

INTRODUCTION

*Through a curious transposition peculiar to our times, it
is innocence that is called on to justify itself.*

Albert Camus

April 2003. Jai Ram Reddy, his wife Chandra, and I drive to their Teidamu farm house in his four-wheel drive to sort out his private papers kept there. Reddy is on his way to the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda in Arusha (Tanzania) as one of its permanent judges, and I would like his papers arranged and stored before he departs. It is a sad, slightly disconcerting drive. Not a free conversationalist even at the happiest of times, Reddy is quiet, forehead furrowed, concentrating on the rough, unmaintained road meandering up to the top. The green tin roof-top house has a slightly haunted, abandoned, look to it. It is at the bottom of a brown, tree-less hill, below which is an unruly, overgrown grove of specially planted mango trees, a fading reminder of the ambitions and dreams of happier, more optimistic times. The house on the twelve acre freehold farm was Reddy's much-loved private retreat from the alienations and asperities of public life, where he relaxed with close friends and family, and savoured the view across the rolling cane fields and dense mangrove forests to the glass-flat waters beyond the Nacilau Point. Once or twice, he had talked about refurbishing the place and retiring there. It is now unlikely.

The papers are in large, bursting cardboard boxes, damp and full of insects, strewn haphazardly across an empty, musty room. We drag them out into the open green patch, one by one. Reddy lights a fire with the aid of some kerosene he has brought from his brother's house where we had

stopped earlier. As the flames splutter to life, we tear open the boxes. Slowly, carefully, we go through the papers. Since I will be their custodian, it has been agreed in advance, the decision about which ones will perish and which ones saved is left to me. This is very unnerving, making judgments about which reminders of a person's life will be saved for posterity and which ones will perish at my hands. I feel strangely like a priest presiding over a funeral ceremony, solemnly witnessing the final goodbye to a life just ended. Reddy is curiously indifferent, businesslike, concentrating on the job at hand, his mind completely preoccupied. A chapter in his life has closed, and he is moving on.

I am horrified when Reddy tells me that this is not the first time he has burned his papers. In 1984, when he resigned from parliament after an altercation with the then Speaker of the House, Tomasi Vakatora, thinking that his political career was over for good, he burned most of his papers, except some special and confidential correspondence on matters of State which are with me now. Gone, just like that, in that bonfire, were draft copies of speeches, newspaper cuttings, jottings, routine correspondence from political supporters, minutes and resolutions of long forgotten meetings. Such a 'criminal' act from a lawyer and a political leader, of all people, is unforgivable. I tell him so. He says nothing; there is nothing he can say.

Erasing the permanent markers of a lived life is nothing alien, I suppose, to those who believe in its inescapable temporariness or its ultimate futility. And most people in Fiji have a pretty dim view of history and the verdict of posterity anyway. When we are gone, we are gone, is how most people view life. Few have much sense of their place in the larger scheme of things; and introspection and solitude have never been among Fiji's favourite pastimes. Onto the fire, the funeral pyre, go papers dealing with the routine operations of Reddy's law practice such as docketts and receipt books, pamphlets and papers from long forgotten foreign conferences, invitations to this social function or that, multiple copies of newspapers with stories by or about Reddy, facsimile correspondence, once so urgent, now

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crumpled and faded beyond legibility. The rest I keep. They are with me, preserved for future researchers.

After several hours in the hot sun, the ‘cremation’ is complete, the fire doused, and we head back to Lautoka, exhausted and covered in soot. As we reach the high point of the Teidamu Hill when the shimmering sea on the Lautoka side comes majestically into view, I ask Reddy an impossibly large and loaded question, not really expecting an answer, trying to create conversation on the slow drive back. ‘How would you sum up your life in politics over the past thirty years?’ ‘It has been a wasted thirty years,’ he replies instantly, without looking at me. ‘I gave up thirty years of my life for nothing,’ he continues, with a palpable trace of disappointment and hurt in his voice. ‘All that sacrifice: for what?’ He meant his political annihilation and the annihilation of his political party, the National Federation Party, at the polls in the 1999 general elections. Reddy lost for the only time in his political career, and his party failed to win a single seat in parliament, falling completely and utterly to a triumphant Fiji Labour Party led by his onetime friend and colleague and now his arch, unforgiving nemesis, Mahendra Pal Chaudhry.

Reddy’s hurt is understandable: his comprehensive rejection by the Indo-Fijian community which he had led as its politically most prominent leader for nearly a generation, through some of the most traumatic times in its history: through coups and constitutional crises, through dangerous periods of threatened racial violence and religious bigotry that aimed unequivocally and unapologetically to deprive his people of their fundamental human rights. Through all these years of friction and division in the Indo-Fijian community that tarnished its image and hobbled its prospects, Reddy was always there, a calm, steady presence; and it was to him, more than to any other leader, that his people turned for advice and guidance and solace in their hour of need and despair, the man, as Peter Thomson, Permanent Secretary to Fiji’s last Governor General, writes, ‘who most clearly articulated Indian interests and on whom the mantle of leadership most comfortably fitted.’¹ Now he was gone for good. His fate epitomizes the tragedy of

modern Fiji. Reddy's colossal defeat and the reasons for it will become clear in due course.

There will be many assessments in the future of Fiji's post-independence years, and there will be contrasting views of Reddy's political role and achievements. Nonetheless, even his most ardent political detractors will surely acknowledge his seminal role, positive or otherwise, in the major political events of Fiji in the last quarter of the twentieth century. Josefata Kamikamica, the founding leader of the Fijian Association Party, summed up the feeling of most people in Fiji when he commented on Reddy's role in the constitutional review process in the 1990s that 'Reddy played a major role in the developments and he will be remembered for that.'² He was often in the eye of the storm, sometimes because duty called, and sometimes because he had no choice but to be there. The community's call had to be heeded, his private reservations or hesitations notwithstanding. Reddy's faults and failings were many, and he readily acknowledges them with a candour that is refreshing, especially in a politician. 'He is frighteningly honest,' the late Hargovind Lodhia, the veteran Nadi politician and NFP parliamentarian, once said to me. It is an assessment echoed by many others as well. 'I am a victim of my own honesty,' Reddy admits in a resigned kind of way. 'I have done and said things I felt.'

Rare among the political leaders of postcolonial Fiji, Jai Ram Reddy demonstrated a singular willingness to change and adapt as the circumstances demanded. With time, he embraced what Henry Fairlie calls the 'patience of politics,' a commitment to an open-ended process rather than to a pre-determined outcome.³ He began his political career like many an Indo-Fijian politician in the cane belts of Fiji, acutely aware of the grievances of his people, their needs and interests, their rightful place in the larger scheme of things, but, like so many of them, only marginally conscious of the aspirations and predicaments of other communities, principally the indigenous Fijians. Pandering to the narrow communal interests of your own people, the more strident the rhetoric the better, was the sure, tried route to political power. Reddy played the game well in the early part of his career,

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surrounded and advised by many like-minded communal politicians and members of the legal profession, who were safe in the cocoon of communal representation and mind-set.

Unlike most, if not all of them, and most Fijian leaders of the time as well with the exception of Sitiveni Rabuka, however, Reddy transcended his limitations and transformed himself over a decade or so from a communal Indo-Fijian politician into a venerable statesman respected and admired, as few others, across the wide spectrum of the country. No one doubted Reddy's commitment to safeguarding the interests and welfare of his own community. His people's absolute faith in his integrity was unquestioned. What was remarkable, from that vantage point, was for Reddy then to understand the doubts, fears and predicaments of the Fijian people as few Indo-Fijian leaders ever had. Fijians were not the enemies of Indians, he said repeatedly throughout the 1990s, echoing the sentiments of AD Patel in the 1960s. It was their history that had kept them apart. He wanted to bridge that gap in a manner broadly acceptable to everybody. 'The issue,' he said, 'is how sentiments of the indigenous people are respected and at the same time the needs of other people living in the country are met.'⁴ To that end, he devoted a substantial part of the latter half of his political career. That was the greatest personal and political accomplishment of his life in politics. Reddy's capacity for empathy and understanding was remarkable. Often, he said, 'it is not a question of whether I am right but whether we are capable of being able to understand and to appreciate the feelings of the members of other communities. What I may perceive to be right may not be so in other people [sic]. We have to break down those barriers so we can achieve this. If you want something changed, you will have to reconcile so that you can accept some of your opponents' proposals and your own proposals, where some will remain and some thrown out.'

Reddy achieved this transformation in thinking in several ways. First, he reached out for advice from a wide range of sources, beyond the conventional domain occupied by lawyers, businessmen, opportunists and hangers-on. It was a closed circle that brooked no dissension and admitted few

‘outsiders.’ Reddy began his career moulded in that way, but changed later. He successfully encouraged younger professionals, who had frequently expressed disdain for the conventional style of politics, to join him in addressing and resolving the problems facing Fiji. He was confident in his own abilities and unafraid of intellectual argument and debate. He reached beyond the legal fraternity and the deeply power conscious party bosses to trade unionists, small businessmen, professional women, academics, and dedicated community workers. And they responded generously, not necessarily to the political party that Reddy headed but to him personally, attracted by his transparent ‘sincerity of purpose,’ as they said. By the late 1990s, Reddy was leading an exceptionally talented team of men and women, arguably the best slate of candidates the Indo-Fijian community has ever seen. After the defeat of the National Federation Party in 1999, when Reddy left, the core disintegrated, and the best and the brightest left for other shores, to the great loss of the Indo-Fijian community and the country, or simply lost interest in public life altogether. The promise of a new beginning was sadly short-lived, like a new-born infant dying without leaving the precincts of its birth place to experience the joy and promise of life outside.

Reddy also showed a remarkable ability to engage with Fijian leaders. He was warmly disposed towards Ratu Sir Penaia Ganilau, Ratu Josaia Tavaqia, Ratu Josefa Iloilo, Ratu Mosese Tuisawau, Ratu William Toganivalu, Koresi Matatolu, Militoni Leweniqila (‘a likeable rogue’), the nationalist lawyers Etuate Tavai and Kelemedi Bulewa (‘with whom I could talk for hours’), for example; even the hard-line Apisai Tora for his personal affability notwithstanding his rabble-rousing nationalist politics (‘I will get courtesy and respect from him. He will not shun me.’) Reddy had genuine affection and respect for Ratu Penaia, ‘an honourable adversary,’ who reciprocated those sentiments through many small gestures of kindness, such as repairing frayed relations between Reddy and some of his Fijian parliamentary colleagues over drinks at the United Club, taking him along on a helicopter tour to hurricane-ravaged Kadavu, telling Sitiveni Rabuka to consult Reddy on important appointments

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despite the absence of the consultative provisions covering the Leader of the Opposition in the 1990 Constitution, acceding to Reddy's request for changes to the terms of reference of various enquiries, keeping the doors of the Government House open to him at all times. Reddy spoke movingly at Ratu Penaia's funeral, meaning every word he spoke. The speech is included in the book.

Reddy's relations with Ratu Sir Kamisese Mara, the preeminent Fijian leader of late 20th century Fiji, were different: always formal, outwardly cordial, but never close.⁵ The two men were too much alike in their essential reserve and public shyness than they were prepared to admit, according to people who knew them both. Ratu Mara, Ratu Joni Madraiwiwi, the Roko Tui Bau and former Vice President and High Court judge, has recalled, was 'reserved, intellectual, generous and quick-tempered.'⁶ Fiji's last colonial governor, Sir Robert Foster, described Mara as a 'moody, shy and solitary man.'⁷ These assessments could just as aptly apply to Jai Ram Reddy. Ratu Mara could not quite fathom Reddy in the way he had assessed Siddiq Koya, for example, though not his predecessor, AD Patel, whom he feared and respected.⁸ He had seen Koya from close quarters throughout the 1960s and early 1970s, and understood the dynamics of the Indian leader's explosive personality. He had a good measure of the man.

Reddy was different. He did not know the Alliance leader. He shared none of Mara's or Koya's understandings and assumptions that underpinned the independence compact. If the constitution permitted it, Reddy saw no reason why he should not compete for the highest office in the land. Mara's inability to 'read' Reddy, to 'frame' him for response, was an important part of the problem.⁹ Mara could never forgive anyone who stood up to him (as Semesa Sikivou found out to his cost) or challenged his authority to rule which he thought was his God-given privilege, along the lines of the Tongan royalty whom he admired deeply.¹⁰ 'His vindictive bouts of rage were legendary,' Peter Thomson has written.¹¹ Reddy privately resented what he thought were Mara's Olympian aloofness and autocratic tendencies, even, or especially, his acts of slight and breaches

of protocol.¹² The Chief and the Indian, so to speak, did not see eye to eye on many issues of public importance, and were wary in private about each other's motives and motivations. Mutual misunderstandings between the two men contributed to problems in the 1970s and 1980s. In private, though, Mara respected Reddy's integrity and honesty. The two were 'beginning to be friendly towards each other,' Mara recalled in 1993, whereas with Mahendra Chaudhry, the other Indo-Fijian leader, 'I could never call each other friends right from the very beginning.' When asked by journalist Joe Nata with whom he would rather work, Chaudhry or Reddy, Mara replied: 'With Reddy without hesitation.'¹³

Reddy's relations with Sitiveni Rabuka were in complete contrast to his relations with Ratu Mara. They were surprisingly open and relaxed, which bore great fruit for the nation.¹⁴ Reddy had not heard of Rabuka before the May 1987 coup. Not many outside the closed army and rugby-loving Fijian circle had either. The Fijian military, a completely Fijian institution, was a mystery to most Indo-Fijians; and most knew little about rugby, the Fijian game either. Reddy first met Rabuka after the September coup at a one-on-one meeting at Battery Hill, the military commander's heavily guarded residence near the parliamentary complex, arranged by a Suva Indo-Fijian lawyer close to the capital's Fijian political elite. Reddy was deeply angry and hurt at the wanton harassment of Coalition supporters taking place throughout the country, and he wanted to see Rabuka in person to convey his feelings to him. He spoke with some passion. The Indo-Fijian community did not deserve to be harassed, he said. If they were to remain, they had to be treated with the respect that all decent law abiding citizens deserved. Rabuka listened patiently. When he mounted a monologue on Fijian grievances to justify the coup, Reddy asked, 'Who do you blame? Why don't you do something about it? Discriminating against Indians is not going to help resolve the problems of the Fijian people.' Rabuka was polite and respectful throughout the exchange when he might have been expected to explode. Reddy left the meeting (and a very large tanoa bowl full of yaqona) somewhat puzzled about his adversary.

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There was more to the man than met the eye, he felt. The atmosphere of that meeting remained with Reddy for a long time.

The two men, one a coup maker and the other its principal target, were chalk and cheese in their training and temperament. Rabuka's erratic pronouncements and frequent flip-flops to duck and weave around the intrigues and machinations within his own ranks in the early 1990s frustrated Reddy greatly, causing much despair and heartache, but there was no personal animosity between the two. They were able, after several false starts and hiccups, to cooperate in the successful review and promulgation of the 1997 Constitution, and even forge a short-lived political coalition that fell to Labour in 1999. Reddy has called Rabuka's leadership of the constitution review process 'masterful,' the work of a true leader of men who demonstrated integrity, sincerity and commitment when it really mattered and when it made a material difference.¹⁵ Without him at the helm of Fijian leadership at the time, the outcome may well have been very different. Rabuka, Reddy said, was 'someone to whom you could turn, to discuss things with, raise issues, very, very, friendly, very, very, open, and you were heard. And had it not been for that kind of relationship we had established I doubt very much that we would have had the review of the kind we did.'¹⁶

Rabuka trusted Reddy to keep his word once it was given. Trust: that is the most essential ingredient in any productive relationship.¹⁷ Rabuka valued Reddy's advice and listened closely to him in committee meetings, Mary Chapman, the Secretary General to Parliament, has recalled. Reddy understood Rabuka's predicament and refused to take advantage of his numerous political misfortunes. Perhaps somewhere deep in his heart he even liked the man for who he was: sometimes misguided, sometimes evasive, a shrewd political animal, but essentially a decent, forgiving, warm-hearted human being. Reddy brought out the best in Rabuka. Had the Rabuka-Reddy political project succeeded, Fiji would almost certainly have been spared much of the agony and trauma it encountered in the years ahead. So while the Chief and the Indian could not connect; the Commoner and the Indian did.

By the late 1990s, Reddy had won the trust, affection even, of the Fijian people (to his enormous cost in the Indo-Fijian community which eyed any hint of political moderation and compromise with deep suspicion), culminating in his historic address to the Great Council of Chiefs in 1997. This was the first time an Indo-Fijian leader had ever addressed the Council. That event is etched deeply in Fiji's collective memory: one of the very best speeches he had ever heard, said American Ambassador to Fiji Don Givertz, adding, for good measure, that he had listened to many great speeches by great orators of history such as Dwight Eisenhower, John F Kennedy, Ronald Reagan and Bill Clinton; New Zealand Foreign Minister Don McKinnon called it a 'masterful performance.' The speech is included in the book. The only exception to the almost universal chorus of approval and praise was Mahendra Chaudhry, who curiously thought the speech lacked dignity.¹⁸

Among Indo-Fijians, Jai Ram Reddy as a political leader is cast in a mould different in significant ways to his distinguished predecessors. AD Patel, the founder of the National Federation Party, which Reddy led for much of his political career, was the greatest leader of the Indo-Fijian community in the pre-independence period. He is, truly, the unheralded father of Fiji's independence movement whose legacy is now sadly disregarded or otherwise dismissed in the officially-authorized versions of modern Fijian history. He died several months before his tireless efforts came to fruition, though in a manner which he would not have approved. Patel was, as Sir Robert Foster accurately told London in his last despatch before independence, 'an intellectual, sincere and dedicated,' whose opponents 'respected some of his qualities no matter how bitterly they disliked his views.'¹⁹ Patel's Achilles heel was his commitment to the Gandhian ideals of politics, it was often said, though precisely why was never spelled out, unless it was a steadfast reluctance to compromise strongly held principles for short-term political gain. Reddy worked with Patel as a young lawyer and learned the finer points of the craft from him, especially the art of courtroom cross examination at which Patel was unmatched and would have shone in any

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jurisdiction, Reddy says. He also owed him his introduction to politics. In some respects, like Patel, Reddy was not in the thrall of the game of politics, its intrinsic challenges and endless fascinations, but what politics could do to bring about progressive social betterment of the people, that is, politics as a means to an end, not an end in itself. Reddy's ethical turn in politics also developed from Patel's Gandhian philosophy and from his spiritual mentor, Swami Rudrananda.

But there was an important difference between the two leaders. Patel spent his entire political life from the late 1920s to the late 1960s struggling against the racially compartmentalized structure of political representation and, beyond that, the foundations of the colonial project itself. He fought for the non-racial common roll system of voting. He believed in the eventual possibility of a non-racial state. But that vision essentially vanished when Patel died on the eve of independence. The Independence Constitution entrenched racial representation and race increasingly permeated the deepest sinews of public institutions and the public consciousness. It came in time to be viewed as a natural state of affairs. Any effort to solicit support from another ethnic group was invariably viewed as an attempt to divide that community, which often heightened tension and exacerbated latent ethnic hostilities (as in 1982). Reddy accepted that race would continue to be important in Fiji politics and sought to work around or rather with it, instead of dismissing it as 'false consciousness.' So, instead of seeking power through open competition, Reddy opted for power sharing through proportional representation in government. This would be his major contribution to the theory of political governance in Fiji.

Patel's successor and Reddy's immediate predecessor, Siddiq Moidin Koya, was as different from Patel as he was from Reddy. Rotund and with the ubiquitous, eye-catching bow-tie ever present as part of his elegant sartorial repertoire, Koya was as complex, conflicted and colourful a character as any.²⁰ He came of political age under the dominant, overarching leadership of AD Patel in the 1960s, and whose able and loyal lieutenant he remained throughout, though whose political temperament and approach

he did not always share. Born in the big, boisterous cane district of Ba, Koya obtained his law degree in Tasmania and became a successful, much-feared criminal barrister. He was a strong man, in every sense of the word, who defended some of the most hardened criminals in the courts (but whose eyes could well up recalling his mother's death when he was just five). He had an instinctive understanding of the hopes and fears of the Indo-Fijian farming community whose interests he championed passionately. He was a belligerent, chest-thumping orator, full of fire and fury, which inspired his supporters and intimidated his opponents. 'If you are the son of one father and one mother, come out in the open [and challenge me]' was his favourite taunt to his opponents. *Agar ek ma baap ke beta ho to ...*. Few did, or dared to. Koya inspired fierce loyalty but also generated great hostility among his party followers, which eventually led to his marginalization within his own party and premature departure from the political scene in the late 1980s.

Koya was a born politician of considerable political talent, skill and personal magnetism, but he was also a product of his age and circumstances, and was not able to transcend them. He was, as his one time colleague Karam Ramrakha says, a 'crisis' leader. That is an accurate description. The great issues which had brought him to prominence in the 1960s, sugar disputes and the struggle for independence, were non-issues after 1970. His style of politics, bellicose, thriving on factionalism and 'cliquism,' to use a much bandied about word of the times, and subservient to his unbending will and dominant personality, curiously old fashioned, was on the wane when his time came to bask in the sun. The electorate in the 1970s was more educated, more demanding of its leaders: real policies, not political rhetoric. Koya, for his part, brooked no criticism and was loathe to explain himself to anyone. He was the leader, and he knew best, and that, as far as he was concerned, was that. Sadly, the times had simply moved on, while Koya remained a captive of the past, his following diminished and his colleagues deserting. Koya's political philosophy is not clear. He accepted the tenets and practices of the Westminster system, or at least he never publicly questioned them, but he also accepted the reality of racial politics in Fiji. He

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had confided to London's emissaries that for him, too, as it was for Mara, a common roll was a long term goal,²¹ but had not worked out an alternative strategy, too preoccupied, as we shall see, with internal disruptions within his own party to forge an alternative national vision.

Relations between Siddiq Koya and Jai Ram Reddy have been the subject of much debate and whispered comments over the years since the two fought each other in the September 1977 elections. In public perception, they are portrayed as sworn enemies, daggers drawn, un-reconciled to the end. The embers from that distant fire are still faintly aglow in conversations with the older generation. Many harsh words were spoken during the campaign, and some of them are reproduced in this book. But for Jai Ram Reddy, political difference did not translate into personal animosity. He could never really dislike Koya, he says. There was an element of empathy between the two, even affection for each other. They shared a broad South Indian cultural background; both were renowned lawyers from the cane belt; the two families had known each other for decades, and the Reddys were great supporters of the Federation Party. Indeed, in the early days, Reddy was thought to be a 'Koya man,' his chosen successor. Reddy brought Koya back into the NFP parliamentary team in 1982. Koya reciprocated Reddy's sentiments, nominating him for the 1992 general elections. He praised Reddy for his 'marvellous' reconciliation efforts. 'We will look to him for guidance at all times,' said Koya of Reddy in 1985, 'and not only when crisis develops.' Between 'the two of us,' he continued, 'there has been understanding and compassion, despite our differences.'²² And in 1992, Koya added that the 'Dove/Flower split was more an internal matter [for the NFP] which was healed when they fought together on one platform in the 1982 elections.'²³ It would be worthwhile to keep all this in mind when reading of the political turmoil of the 1970s and 1980s.

Jai Ram Reddy, like Koya, came from the cane belt of western Viti Levu (Vitogo, Lautoka), but there was difference in style and approach between the two. Easy bonhomie with the masses was not Reddy's forte. Whereas Koya could work a roomful of supporters with practiced ease and

charm, Reddy was always ill-at-ease in a crowd, socially comfortable and relaxed only in the company of close friends. While Koya emoted effortlessly with the people, Reddy could not. Reddy was aware of this trait of his, but he simply could not bring himself to do what did not come naturally to him, wrapping his arms around other people's shoulders, making small talk about family and business. Koya was at home making meandering speeches full of 'masala' which kept his audiences enthralled for hours. He was the complete master of the theatrical stage. Reddy, on the other hand, while a spellbinding orator, was always controlled in his public speaking, clinical, precise, withering in the manner of a brilliant barrister (which he was), as if dissecting a case before the courts, not a theatrical speaker wooing a crowd with enticing homilies full of rustic images and metaphors.

People compare Jai Ram Reddy to AD Patel in his oratorical brilliance (totally exaggerated, Reddy says of the comparison). I have heard Patel only on tape, and his way with words and images and metaphors is mesmerizing. He is truly unrivalled as the most learned and eloquent orator in the annals of Fijian political history of the 20th century. Reddy I would regard as the finest orator in Hindi I have heard in person: emotional, intense and passionate, capable of turning even the most sceptical of minds around, reducing people to tears or to deep, explosive anger against injustice and discrimination. In his time, he had no match in Fiji. 'Before you can inspire with emotion,' Winston Churchill once said, 'you must be swamped with it yourself. Before you can move their tears, your own must flow. To convince them, you must yourself believe.' These words aptly capture Reddy's oratory. His speeches always reflected his deepest convictions, not always to his political advantage, as this book shows. Recall his words: 'I have done and said things I felt.'

Politics of the conventional cane-belt type was not in Reddy's character. 'A leader must never lie to the people,' Reddy says. 'He must tell the people the truth as he sees it, and then lead them from there.' Honesty and integrity, a capacity for sustained hard work, a willingness to consider the other person's feelings and thoughts are other attributes of good leadership,

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according to Reddy. He exemplifies what Henry Fairlie identifies as an important attribute in a successful politician. 'The first task of a politician,' he writes, 'is to reconcile the multiplicity of conflicting interests and wills which exist in any free society, and to produce from their conflict a policy which if not approved, will at least for the time being, be acquiesced in by all of them.' A successful leader operates by the rule of thumb and from the accumulated experience of himself, of his colleagues and his party, not from abstract principles etched in stone. 'It is largely a matter of judging the occasion: when to stand firm, when to give way; when frankness will bring rewards, when a little bit of hypocrisy will save a lot of trouble, when to sit back and wait, when to act decisively; when to provoke opposition, when to mollify it.'²⁴ Reddy exhibited as well as transcended these attributes in the latter half of his political career.

Reddy's critics as well as admirers have often said that Reddy was 'a reluctant politician.' They are both right, pointing to his great strengths as well as his great weaknesses as a political leader. Reddy saw politics not as a lifelong vocation but as an instrument to achieve specific goals. One does not have to be in parliament to serve the people, he said repeatedly to those who missed out on party tickets and threatened to stand as independents. There was not a single election in postcolonial Fiji in which Reddy actively sought selection. He was often persuaded to enter the contest at the last minute and that, too, under considerable pressure from his colleagues. This was not theatre: his reluctance was genuine, but sometimes misunderstood. Even in the September elections of 1977, the most heated in the history of the Indo-Fijian community, he did not want to stand against Koya because of his deep concern that it might irrevocably split the party, but was persuaded at the last minute to enter the fray by respected party elders. Politics did not come naturally to Reddy, good though he was at it. The law, the art of advocacy, was his real, abiding passion, and he regretted his frequent absences from it; politics was duty and responsibility.

Transcending narrow political agendas, Reddy was able to see the larger picture into which he tried to situate the broader interests of his own

vulnerable community, while his opponents tended their own backyards assiduously. They very clearly understood the truth of the maxim that all politics is ultimately local, as the American politician Tip O'Neill once said. Reddy as the national leader of the Indo-Fijian community, and as the Leader of the Opposition at the most critical period in Fiji's postcolonial history, did not have that luxury. Simply too much was at stake. But reluctance was not a fatal weakness in Reddy, nor a serious character flaw. He was no drooping lily. Once the battle was joined and Reddy was in the ring, his political opponents discovered to their great cost just what a tough and unrelenting competitor he could be. Swami Bhaskar Aryana, a former teacher and spiritual mentor of the Ramakrishna Mission, was once told by a colleague pointing to Jai Ram, then a student at the Sri Vivekananda High School in Nadi, 'He may look like a cat, but he roars like a lion.' It was a prophetic assessment echoed by many others.²⁵

For Jai Ram Reddy, the interests of the National Federation Party were obviously important to protect, but more important, overall, were the interests of the Indo-Fijian community, and if working with his other Indo-Fijian rivals was needed for that purpose, he would not hesitate. An example: the Fiji Labour Party leader Mahendra Chaudhry repeatedly vowed to 'wipe out the NFP' in the early 1990s, but Reddy did not hesitate to make a joint submission with him for the review of the 1990 Constitution.²⁶ Nor did he fail to campaign for a Labour candidate, Gaffar Ahmed, in a Ba by-election in 1995 against some former NFP rebels, and Reddy loyalists, who had formed a new Janata Party to fight Labour, in the same manner that the NFP Youth had done a decade earlier. 'Even the Leader of the Opposition is with us today,' Chaudhry proclaimed triumphantly, Kamal Iyer recalls.²⁷ For Reddy, again, the unity of the community was paramount, not the narrow political interests of his party or his own political fortune.

Chaudhry wanted Reddy's political blood, but well into the late 1990s, Reddy still spoke, to his closest friends and colleagues, much to their dismay, of the Labour leader as his natural successor as the leader of the Indo-Fijian community, not any aspirants within his own party. Harish Sharma recalls

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a conversation this way. Reddy had asked him, since he (Harish) would be retiring from politics at end of the parliament's 1994 term, to resign as his deputy sometime in 1997 to give him about eighteen months to groom a successor. 'I can't think of a better person than Mahendra Chaudhry,' he told Sharma. Sharma replied, 'Give me time, but I will resign.' Three or four days later, Chaudhry made the headlines by accusing Reddy of selling out the interests of the Indian community by agreeing to one fewer Indian communal seat during the negotiations for the 1997 Constitution. Reddy was outraged at the untruthful allegation (see later discussion). When Sharma went to Reddy's Opposition office the following morning, Reddy said, 'I know why you are smiling' when Harish asked, 'Do you still want me to resign?'

Reddy knew the dangers of coalescing with Sitiveni Rabuka's deeply unpopular *Sogosoqo Vakavulewa ni Taukei* (SVT), but went ahead anyway because that, he said, was the honourable thing to do. How could you possibly jettison a party with whom you had worked to revise the constitution, even if that party had much baggage and a tainted leadership? Further, he agreed that should the NFP–SVT Coalition win power, the SVT would provide the next prime minister. This was a genuine act of political concession and understanding in the larger national interest, to assuage Fijian fears about their proper place in Fiji. The concerns of the indigenous community could not be ignored or wished away, Reddy said; they were real and they had to be acknowledged. The concession was an act of a mature vision, not of cowardice his political opponents said it was. And he was acutely aware of the vulnerability of his own community. To the language of violence that underpinned Fijian political discourse in the years after independence — 'blood will flow' — the Indo-Fijians had no answer. That was the brutal reality on the ground. If leadership meant anything, it meant reconciling essentially irreconcilable interests. But for adopting that approach, Reddy paid the ultimate political price at the hands of Mahendra Chaudhry, of all the political leaders, who had expressed similar sentiment earlier, but failed to honour it when the moment of truth came.

Reddy was by nature a moderate, pragmatic politician who expressed disdain for the politics of extremism, as he said over and over again. 'In the context of multiracial societies, demands don't work,' he said. 'We have to work slowly through consensus building exercise where we are able to identify areas of agreement and areas of disagreement and find compromise solutions.'²⁸ 'I am not interested in the tired old rhetoric of racial politics,' he said on another occasion. 'I am weary of pointless bickering, ugly innuendos and raking over old coals. There are issues and challenges before us which are more important than who wins the next elections, or whose skill as a debater or public speaker is the most persuasive. None of us does his or her community any service by perpetuating the recriminations and narrow racial perceptions of the past.' This was sensible thinking and good advice, but politically counterproductive in a racially polarized atmosphere which provided all the incentives for ethnic chauvinism which many a politician exploited to their advantage, and very little incentive for moderation and accommodation.

During the course of his twenty-year political career, Reddy moved, as already indicated, from being an 'open' multiracialist to what might be called a 'consociational' multiracialist.²⁹ The culture of unrestrained competition bred suspicion and hostility threatening violence at election time. It had bad history. Instead, Reddy favoured the approach of 'compartmentalized' cooperation. 'Let us each be in our separate compartments if you like,' he said in 1992. 'Let communal solidarity prevail and I do not begrudge Fijian leaders for wanting to see that their community remains united. That is a very natural desire. Let the General Electors be united. Let the Indians be united; let everybody be united, but from our respective positions of unity let us accept that we must co-exist and work together with each other. That is a more realistic approach.'³⁰ Politics in Fiji would always have an ethnic dimension, he argued, and it was better to accept that reality than to deny it. The consociational features of the 1997 Constitution, in whose formulation Jai Ram Reddy had a major hand, reflect this philosophy, especially its compulsory power sharing provisions.

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That 1997 Constitution represents Jai Ram Reddy's single greatest achievement, the pinnacle of his political career, not the least because of the fraught context in which it was fashioned. But the magnitude of the achievement was not sufficiently appreciated, especially by his own people, with shallow political memories, who took the successful review exercise for granted, and wanted the immediate satisfaction of their mundane everyday needs. Less than a decade earlier, the Indo-Fijians had endured the soul-destroying miseries caused by the Sunday Ban, the desecration of Hindu and Muslim places of worship, and a constitution that had robbed them of fundamental human rights. A decade later, all their rights were restored and, for the first time ever, Indo-Fijians were given an equal opportunity to participate in the affairs of state. Through persuasion and persistence, Reddy had helped Fijian leaders inside and outside parliament, including those in the Great Council of Chiefs, to move away from a hard line adherence to the principle of 'paramountcy' of Fijian interests to embracing the principle of equal 'partnership.' This peaceful transition from paramountcy to partnership was an achievement of fundamental importance, realized through consensus and dialogue, in the full glare of public scrutiny and in the face of deep scepticism. Indo-Fijians are now belatedly recognizing their mistake in not rallying behind the new power-sharing arrangement.

It was good for Fiji that a leader like Jai Ram Reddy was at the helm of the Indo-Fijian community at a critical time in Fiji's post-coup political evolution when things could easily have gone wrong, or turned nasty in the hands of other untested, impatient hands. The coup in 1987 had placed a knife on the throat of the Indo-Fijian community, and the indigenous nationalists in the Taukei Movement and in the Methodist Church were baying for its blood. 'Reddy the Gun, Bavadra the Bullet,' 'Bavadra the Boat, Reddy the Captain' the placards proclaimed in tense protest marches in major urban centres throughout Fiji just before the first coup. Reddy's own law offices in Lautoka were torched, and arsonists attempted to firebomb his house, with his wife and children inside it. After the second coup in September 1987, Reddy went into hiding to escape certain physical danger.

If caught, he would have been killed or severely hurt by the rampant Fijian nationalists, so deep was their anger towards him.

Reddy was the most feared as well as the most hated Indo-Fijian leader after the coups, seen by many Fijians as the key architect of the defeat of the long-reigning Alliance party, the evil, manipulating, mastermind behind the Coalition leader Dr Timoci Bavadra. Ratu Mara, in a non-approving tone, had dubbed Reddy the ‘guru’ of the Coalition, the chief orchestrator of his defeat.³¹ Reddy’s refusal to capitulate or vanish quietly from the public stage simply incensed his foes even further. ‘Haven’t you had enough?’ Ratu Mara once erupted when Reddy refused to accede to the demands of the Fijian nationalists, his angry words repeated ominously by others. ‘Mr Reddy, in this country, you take what we give you. No more,’ a Fijian soldier told him in Nadi soon after the first coup. The protest marchers demanded his head on a platter. And yet, he returned to the political stage after the dust had settled to successfully negotiate with the very same Fijian leaders who had aided and abetted the coups and sought the political diminishment of the Indo-Fijian community. His conciliatory and understanding approach, his ability to look further than his personal hurt and anger, was fundamental to the political transformation that took place in Fiji in the 1990s.

Therein lay a great paradox. How could a political party suffer such a humiliating defeat when its leader enjoyed such widespread national respect? This is one of the more perplexing mysteries of Fijian politics in the latter half of the 20th century. The decline has to do, in part, with the changing demographics of Fiji; the arrival on the scene of more strategically focused and better organized parties; and the longstanding and ultimately crippling divisions within the Indo-Fijian community itself. Reddy was the undisputed leader of the NFP by the early 1990s, but he was not a ‘party machine’ man. He kept a watchful eye on its internal proceedings, mediated in disputes when these arose, offered advice to branch officials and supporters, but did not take an involved interest in the party’s internal affairs, not the least because he was deeply immersed in the broader affairs of the

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nation. That was left to others, including people who were new comers to the party. The grassroots apparatus of the party, once so vibrant and powerful, had become moribund by the late 1990s, party branches withered on the vine, or defected to the rival organizations. Perhaps some of the party's own leaders took the peoples' support and confidence in them for granted, complacently basking in the afterglow of the successful review of the 1990 Constitution and expecting a grateful electorate to return them to parliament as a matter of course.

The contrast with Mahendra Chaudhry, who effectively succeeded Reddy as the leader of the Indo-Fijian community, and to whom he will invariably be compared in the future, could not be greater. Chaudhry was a tough, tenacious leader, not one to flinch from a fight, a trait widely admired among his supporters at home in the tradition of confrontational politics nurtured in the cane belt of Fiji. He was not only the dominant, unchallenged leader of his party, as Reddy was of his once, he had complete control of the party machinery, putting loyalists in positions of power and using them effectively to attain his political goals, whatever they might be. No one in the party dared speak without his express authorization. Dissent was suppressed in the name of party discipline, and dissidents unceremoniously expelled for questioning party policy or the leader's judgment, including party founders such as Tupeni Baba and Krishna Datt. For many of his supporters, Mahendra Chaudhry was the Labour Party.³² One could not be imagined without the other.

Chaudhry was a political practitioner par excellence, completely at home in the brutal cut and thrust of politics, in fact thriving on it, unlike Reddy who found wheeling and dealing behind the scenes personally distasteful. Reddy was scrupulous in his observance of protocols and processes of the undertakings he gave; as a lawyer he operated 'strictly within a reverence for the law.'³³ For him, the process was just as important as the outcome. 'There are no shortcuts in politics,' he said often. For Chaudhry, on the other hand, ends often justified the means. This may be a result of his long years in Fiji's trade union movement. If deals had to be made to

get the results, Chaudhry would not hesitate to sanction them. There must be a place for principles in politics, a frustrated Reddy told his audiences in the 1990s. For Chaudhry, the simple, enduring principle of politics was the attainment and exercise of power. If to get into power a deal had to be made with the Fijian nationalists, even those dedicated to the annihilation of the rights of the Indo-Fijians, then so be it. This was cold, calculating politics at its best, or at its most ruthless and cynical.

Reddy viewed things differently. 'Our strategy is very simple,' he said. 'It is based on sincerity of purpose and on the recognition of the fact that the only way to move forward is through dialogue and discussion to create an environment in this country where people are beginning to think again.'³⁴ For Chaudhry, however, every move was a tactical manoeuvre. Reddy's policy of peaceful dialogue was for Chaudhry 'a policy of selling out Indian interests bit by bit,' a feat, he accused the NFP leader of being accomplished at. Reddy believed sincerely that the Coalition between Labour and the NFP would endure, each party respecting the independence and integrity of the other, but cooperating on important issues for the greater good of the Indo-Fijian community. There was no other way. For Chaudhry, the Coalition infrastructure was intended to enable him to consolidate himself in power and to work from there to eliminate his rival altogether.

Just two examples of the difference in approach between the two leaders will illustrate the point. In 1992, Sitiveni Rabuka won the elections but did not have enough numbers to form government and become prime minister, being challenged for leadership from within his own party. He approached both Reddy as well as Chaudhry for support. Reddy declined point blank, no matter what political cost to himself or his party. Important principles were at stake. How could he support a man who had carried out the coup, caused untold suffering to his people and had not repented for his treasonous actions? How would he be able to explain his support for Rabuka to the people who had voted for him? Chaudhry took a different position altogether, although, like Reddy, he too had been a victim of the 1987 coup. He offered Rabuka his support as a matter of real politick in

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exchange for an (legally unenforceable) undertaking to address some of his concerns, and in the hope that the tail might be able to wag the dog. 'What fool wants to be in opposition if you can be in government,' Chaudhry often said. Getting into government was the main game for him. Everything else was secondary. To that end, Chaudhry marshalled his resources and applied his considerable political talent. His great tragedy was that when his time came for national leadership, he was not able to transcend this vision. To the end, he remained a politician, a formidable one, to be sure, but a politician all the same. Reddy, on the other hand, lost many battles, including his humiliation at the polls in 1999, but he departed the political scene a greater man than when he first entered it.

In the 1999 general elections, Chaudhry's Labour Party gave its last preferences to the NFP, placing it well below political parties, such as the Christian Democratic Alliance, which was diametrically opposed to its own policies, wanting Fiji to be made a Christian state and advocating the entrenchment of the principle of Fijian paramountcy. It was cold-blooded politics at its most brutal: the NFP was Labour's greatest threat and it had to be eliminated at any cost, notwithstanding the fact the two parties' philosophy were broadly similar and that they had cooperated as coalition partners before. Reddy lamented the sacrifice of principle to political expediency, but for Labour the principle was about winning the election. In politics, Labour believed, 'my enemy's enemy is my friend.' As it turned out, Labour won the battle, but lost the war. In 2006, Chaudhry once again lent his political support to the executor of Fiji's fourth military coup, Commodore Frank Bainimarama, vainly justifying his participation in the military regime on the grounds that the deposed democratically elected government was corrupt (but in which his own Labour Party had several senior ministers because of the power-sharing provisions of the constitution). A Labour leader supporting a military coup left many heads shaking in disbelief, but there was nothing inconsistent in Chaudhry's approach: he was being true to his political philosophy in which politics is, first and foremost, about the attainment and exercise of power. So, if a military coup had to be condoned

to remove a democratically elected government of which Chaudhry disapproved because it was alleged to be corrupt and racist, he had no qualms about it.³⁵

Great leaders succeed not only by virtue of their own instinct, skill and courage, but also because they have able and loyal deputies. Ratu Mara had Ratu Penaia Ganilau. For many Fijians, Mara was a remote, inaccessible figure, and many probably also questioned his commitment to the Fijian cause as well. But no one ever doubted where Ratu Penaia stood on the defense of Fijian interests: firm, immovable. He was the one Fijian leader everyone trusted to protect the interests of his people in the teeth of all the opposition in the world. No one doubted his attachment to his culture or to his people. And if he gave the green light to follow Ratu Mara, then they did so unhesitatingly, knowing that at the end of it all, Ratu Penaia would always be there. AD Patel had Koya. 'AD was AD,' 'Puchla' Maniratnam Naicker, one of Koya's most ardent supporters, told me, a revered if somewhat remote figure; Koya was their man. He was well connected to the grassroots; they trusted him as they trusted few others; he inspired his followers and they, in turn, gave him their complete loyalty, which made Patel's overall task much easier. Koya was the perfect lieutenant. As leader in his own right, though, he was not the same man. He could not command the complete loyalty and support from his colleagues for reasons that are explored in this book. It may also quite possibly be that some lieutenants are not destined to make good commanders.

It was a similarly the case with Reddy and Chaudhry. Reddy could be likened to a commanding general, possessing an acute understanding of the lay of the land, a strategic vision, and the ability to forge coalitions to form a broad front. Chaudhry would fit the bill perfectly as a great field commander, in constant touch with the troops, inspiring them with his courage and manoeuvres, tactically astute and bold, but lacking the attributes that transform field commanders into successful commanding generals. Chaudhry was at his best and most effective as the second-in-command, but as leader in his own right, he made fundamental errors of judgment (such as

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joining the military administration in early 2007) for which his people may yet pay a terrible price, and embroiling himself in activities which tarnished his reputation.

Reddy's political tragedy was somewhat like Koya's. Towards the end of their careers, the political world both the leaders had inherited and moulded had changed beyond their full grasp or easy comprehension. They had become remnants in their own lifetime. In Koya's case, as mentioned before, the issues which had shaped his career, earned him his enormous political capital, and along with it the adulation of the Indo-Fijian community, had become spent forces by the time the rein of leadership came into his hands. By then, the long simmering disputes in the sugar industry had finally ended with the Denning Award in 1969, and the great debate of the 1960s about whether the Fiji should have common roll or communal roll had effectively been resolved in favour of the latter. A product of the post-war period full of anti-colonial and anti-CSR rhetoric, which formed a steady fiery diet of the Indo-Fijian electorate, Koya found it difficult to adjust to the sober realities of politics in the post-independence era. He changed but did not change enough to meet the needs and demands of the new times.

Reddy faced a somewhat similar dilemma. The great personal sacrifices he had made over a decade of intense negotiation and fluctuating fortune over the review of the 1990 Constitution had resulted in the successful promulgation of a new, more inclusive, more multiracial one. By the time he faced the electorate in 1999, the new constitution was an accomplished fact, over and done with. Reddy wisely wanted to give the new constitution time to acquire a life of its own, to become entrenched in people's consciousness. 'We should learn to walk before we should attempt to run,' he told his political rallies. The electorate, encouraged by Labour, wanted more: good health care, affordable education, minimum wages, social security and employment, and the sooner the better. It responded enthusiastically to these bread and butter issues. 'The constitution won't put food on your table,' Labour told the electorate. They fell for the slogan. Reddy's more abstract appeal for moderation and introspection and about the need to build

the foundations of a new future, fell on the deaf ears of a people wanting instant satisfaction of their needs, and Labour was the party to deliver it.

By the late 1990s, the character of the Indo-Fijian electorate had changed considerably from what it had been in the early 1970s. The steady emigration of skilled professionals and the educated classes, people who were concerned about the long term future of the community and the country, and who had formed the backbone of the NFP support, had robbed the party of its powerful support base, its party functionaries and financiers. Many of those left behind were among the desperately poor and they warmed up to Labour's vaguely socialist rhetoric about empowerment and opportunity. Chaudhry, not Reddy, was their saviour. Reddy's choice of well educated and otherwise qualified people as candidates in the election made perfect sense from a rational point of view: to put people in parliament who could make informed contribution to national decision-making. To run a good government, you need good people in parliament, Reddy said.

But Labour adroitly used this against the NFP, portraying it as the party of the rich and the professional elite. For its part, it chose people from the community, many with elementary formal education, some barely able to speak English, or read only haltingly speeches prepared for them by others, but who were a regular presence at community functions, in constant circulation among the people at the grassroots level. They were the grassroots. 'People Power' played big in the countryside; Reddy called it 'Parliament by Proxy.' The quality of the candidates for Labour was of secondary importance; the victory for the party was what mattered in the end. Reducing the expectations of the electorate to the lowest common denominator has been one of Labour's more enduring, if also more unfortunate, contributions to Fiji's political culture, and a marked reversal of the trend under the leadership of Dr Bavadra. It was also a reflection of the changing times, which Labour understood well and harnessed to its considerable electoral advantage.

Reddy's political career can be divided quite neatly into two phases. The first was from 1977 to 1987, and the second from 1987 to 1997. In the

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first phase, Reddy spent nearly all his time putting out fires in his own fractious community, in his own squabbling party hovering on the verge of complete disintegration. The issues over which the people split seem so petty and parochial in hindsight: a position of a branch functionary here, appointment to a board or a statutory organization there, sealing off office doors to bar opponents from within the party, staging boycotts of party proceedings because some leader was unable to have his way, ripping into each other in vicious newspaper leakages when internal matters should, and could, have been resolved out of the public view. Unhopeful of winning national power, the party turned on itself with a viciousness that both surprised and delighted its opponents. Internal competition and rivalry for position is in the nature of political parties everywhere, and the National Federation Party was no exception.

What exacerbated its problems was that division and friction became its dominant themes, almost its rationale for existence, with the result that the party could not articulate a larger vision for the nation. The NFP was always in the news for all the wrong reasons, principally about the debilitating leadership ambitions and struggles of its hierarchy. It could not, and rightly so, be taken seriously as the government-in-waiting even by its own supporters, let alone the nation at large. In 1981, a disgusted Reddy condemned the boycotts and walkouts which had become a hallmark of the party's annual conventions. 'We are a party seeking the reins of government, but here let alone govern, we cannot even elect a branch official. If this is the way to run the party, you might as well close it up.'³⁶

The second phase of his career was more rewarding for Reddy. After the coup of 1987, he had once again been thrust into the public arena as the paramount leader of the Indo-Fijian community, its representative to the other side of the political divide at home and to the international community at large. He sat on various committees trying to draw up a better constitution for Fiji, attended meetings and rallies abroad and worked tirelessly at home to shore up the morale of his people in the darkest time of their lives. But Reddy did not have an unfettered run even so. In the 1990s,

he was fighting the Fiji Labour Party for the unity and leadership of the Indo-Fijian community, just as he had been fighting factionalism within his own party in the 1970s and early 1980s. But in the 1990s, real issues were at stake, none more important than a fairer constitution for his people, and building bridges with the leadership of the Fijian community. Reddy took the lead on both these matters and achieved a degree of success that had appeared unimaginable a few years earlier.

Jai Ram Reddy of the 1990s was in many ways a different man to what he had been two decades earlier. ‘We human beings also evolve,’ he once said, ‘and I am not the same Jai Ram Reddy I used to be. I have seen, I have experienced, and I have learnt. I would like to think that I have become a bit wiser.’³⁷ He told the Andhra Sangam convention in 1996 that he had to ‘walk a political tightrope and work towards realizing the aspirations of the people of Fiji. I realize that the success of my community depends on the success of every other community in Fiji.’³⁸ In the 1970s, Reddy had no, or little, national profile, apart from his formal role as the Leader of the Opposition. He was very much an ‘Indian’ leader, addressing Indian audiences. He had none of Ratu Mara’s advantages of political longevity and experience. He rarely gave media interviews that admitted the public to his inner thoughts and doubts. On the contrary, he was positively media averse. By the 1990s, Reddy had transformed himself. He gave important addresses to non-Indian audiences on a whole range of topics, outlining his vision for the future. The interviews he gave to the press were full and informative, as he laid his ideas out before the public with clarity and precision. He was engaged in a mammoth task of political transformation, and he was determined to carry the people with him. New technology helped (cassette tapes, videos, television); traditional gatekeepers of information had lost their role and relevance. ‘Most sensible people have been listening to Mr Reddy for some time,’ said Graham Rouse in 1998.³⁹ It was not a sentiment that could have been so freely expressed, or admitted, two decades earlier.

Looking back at the life of the National Federation Party, it can be said that there were two truly glorious periods in its history. One was the

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1960s when it articulated a vision for Fiji different to the one offered by the Alliance Party, when it presented itself seriously as a credible alternative government. It set the pace and tone of the national political debate. It took positions on important issues of the day. It called for immediate independence for Fiji and for Fiji to become a republic with an elected Fijian head of state. It was for the nationalization of the gold mines and the end of the CSR regime in Fiji. The NFP was the dominant, unchallenged voice of the Indo-Fijian community, and it was respected by all as such both in Fiji and abroad. For most of the 1970s and the early 1980s, the party lost its way as it turned endlessly upon itself over leadership and other parochial issues. The second productive phase was the 1990s when the party, although challenged by Labour for dominance in the Indo-Fijian community, played a major role, with Reddy at the helm, in national healing and in initiating dialogue and negotiation with its once bitterly opposed political foes to 'take the country forward,' to use a currently fashionable phrase.

What is clear from the record is that the NFP reached its greatest heights when it was united under a single leader, AD Patel in the 1960s and Jai Ram Reddy in the 1990s. The 1970s and 1980s were years of missed opportunity for the NFP. The contrast with the fortunes of the Alliance Party of that period could not have been greater. The Alliance had an unchallenged leader in Ratu Sir Kamisese Mara. There were private mutterings about his autocratic tendencies and his closeness to certain people and not others, but no one dared to challenge his authority publicly. Only once was Mara's leadership challenged (by Ratu William Toganivalu) over his close association with Sir Vijay R Singh, the Attorney General.⁴⁰ Secure in his position, Mara presented himself as a strong, credible national leader. He undoubtedly was. He was admired and respected across the political divide, however much some of his policies and positions might have been contested. The Alliance Party conducted its affairs with professionalism in private, behind closed doors, in stark contrast to the way the NFP managed its internal affairs: on the front pages of the newspapers. The impression thus created was of a party well run and managed and united. The astute politi-

cian that he was, Mara kept reminding the people of Fiji of the weak and divided opposition which could not be trusted to run anything, including a lottery. 'Keep Fiji in Good Hands,' the slogan went. The Alliance's greatest days, from the early 1970s to the mid-1980s, coincided with the NFP's most miserable ones.

To outsiders, the Indo-Fijian community appeared a monolith, menacing and uncompromising in its demands. There were of course certain issues on which the community had common concerns, such as land and underrepresentation in the public sector. But what this study also shows is the wide divergence of opinion in the community on matters of even the greatest importance to them. The National Federation Party split irrevocably in the late 1970s on the Agricultural Landlord and Tenant Act, for example; and the divisions hobbled the party for a long time. In the 1990s, differences over how to review the flawed 1990 Constitution once again split the community in half. Cultural and religious groupings affected political affiliations too. In the 1990s, it was said, for instance, that people should vote for the Fiji Labour Party and Mahendra Chaudhry because it was time for a 'North Indian' to be leader of the community which in the past had been led by a Gujarati (AD Patel), a Muslim (Siddiq Koya) and a South Indian (Reddy). Appeals to voters on cultural and religious lines are a common, if not publicly admitted, feature of politics in the Indo-Fijian community. Every avenue is explored, every opportunity exploited for political advantage though any impropriety assiduously disavowed to the point of denial. This study reveals the inner tensions and divisions which may not be easily visible to those unfamiliar with the internal contours of the Indo-Fijian community. Reddy's task, then, were twofold: to keep his own fractious community united and focused, and, as the Leader of the Opposition, to keep the government of the day in check.

The latter task was not an easy one for Jai Ram Reddy, or any other Indo-Fijian political leader, given Fiji's multi-ethnic character and the way politics were organized there. The government was always in the hands of the indigenous Fijians, while the Opposition was invariably led

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by Indians. Debate in parliament predictably degenerated into a 'racial' contest. It was a minefield in which one had to tread very carefully. Every issue of public policy was seen through the prism of race, so that any criticism of the government was construed, for political purposes, as an Indian attack on a Fijian government. Demography did not help: the two major communities were evenly divided numerically, and each had a distinctive understanding of its proper place in the broader scheme of things. Certain assumptions and understandings underpinned Fiji's political culture in the post-independence years. 'Blood will Flow,' it was so common to hear in the 1970s and 1980s, if Indo-Fijians touched Fijian land or threatened Fijian political control.

Fijian fears of dispossession may have been manipulated by the ruling elite to keep themselves entrenched in power, but they were also real for many ordinary Fijians languishing in the subsistence sector as other sections of the community appeared to march purposefully towards modernity, or failing to achieve success in the ruthlessly competitive money economy. When political control was finally wrested from the Fijian establishment in a democratic election in 1987, a military coup removed the government, in the name of protecting Fijian interests. But the last two decades have turned the table. As Indo-Fijians left the country in ever increasing numbers after the coup of 1987, (almost one hundred twenty thousand in twenty years) dwindling to around a third of the population by the early years of the 21st century, some of the old Fijian fears about being dominated diminished as Fijians realized that they were the outright majority of the population and will never be outnumbered again. It was that realization together with Reddy's patient, persistent approach that opened up the way for dialogue on the constitution and other matters.

Like other Indo-Fijian political leaders before him, such as AD Patel and Siddiq Koya, Jai Ram Reddy is rapidly becoming a forgotten figure of Fijian politics, uncelebrated as national icons like Ratu Sukuna, Ratu Mara or other notable Fijian paramount chiefs. There are no public monuments to their great sacrifices and achievements, no public recognition of

the role they played in shaping Fiji's history. It was as if this was the natural order of things, the way things were meant to be. For a long time, such was the nature of the politics of cultural representation and symbolism in Fiji that the public face of Fiji always had to be Fijian. Public attitude is shifting slowly, but only ever so slowly, as travel and technology open up new horizons and increase contact with the outside world, as communication barriers crumble, and as leaders once worshipped as gods are shown finally to have feet of clay.

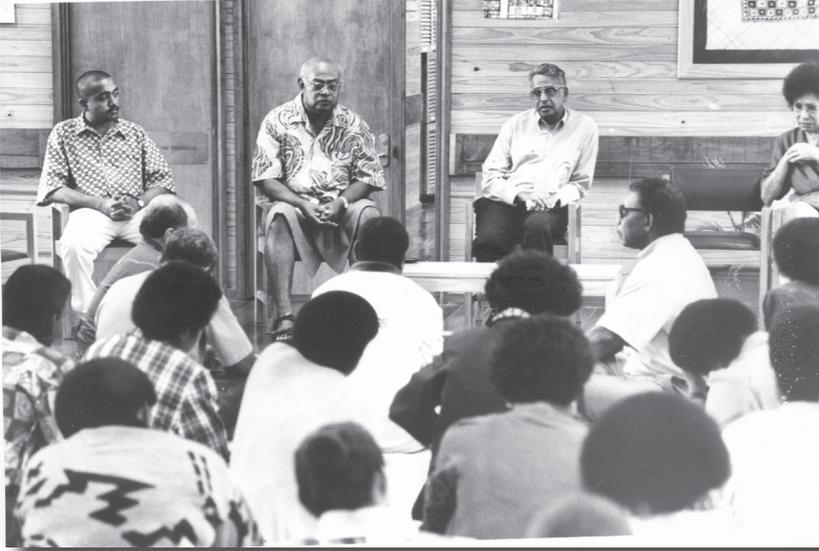
There is also something else at work: amnesia, ignorance, and indifference. There is simply no consciousness of history in the community, no sense of the need to engage with it. The schools are silent. Memory of the past is shallow. To illustrate, in September 2008, I asked a group of senior history students at a school in Nasinu if they knew who Jai Ram Reddy was. Not a single student in the class knew, not even Indo-Fijian students! They knew about George Speight, though, and Sitiveni Rabuka. Around the same time, a letter writer to the *Fiji Times*, Raj Singh, said that young people like him were 'so bored with that endless old stuff that they quickly flip to the next page as soon as they notice the name or picture of writers.' 'Younger Indian readers,' he continued, 'find articles on sports, weather or their horoscope more interesting. The world around us has moved on but some writers are still hanging on to the old stuff.'⁴¹ That old stuff indeed!

The Nasinu incident distressed me greatly. It was then that all my dithering and doubt and diversions disappeared and I began to write this book. 'Where there is no vision, the people perish,' the Proverbs (29:18) say. And TS Eliot reminds us that 'A people without history/ Is not redeemed from time.' I firmly believe, like so many of my pre-postmodern generation, that the act of writing and remembering can have the power potentially to rescue memory from the shallow graveyards of forgetfulness and obscurity that are so commonplace among our people. It is the one conviction that has kept me going through all these years of arid hopes and dashed expectations. 'Words,' Winston Churchill once said, 'are the only things that last for ever.'⁴²

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Finally, to return to Reddy. It is exactly a decade that Jai Ram Reddy departed the political scene but his ghost, so to speak, continues to haunt the table of his political opponents. The blood does not wash away easily. His name is still taken in vain by his opponents to justify or criticize this policy or that cause, open an argument or close a debate. Reddy has his detractors, but there are also many thoughtful people who appreciate the magnitude of his contribution to the public life of Fiji. They would share Richard Naidu's broad assessment: 'Jai Ram Reddy, who survived the rough and tumble of politics for more than 20 years with his reputation for integrity intact, without succumbing to the compromises of politics in a coup-ridden country, surely ranks heads and shoulders above any other politician of his generation.'⁴³ Or political sociologist Steven Ratuva's judgment: 'Jai Ram Reddy was, and still is, the only Indo-Fijian leader capable of assuming the heights of multi-ethnic statesmanship. He was the only Indo-Fijian leader ever trusted by the Fijians. He was genuine and humble and indigenous Fijian leaders saw these virtues clearly and related to them.'⁴⁴ Sadly, what was virtue to one community, the indigenous Fijians, was vice to another, the Indo-Fijians. The irony could not be greater.

At a farewell function held for defeated and retiring parliamentarians in 1999, Dr Apenisa Kurusiqila, the Speaker of the House of Representatives, paid handsome tribute to the former Leader of the Opposition. The two men had got on well together. Reddy recalled how the Speaker had used the moral authority and facilities of his office to promote friendly interaction between the two sides of the House during the fractious 1990s, fostering an atmosphere that, he hoped, would be conducive to meaningful dialogue between the two main communities and their principal political leaders. His hope had not been in vain. Dr Kurusiqila, Reddy said, was one of the gentle, unsung heroes of the successful reconciliation process in the late 1990s. There was hardly a dry eye in the audience as Dr Kurusiqila spoke, Mary Chapman recalled. He spoke with characteristic generosity and good judgment about what Reddy had done and accomplished in the most difficult of circumstances in the 1990s, the man who had helped make it all



Dr Kurusiqila farewelling, Jai Ram Reddy, Parliament House, 1999. On the extreme left is Kamal Iyer, Administrator of the Office of the Leader of the Opposition, and on the extreme right is Mary Chapman, Secretary General of Parliament.

Photo courtesy of the Fiji Times.

possible through his persistence and perseverance. At the end of his political journey, Reddy stood tall in defeat. His voice breaking, Dr Kurusiqila said, 'Jai, parliament will not be the same without you.'⁴⁵

Reddy was moved. 'This is not the end of the road for me,' he managed in the midst of welling emotion. Indeed it was not. Soon afterwards, another door would open for him in a faraway land, in Tanzania, where he would cover himself with glory and honour that he never found among his own people, in the land of his birth.

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NOTES

1. Peter Thomson, *Kava in the Blood: A Personal and Political Memoir from the Heart of Fiji* (Auckland: Tandem Press, 1999), 127.
2. *The Review Magazine*, 'Mood for Reconciliation,' (Jan. 1998), 21.
3. See his *The Life of Politics* (London: Methuen, 1968), 177.
4. *Fiji Times*, 4 June 2001.
5. The background to Ratu Mara is in his memoirs: *The Pacific Way: a Memoir* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1997).
6. Joni Madraiwiwi, *A Personal Perspective: The Speeches of Joni Madraiwiwi* (Suva: University of the South Pacific, 2008), 271.
7. Sir Robert Foster, 'Fiji: final despatch before independence,' 8 Oct 1970, in Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) 32/606, no.1.
8. Wrote Mara of Patel: 'He had been a brilliant lawyer, an eloquent speaker, a charismatic leader of his party and a doughty opponent. But it has to be admitted that political negotiation with him had proved difficult, and on occasion impossible. In particular he was irrevocably committed to the policy of common roll as a first step, not as an aim for the future, which we were prepared to concede.' *Pacific Way*, 97.
9. Some have gone so far as to assert that Mara 'hated' Reddy whom he regarded as an 'upstart.' See Jim Anthony, *The First International Conference on the Political Crisis in Fiji: A Report* (7–9 July, 1988 International Movement for Democracy in Fiji, Honolulu), 14–15. Anthony adds that 'Mara hated AD Patel. He liked Koya as long as he could keep Koya under his thumb.'
10. Sikivou was not even accorded a farewell morning tea when he left the Alliance Cabinet after many years of service. It did not help that Sikivou was a commoner.
11. Thomson, *Kava in the Blood*, 162.
12. Such as in 1982 during the Queen's visit to Fiji when Ratu Mara put Reddy last in a long line, after the members of the diplomatic corps, to greet Her Majesty, when protocol demanded that he should come after the cabinet ministers.

When the Queen finally reached Reddy, Prince Philip asked him: ‘And which country do you represent?’ Reddy replied: ‘I am Her Majesty’s Leader of the Loyal Opposition.’ The Queen noted the remark and made a point of seeing Reddy again to say goodbye before retiring for the night.

13. *The Weekender*, 6 Feb. 1993. In an interview broadcast posthumously on Fiji TV, Ratu Mara changed his tune, but by then he was playing politics. Mahendra Chaudhry was prime minister and his daughter, Adi Koila, was a minister in his government. Reddy was by then out of politics.
14. Rabuka’s early life and his execution of the 1987 coup are covered in Eddie Dean and Stan Ritova, *No Other Way* (Sydney: Doubleday, 1988); also John Sharpham, *Rabuqa of Fiji: Authorised biography of Major-General Sitiveni Rabuqa* (Rockhampton: Central Queensland University Press, 2000).
15. It is an assessment shared by James Raman, a member of parliament and of the Joint Parliamentary Select Committee on the Constitution Review. Personal communication, Sept. 2009.
16. John Sharpham, *Rabuqa of Fiji*, 321.
17. That certainly was the basis of my own relationship with Tomasi Vakatora on the Fiji Constitution Review Commission.
18. He reportedly made the comment in a radio interview.
19. FCO 32/606, no.1, 8 Oct. 1970
20. A warm tribute, ‘The Life and Trials of Koya,’ is in the *Fiji Times*, 17 Apr. 1993.
21. Among them, Sir Leslie Monson, Deputy Under-Secretary of State for the Commonwealth, 1967–1972. A summary of the larger decolonisation debate, which is covered in my *A Time Bomb Lies Buried: Fiji’s Road to Independence, 1960–1970* (Canberra: ANU E Press: SSGM Monograph Series, no 1, 2008).
22. *Fiji Times* 19 Aug. 1985.
23. *Fiji Times*, 12 May 1992.
24. Fairlie, *The Life of Politics*, 23.
25. For example, Peter Thomson, *Kava in the Blood*, 127, where he writes that

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Reddy often had a 'rather meek manner' with 'a slightly bemused, almost hurt expression on his face,' but that these 'outward appearances belied a dogged inner resolve.'

26. Chaudhry's threat is in *The Review Magazine*, Aug. 1992.
27. The agreement apparently was that neither Labour nor NFP would contest the seat won by each other, but to actually campaign for the other party was another matter.
28. Quotes from Reddy's speech to the General Voters Party, 1993.
29. The essential features of consociationalism are a grand coalition of elites representing the different segments of society, mutual veto over matters of particular concern to the different communities, proportionality in representation, and segmental autonomy that allows for the maintenance of different cultural identities. See Arend Lijphart, 'Consociational design for divided societies.' *Journal of Democracy*, 15:2 (2004), 96–109, and more generally his *Democracy in Plural Societies: A comparative Exploration* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1977).
30. *The Weekender*, 30 Apr. 1993.
31. *Pacific Islands Monthly*, June, 1987.
32. See Nemani Delaibatiki's assessment, 'Where's Labour heading to,' in *Daily Post*, 23 May 1995.
33. Thomson, *Kava in the Blood*, 127.
34. *The Weekender*, 16 July 1993.
35. In 2009, a year after Chaudhry was dropped from the military cabinet and a few months after the 1997 Constitution was abrogated, Chaudhry joined forces with Qarase to petition the international community for an early return to parliamentary democracy!
36. *Fiji Times*, 22 June 1981.
37. Interview in *The Review Magazine*, Jan. 1998, 21.
38. *Fiji Times*, 8 Apr. 1996.
39. *The Review Magazine*, Jan. 1998.

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40. This is according to Tomasi Vakatora who recalled the incident vividly as he had to forego his usual Saturday game of golf to attend an emergency meeting.
41. *Fiji Times*, 14 Nov. 2008.
42. David Reynolds, *In Command of History: Churchill Fighting and Writing the Second World War* (Penguin, 2005), 525.
43. *The Review Magazine*, 16 Aug. 2003.
44. *The Review Magazine*, 1 Aug. 2003.
45. Reddy recalled this in his eulogy for Dr Kurusiqila, 31 Jan. 2001.