerity that he acknowledged in Patel. As mentioned earlier, many times his absence from Parliament had been noted and commented on by the government side but it continued. The most conspicuous example was in 1975, when Butadroka introduced his pivotal motion calling for the repatriation of Indians from Fiji (see Chapter 6). The leader of the NFP which the majority of the Indians supported was in the Supreme Court fighting a case!

Unlike Patel, who had clear policies for the party, under Koya the party lacked a coherent policy. One reason for this was that soon after Patel’s death the country had achieved the major things Patel had been fighting for which were an end to colonialism and exploitation. The country gained independence and the farmers received a better deal with the CSR withdrawing from Fiji.

What Koya failed to appreciate was that independence meant different problems, and one of the most important was bringing the two major races together. Although in his early years as the leader Koya gave the impression that he was sincere in his concern for improving the position of the Fijians in the country, especially in improving their educational achievement, when it came to implementing these policies he was not supportive. An example was the preferential policy for admission to the USP (see Chapter 3).

Then there was the question of the freehold land owned by the CSR which reverted to crown land after the departure of the Company. Patel had assured that the ownership of land, be it crown land or native land, would not be questioned at all but the opposition under Koya advocated the sale of the CSR land to sitting tenants (see Chapter 2). There was also the question of common roll. Although Koya kept up the demand for this system of election, he never stood for a national seat which was the closest thing to a common roll seat.

He also lowered the dignity of the Parliament by indulging in personal attacks (e.g. his attacks on Len Usher, Stinson, Falvey etc.). Perhaps the worst example was on 27 June, 1974 when he produced two nooses in Parliament and asked two Indian members on the government side to hang themselves. The combined result of all this was that rather than promoting multiracialism he generated conflict and unrest. Soon more divisions emerged. The one redeeming feature of his leadership, however, was that although he often said that as Leader of the Opposition he was the alternate Prime Minister, he did not ever try to deliberately get rid of the Fijian-dominated Alliance government, as his successor, Jai Ram Reddy, did. His hesitancy in assuming leadership of the country when his party narrowly won the first general elections in 1977 (see Chapter 5) was also to his credit as it showed an understanding of Fijian feelings and the need to keep the ethnic balance.

NFP under Reddy

Unlike Patel, Koya and Reddy were both Fiji-born, but they were less sensitive to Fijian feelings than Patel was. Gillion had noted in 1977: "But the time was past when visitors from India, however well meaning, could have any say in the affairs of Fiji. Indians would have to make their own terms with the other peoples of Fiji, and they would have to make them not on the basis of patronage of the Fijians, but on terms of equality with them, at best, and in the realization that they could not supplant the Europeans" (Gillion, 1977, p.174).

Two years later, in 1979, at the time of the centenary celebrations of the arrival of the first indentured labourers in Fiji, the Indian High Commissioner, Mrs. Soonu Kochar, made the mistake of not heeding this sound advice (that visitors from India should keep out of Fiji politics) when she publicly made an impassioned plea to the Indian leaders to unite, stopping their infighting. Ratu Mara soon wanted her out of Fiji as he thought she was interfering in Fiji's domestic affairs.

In 1979 there was also Banarsidas Chaturvedi, who had been "pursuing a lonely concern for the interests of Indians abroad" (Gillion, 1977, p.114). He offered his advice to the Fiji Indians but it was very different from Mrs. Kochar's as he was more concerned about relationship between Fijians and Indians. Chaturvedi asked the Fiji Indians to respect Fijians and live in harmony with them (Girmit Centenary Souvenir Magazine, 1979).

Chaturvedi also suggested to India's Foreign Minister, Atal Behari Vajpai, who later became the Prime Minister, that the Indian government should donate a sum of Rs. 6-7 'lakhs' to build a centre for racial integration in Fiji. This centre, Chaturvedi believed, should be managed not by Indians alone, but by all the races, which would bring about better relations between different races in Fiji (Girmit Souvenir Magazine, 1979). Following this suggestion, when the Indian Prime Minister, Mrs. Indira Gandhi, visited Fiji in 1981, she donated the money and laid the foundation for the 'Girmit Centre', which was built on land donated by the Fiji Government. Unfortunately, from the beginning it failed to serve the purpose for which it was intended – bringing about national integration.

The Leader of the Opposition, Jai Ram Reddy, must have read Chaturvedi's message as his (Reddy's) name came second after the Chairman Ratu Sir Penaia Ganilau's in the editorial committee of the Souvenir Magazine. He, however, showed no sign of having taken that message seriously. His call to the Indians in Fiji on that historic occasion was a reminder of the achievements of the

‘girmitiyas’ and an exhortation to be strong in facing the future. There was nothing in his message about fostering harmonious relationships with other communities which was the challenge facing the Fiji Indians at that time

When Reddy became the leader of the Opposition in 1977 after the second general elections that year, the Indian community had high expectations from him as he had made statements that gave the impression that he would be putting an end to the politics of confrontation and would co-operate with Fijian leaders and bring back the harmony that existed earlier (see Chapter 6). In other words, the expectation was that under him the opposition would become a ‘thoughtful’ opposition once again. Instead what Reddy did was to reduce the NFP to a party similar to the Alliance in ideology (see Lal, 1986, p.95). Besides he succeeded in heightening racial tensions in 1982 by his lack of appreciation of Fijian sensitivities and thereby antagonising the Fijian community.

If Fijian leadership lapses led to the destruction of the unique Fijian culture with the chiefly system as its ‘cultural capital’, Indian leadership lapses led to the destruction of the prospect of a ‘multiracial’ nation with equal rights for everyone. Materially, the Indian community was the major loser here and this was caused by the limited vision of the Fiji Indian leaders who could only think in terms of their community rather than looking at the needs of the nation, though they paid lip service to nationalism.

The Task of Leading a Nation

Reddy noted in 1980 that “after ten years of independence, no nationalism exists, only communalism” (quoted in Premdas, 1993, p.22). This was said probably as a criticism of the Alliance government. Ironically, Reddy and his predecessor, Siddiq Koya, contributed immensely to this retrograde state of affairs.

In the 1972 and 1977 general elections, the NFP made education the main policy platform leading to the Indians withdrawing their support for the Alliance

government (see chapter 3). Patel looked at education “in terms of *education* not in terms of votes” (emphasis in the original) and “had (or at least gave the impression of having) no political axes to grind” (former Director of Education, quoted in Lal, 1997, p.168). Under Koya, the opposition looked at education only from the view of gaining a few extra votes and not in terms of what was good for the nation.

So in 1977 the NFP made the USP quota system the main election issue. This led to the Indians withdrawing their support for the multiracial Alliance Party from 1977. Earlier 25 per cent of Indians had supported the Alliance (in some constituencies over 35 per cent – Lal, 1986, p.90) but now they saw the Alliance as a party that was against the Indians and for Fijians only as it followed education policies that affected the Indian students adversely (see Chapter 3).

NFP leadership also showed lack of principles in colluding with the Nationalists in 1977 in the national seats using “various strategies of mutual support” (Alley, 1977, p.288) to defeat the Alliance Party (see also Chapter 5). A *Fiji Times* editorial commented on “the curious political marriage between the FNP and the NFP in some constituencies” and concluded that “politics makes strange bedfellows” (4 April, 1977). This perhaps was the most thoughtless action of the NFP leadership as it colluded with a party that was openly against the Indians but wanted to help the NFP win a few extra seats to defeat the Alliance to prove their (the Nationalists’) claim that Fijian rights were under threat.

The NFP leadership seemed to have no understanding of what the results of their actions would be as they seemed quite taken aback by their victory at the polls. It is difficult to describe the NFP leadership, whether they were immature, short-sighted or plain idiotic. It is not clear if everyone agreed with Koya’s tactics as the divisions within the NFP had resurfaced soon after the elections splitting the party into two factions.

Koya proved that he had no aims or strategies except indulging in personal attacks. According to R. S. Milne, Koya's outbursts "almost suggested personal instability" (1975, p.426). Milne noted that when Koya co-operated with Ratu Mara he played the part of a statesman. His co-operation with Ratu Mara was, however, different from the consociationalism practised by Patel. Under Patel the opposition scrutinized every policy and supported those that they believed were for the good of the country and severely criticized what they thought was detrimental to the country. Koya praised Ratu Mara in Parliament and went with him on some of his trips abroad but actual support for the major policies was not forthcoming.

When Reddy became the leader he rejected Ratu Mara's proposal for a government of national unity which was based on the consociational model because he found the proposal vague (see Rabuka, 2000, p.10). Soon, as Premdas noted, "ethnic conflict resolution ... moved away from consociation and sharing towards victory and dominance" (1993, p.23).

In 1965, Ratu Penaia had said there was a simple solution to the problems in Fiji which was "for the Indian political leaders to change their attitude" because "[s]peeches made publicly, either in this House or outside this House ... [do] not help to unite the feelings of people" (LC Debates, 16 December, 1965, p.657). Later, Patel, who was the Leader of the Opposition at that time, changed his attitude because he knew there was merit in Ratu Penaia's warning that "[h]ad the United Kingdom decided to introduce common roll [in Fiji] ... there would have been an uprising to show the dissatisfaction of the people at the decision" (LC Debates, 16 December, 1965, p.658). Patel realized, after the by-elections of 1968, that it was not an empty threat and he took a more conciliatory attitude which brought about a sudden transformation in the political atmosphere in the country.

Ratu Penaia had continued: “It is a man-made problem that we are facing and so long as we are sensible I am quite sure that a satisfactory solution can be found to make everybody live happily in Fiji” (LC Debates, 16 December, 1965, p.658). Indian leaders after Patel chose not to be sensible because of their limited vision. Professor Subramani, noted in 1995: “Lack of broad-minded, principled leadership [among the Indians of Fiji] has been a problem in the past; the future looks even more bleak” (1995, p.206).

NFP’s concern “to promote the interests of Indo-Fijians ... contributed immensely to ethnic polarization and needless to say added fuel to the Fijian nationalist sentiment”, a Fijian scholar, Steven Ratuva noted (1993, p.59). Indian leaders, however, were blind to the consequences of their actions on the whole Indo-Fijian community. In the 1980s they single-mindedly pursued a policy aimed at getting rid of Ratu Mara and the Alliance government.

Ratu Mara was the most moderate among the Fijian leaders (Norton, 2002, p.143) so it would have been in the best interests of the Indian community for its leaders to co-operate with him rather than trying to defeat his government. What the Indian leaders of independent Fiji failed to realize was that they not only had a friend in Ratu Mara but perhaps, more importantly, he was the only friend the Indians of Fiji had among the indigenous leaders after the death of Ratu Sir Edward Cakobau in 1973. Moreover, there were not many in the whole indigenous Fijian community who were happy to give equal rights to the Indians. The greatest mistake of Jai Ram Reddy as a leader was the concerted effort he made to get rid of Ratu Mara. Rather than having policies for the NFP to convince the voters that it could form an alternative government, which would be as good as, if not better than, the Alliance government, Reddy entered into coalitions of expediency with splinter Fijian parties to defeat Ratu Mara and his government (see Chapter 6).

The greatest failure of NFP leadership after Patel was its inability to promote policies different from that of the government and present itself as a viable alternative government. So it could not provide the electorate with a choice except an ethnic choice. Therefore it could not compete for office in Fiji's racially volatile situation. This was all the more regrettable because the NFP in 1966 (when the Westminster system started in the country) began as a strong but 'thoughtful' opposition and continued in that vein (for several years) before turning 'confrontational' and slowly becoming reduced to an ethnic party. In the mid 1980s it became defunct for all practical purposes necessitating the emergence of the Fiji Labour Party.

Chaudhry, who became the first ethnic Indian Prime Minister in 1999, was similar to Patel in that he did not think in terms of Indians; had a clear ideology; and wanted to make a difference by improving the lot of the common man/woman. His major problem was his style of leadership, which was often described as 'arrogant' and 'dictatorial' (Connew, 2001, p.76; Field and Baba, 2005, p.61,67). Teresia Teaiwa was less critical and described Chaudhry's leadership style as 'abrasive' (2001, p.31). The main difference between Patel and Chaudhry was that the latter lacked the humility of the former who had the moral courage to admit that he had made a mistake when he realized it as in 1968. This lack of humility made Chaudhry refuse to listen to any advice from anyone. Here he was a great contrast to Patel who had two close advisers in Swami Rudrananda, and S. B. Patel, whose views he valued (see, for example, Mara, 1997, p.74).

Chaudhry would have done well if he had sought the advice and guidance of Ratu Mara. Ratu Mara was not only the President and elder statesman of the country but he had also helped Chaudhry become the Prime Minister by advising the Fijian parliamentarians like Adi Kuini and Poseci Bune to accept Chaudhry as the Prime Minister. Chaudhry himself acknowledged Ratu Mara's help on assuming leadership of the country. So it would have been to Chaudhry's benefit to seek and

follow Ratu Mara's advice on all issues of importance. His failure to do this was a costly mistake.

Ratu Mara could have given him sound advice how to steer clear of issues that were sensitive to Fijians such as land and constitution. If Chaudhry had done that it would not have raised the fear in the Fijian mind that he was trying to turn Fiji into a 'Little India of the Pacific'. Instead of avoiding issues that would cause controversy Chaudhry played right into the hands of his opponents who were waiting for any opportunity to discredit him. In the final analysis it was leadership failures again which brought about the fall of his People's Coalition government in 2000.

Leadership again featured as the main issue in the May 2006 general elections which again saw the ethnic polarisation of voters. The majority of the ethnic Fijians voted for the SDL party under Qarase while the majority of the Indians voted for the FLP under Chaudhry. An academic, Wadan Narsey, has pointed out that the ethnic Fijians supported Qarase overwhelmingly probably because they wanted leadership to remain with ethnic Fijians (*Fiji Times*, 19 May, 2006) rather than it going to Chaudhry, the Indo-Fijian. Leadership seems to have been the main issue with both the major ethnic groups.

Unfortunately, the political situation today has gone back to that of 1968 (before independence) when parties were communally divided even when their ideologies were different. The FLP and SDL have different policies but each is overwhelmingly supported by one ethnic group. The 1997 constitution seems to have done little to integrate the different ethnic groups. The multiparty government enforced by the 1997 constitution has not worked so far in its aim of bringing racial harmony in the country. One could say that so far it has fared worse than the 1970 constitution which at least worked for 17 years and brought the two major ethnic groups closer together, especially in the early years when the

opposition was an effective one. The problems only started when the opposition changed from a 'thoughtful' opposition to a 'confrontational', ethnic one.

Conclusion

‘Fiji, the way the world should be’³⁶, proudly proclaimed the people of Fiji from 1970 to 1987 and it was not an empty slogan either. In an imperfect world, Fiji seemed to come close to perfection.

“The people of Fiji, when they went abroad, could raise their heads with pride, and not without a bit of justified smugness. Outsiders spent a lot of time trying to explain how Fiji, a country that should have been in racial strife wasn’t; why a big bang racial conflagration had not taken place” (McCall, 1987, p.45).

My conclusion is that what made the difference was the ideology of ‘multiracialism’ in which Ratu Mara and other Fijian chiefly and non-chiefly leaders played an important role in formulating and promulgating. The Indo-Fijian leaders in the Alliance and the NFP provided the vital support by accepting these policies and the NFP by being a ‘thoughtful’ opposition made the Westminster system work effectively. In the early years of independence, therefore, Fiji seemed to move towards ‘multiracialism’ but soon it became clear that most other leaders, other than Ratu Mara, were only paying lip service to the ideology and did not have any genuine commitment to it.

³⁶ Fiji Visitors Bureau used to advertise Fiji as ‘the way the world should be’.

Ratu Mara's dream of a united Fiji still remained elusive after 30 years because of:

- (a) the failure of schools to lay the foundation for such a society with the continuation of the voluntary system in education which fostered communalism and hindered integration;
- (b) the opportunistic labour aristocracy which politicized the union movement and concentrated its efforts on toppling the Alliance government;
- (c) the failure of the political parties, especially the NFP, to continue to provide effective opposition, which affected the performance of the government (as the political parties became more and more ethnically based);
- (d) leadership failures, most of all, as other leaders (both Fijian and Indo-Fijian) failed to support Ratu Mara's efforts in nation building while maintaining cultural heterogeneity. Indian and Fijian leadership failures prevented the country becoming a heterogeneous nation. Indian leadership failures stood in the way of the implementation of government policies aimed at integration while Fijian leadership failures contributed to the destructive Fijian nationalism.

The combined effect of all this was that the country failed to develop a distinct Fiji identity and become integrated. The result is that "the people of Fiji cannot go about with the pride that they had before, for their land too has demonstrated its imperfections" (McCall, 1987, p.46).

It was not only the pride that they had in their country as a model of ethnic harmony that the people of Fiji lost. Many people were displaced after the political problems of 1987 and 2000 and suffered in many ways. Talking of the crisis of 2000, Ratu Joni Madraiwiwi has noted: “It was a fearful time. The passage of years does not diminish the sense of dread and despair that one experienced. Under the pretext of asserting control, some Fijians took the law into their own hands to steal, loot and pillage” (Madraiwiwi, 2004).

In spite of that, four years later, in 2004, Ratu Joni found ethnic relations in Fiji better than ever before. He noted several factors which accounted for this ironic phenomenon. First and foremost was the “acceptance by the Indian community of the primacy given [to] indigenous interests” (Madraiwiwi, 2004).

When Patel was the NFP leader, he always emphasized the need to give priority to Fijian rights. After his death, his successor, S. M. Koya, also agreed with this principle which led to a smooth transition to independence. After independence the government of Ratu Mara, as part of its ‘multiracial’ policies, tried to eliminate inequalities between communities by using positive discrimination in education which the opposition attacked mainly at election times. The opposition’s failure to explain and make its followers understand that such policies were necessary for achieving equity and building a harmonious nation made the political upheavals of 1987 seem inevitable.

Before 1987 the people of Fiji enjoyed peace and tranquility. If the Indian leaders of independent Fiji had explained to their followers the special position of the Fijians as the original settlers, as Patel did, and therefore the need to give priority to Fijian interests, until the country became integrated with a distinct Fiji identity, the people of Fiji would have been spared a great deal of agony. Since that was not done the Indians in Fiji had to learn the hard way through the coups of 1987 and the attempted coup of 2000 which “emphasized the willingness of Fijians to assert their rights where they were believed to be under threat” (Madraiwiwi, 2004). The main difference between the events of 1987 and those of 2000 was that in 1987 the Fijian perception that there was a threat to their rights as the indigenous community was widespread whereas in 2000 it was confined to particular areas like Tailevu where the rebel leader, George Speight, had personal influence.

Therefore I conclude that the major reason for the dream of multiracial harmony in Fiji remaining elusive was the lack of enlightened and statesmanlike leadership. I have identified the reasons for Fiji failing to achieve integration and therefore remaining an ethnically divided society. But the question of how harmonious ethnic relations and a stable democratic government can be achieved in a multiethnic country like Fiji still remains.

John Stuart Mill seems to have been the first scholar to discuss this problem of governing an ethnically divided country in the nineteenth century and he identified a common loyalty to a nation as the most important prerequisite. Fiji lacked this at independence. The government of Ratu Mara had policies for fostering a common national identity and thereby generating a common sense of loyalty to the nation in the youth of Fiji primarily through its schools. The attempts to achieve these failed because of a general lack of interest in some of these policies such as cross-cultural language learning and the lack of will on the part of the government to enforce them without the solid support of the opposition NFP to such measures. The government was hesitant especially because the majority of schools in the country were run by voluntary agencies, many of them Indian.

Sir Arthur Lewis was another scholar in the twentieth century who talked of the problems of governing a multiethnic country. He warned: "The surest way to kill the idea of democracy in a plural society is to adopt the Anglo-American electoral system of first-past-the-post" (quoted in Horowitz, 1991, p.164). Ratu Mara must have been aware of Arthur Lewis' warning because he had quoted Lewis in Parliament in 1970 regarding the dangers that such societies faced, emphasizing the need for moderation (see Chapter 1). So, although Fiji adopted the first-past-the-post system in elections, communal representation was retained with only limited common roll (cross-voting) which was to continue until the country became more integrated. The NFP, while not supporting the policies put forward

by the government for bringing about more integration, started accusing Ratu Mara from mid-1970s of not keeping his word on common roll.

The two leading scholars today who have discussed the question of governing ethnically divided countries and suggested answers to this problem are Arend Lijphart and Donald Horowitz. Lijphart recommends consociationalism. Fiji's 1970 constitution had clear elements of consociationalism. There was elite co-operation as the Prime Minister and the Leader of the Opposition were expected to consult on all important matters. It also gave veto power to the Great Council of Chiefs in issues affecting the ethnic Fijians. It promoted power sharing by allocating equal number of seats in Parliament for the two major ethnic groups.

Horowitz, however, feels that counting on enlightened leadership to take steps to avoid "mutual destruction" as the consociational model does, is not always satisfactory because leaders may not work in a selfless manner, putting the country before their personal interests. He is of the opinion that "without incentives statesmanship will be in short supply" (1991, p.177). He recommends the alternative voting (AV) system as the answer for the amelioration of inter-group conflicts and inducing changes in the behaviour of ethnically based parties.

While Fiji did not have the AV system of elections until 1997, it had a kind of 'electoral engineering' through the cross-voting system where each ethnic group had to seek some support from the others to win the national seats. I have shown

how the opposition NFP leadership, after Patel, did not try to reach across to the other groups and seek their support. The policies of the party concentrated on issues affecting only ethnic Indians so they had no attraction for the other groups. Soon the cross-voting national seats became an extension of the communal seats and thus failed in their objective of bringing about more integration in politics.

The 1997 constitution, on the other hand, followed the AV system rather than the first-past-the-post system of elections. The first elections under this constitution, in 1999, gave an overwhelming majority to the People's Coalition led by the Fiji Labour Party leader, Mahendra Chaudhry, while the NFP was completely wiped out. The NFP/SVT coalition cried foul saying that the Labour Party manipulated the electoral system though the FLP would have won even under the first-past-the-post system. Unfortunately the 1997 constitution also did not bring stability to the country probably because the people of Fiji still did not have a common loyalty to a nation and the People's Coalition government was overthrown in May 2000 after exactly a year in office.

C. J. Lynch was the first to talk about the problems of Westminster type democracy in the Pacific followed by I. F. Helu and Michael Goldsmith. Lynch talked of the importance of consensual-consultative style of the Pacific while Helu finds having selfless leaders imperative for the success of democracy. He suggests that the leaders should follow the Socratic tradition rather than the Sophists; while Goldsmith, who finds the Westminster system of government and opposition

problematic, stresses the importance of having a ‘thoughtful’ opposition. Helu and Goldsmith both seem to emphasize the importance of leadership for the success of democracy in the Pacific.

We have seen that under A.D. Patel Fiji had a ‘thoughtful’ opposition but after his death it degenerated into a ‘confrontational’ one. The question then is how do we make the leaders ‘thoughtful’ and not ‘confrontational’ and be concerned with the good of the nation (following the Socratic principle) rather than giving priority to their self-interest (as the Sophists did)?

Helu suggests that the gaining of power through politics should be balanced by some loss of privilege or natural rights (Helu, 1994, p.325). This suggestion is quite valid when one considers what happened in Fiji from early 1970s to 1987. The NFP opposition would have been able to present itself as a viable alternative government if the leaders of the opposition had had to give up their lucrative law practices and concentrate more on their responsibilities as the alternative prime ministers.

What all this boils down to is the importance of leadership. Hince offers these criteria for assessing a leader. The important questions to ask, he says, are whether the person concerned wanted “personal power” or was he/she doing “community service”; was he/she a “positive force for development or a divisive, destructive agent; a leader of men or manipulator” (Hince, 1991, p.1). In the period I have

looked at (from 1960 to 2000) only two leaders in Fiji, at the national level, seem to come close to passing the test according to these criteria.

The two leaders are Ratu Mara and A.D. Patel. They both seemed to have wanted personal prestige (more than personal power) but they were enlightened enough to understand that what would give them prestige is what they achieve for the community and the nation (and in the case of Ratu Mara, it stretched to the whole region).

Ratu Mara and Patel were similar in many ways, although most would be shocked by this claim because during most of his political career Patel disagreed with Ratu Mara. I say they were similar because they both had a similar national outlook (see Introduction). They looked at the country as a whole and what was best for the country rather than at the needs of any particular community. They were also very proud of their cultures but at the same time respected other cultures.

They also had a similar educational background. They both were educated in England and had great respect for British education and British institutions like democracy and the rule of law. They both were capitalists but they were against exploitation and believed in an egalitarian society. They both were also against colonialism, especially the exploitation of the non-whites by the white colonial powers, which was a common feature of colonialism. The main difference between the two leaders was that while Ratu Mara was against colonialism, he

remained a loyal subject of the British crown, seeing it as an extension of the Fijian chiefly system as most Fijians did, whereas Patel could not see any difference between the British monarchy and British colonialism.

Ratu Mara and Patel had clear policies for their political parties. While formulating these policies they looked at what was good for the country as a whole rather than for just a particular community so the policies they put forward were for the benefit of the people of the country without any ethnic distinctions. They believed in integrating the people of the country.

The methods Ratu Mara and Patel advocated for bringing about integration, however, were different. While Ratu Mara believed in a slow change brought about mainly through education Patel believed integration could only be achieved through a common electoral roll. This is where the difference came between the two leaders though their ultimate aims were similar. They both were positive forces for development rather than destructive agents. So they can be located within the Socratic tradition of leaders.

Unfortunately most who succeeded them were Sophists, who saw politics as just another rung in their career ladder. While concentrating mainly on their personal advancement, hardly any of them did anything major for the benefit of the country and its people, unlike Ratu Mara and Patel, who both achieved a lot for the benefit of the common people.

The Fiji experience proves the important role leaders play in determining the fate of a nation and its people. A country needs enlightened and statesmanlike leaders who put the national interest before their personal ambitions to make democracy work in a small, developing, multiethnic country in the Pacific. How do we produce such leaders is the question that remains. Judging from the example of Fiji, we can conclude that it is a very difficult task.

Helu's suggestion that aspiring leaders should give up some of their other privileges maybe a good starting point. In this connection the appointment of Ratu Joni Madraiwiwi as the Vice President seemed to augur well for Fiji. On his appointment, he gave up his law practice to give undivided attention to his duties as the Vice President although it meant a personal financial loss. On taking office Ratu Joni promised to uphold the dignity of the Great Council of Chiefs and fulfil the wishes of the indigenous Fijians while at the same time protecting the rights of other people living in Fiji (fijilive, 10 January, 2005).

Ratu Joni's appointment generated some optimism that the dream of multiracial harmony in Fiji might not be as elusive as it had appeared from time to time and that Fiji might still become a shining example to the rest of the world in ethnic harmony with the people of Fiji able to hold their heads up once again with justifiable pride.

The 2006 general elections, however, proved that the Fiji population is ethnically polarized as ever. While the majority of the ethnic Fijians wanted a government led by an indigenous Fijian (Laisenia Qarase) the Indo-Fijians gave their support to the FLP led by an Indo-Fijian. The multiracial National Alliance Party was rejected by both the major ethnic groups.

Qarase has invited Chaudhry to form a multiparty government which the latter has accepted. If the multiparty government proves successful there may be stability in the country. The multiparty system, however, stifles opposition.

Besides the country seemed to have taken a backward step and gone back to the situation of the 1960s when it was a plural society replacing the 'multiracialism' that was in dominance in the 1970s and 1980s. This was evident in the ethnic polarization of voters in the 2006 May elections. The political situation now is similar to that of the 1960s when parties were communally divided even when their ideologies were different. The FLP and SDL have different policies but each is overwhelmingly supported by one ethnic group. This was true of the NFP and the Alliance in the 1960s.

The country may remain peaceful and harmonious but it would not be a country where all the ethnic groups enjoy equal rights and status. The country may also become a sanctuary for coup plotters and traitors as Prime Minister Qarase wants to introduce a bill in Parliament that gives amnesty to all those who were behind

the crisis and mutiny of 2000. The future may seem more stable than it has been for a long time but it will be a place where political crimes are condoned judging from the Prime Minister's eagerness to pardon all those who took part in the uprising in 2000. Rabuka can feel relaxed³⁷ even though he is charged with treason, because he has nothing to fear under such a government. In such circumstances, even if there is stability, Fiji can no longer claim to be the way the world should be.

Post Script

In December 2006 the Qarase government was overthrown by Commodore Bainimarama, the Commander of the Fiji Military Forces, who disagreed with Qarase's plans to give amnesty to those who were involved in the 2000 Crisis. The stated aim of the army is to 'clean up' the government of corruption and other problems which affect the interests of the nation as a whole. It remains to be seen if the army will succeed in its aims.

³⁷ Michael Field noted that Rabuka seemed relaxed even though he was charged with treason (see Field, Michael, *fijilive*, 25 May, 2006)

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