

CHAPTER 6: TRANSITION

*The old order changeth, yields place to new
And God fulfils himself in many ways
Lest one good custom corrupt another*
Alfred Lord Tennyson

12 May 1987 was Jai Ram Reddy's 50th birthday. It had been an eventful half century for the lad from rural Lautoka, handed the short straw like so many of his time and place, and growing up in the long, lingering shadow cast by the events of World War II: the dislocation of the farming community in western Viti Levu caused by the war-time work, the effects of the crippling strikes in the sugar industry, and the deteriorating race relations resulting from the varying degrees of enthusiasm with which the different communities had approached the war effort. After an indifferent high school record, Reddy had acquired a New Zealand law degree, later emerging as the leading criminal barrister of his generation. His early political career had been spent almost entirely in the labyrinth of Indo-Fijian politics as a fire-fighter, a peace-maker and a bridge-builder, although he was of course not viewed that way by those who were on the other side of the political divide for whom he was the very epicentre of the political turbulence that racked his people and his party. After 1977, Reddy emerged on the centre stage as the dominant leader of the Indo-Fijian community and its representative to the outside world.

In December 1983 Reddy had walked out of parliament after an altercation with the Speaker of the House, hoping that would be the end of his parliamentary career. The elections of 1987 brought him back on to the political stage as the principal architect of the Coalition which finally

dislodged the Alliance from power after an uninterrupted reign of twenty one years, and as its leading campaigner even though he himself was not a candidate. He was often in the eye of the storm after the coups, the target of attacks by the Fijian nationalists who thought him the real power behind the Bavadra throne, sitting on various commissions struggling to get Fiji back onto the road of parliamentary democracy, counselling caution and moderation in political dialogue, giving hope to his people demoralized by the display of destructive indigenous ethno-nationalism and rampant religious fanaticism. The coups marked the end of the first, largely unproductive phase of Jai Ram Reddy's career. A more productive one was about to unfold, transforming in the process a communal politician into a respected elder statesman.

1987 was also a cataclysmic year for Fiji. It ended an era in modern Fijian history and ushered another whose future and fate it is yet too early to tell. But of its seminal, life-changing impact on the politics, society and economy of Fiji there can be no doubt. It was, by any measure, a watershed year etched forever in the collective memory of the nation, the most transforming moment in its 20th-century history. The bayonet abruptly overturned the verdict of the ballot box. The rule of law was rudely ruptured. Political turmoil engulfed the country. Race relations were frayed and racial discrimination entrenched in public policy as never before. Indo-Fijian tenants were threatened with the non-renewal of their leases for no other reason than for voting for a political party not supported by the landowners. Poverty deepened and mushrooming squatter settlements became a permanent feature of areas surrounding major urban centres. There was, after all this, justifiable ground for grief and despair and anger but instead Jai Ram Reddy chose reconciliation and healing as his preferred path forward so that his people could live a life of dignity and peace in a land where they had so few rights and such limited opportunities. After the coups, Reddy seriously began to question the assumptions and political arrangements of the early independence era. These, he realized, had proved disastrous for Fiji and had to be discarded in favour of something else that nurtured

consensus, not confrontation and that promoted national unity rather than ethnic division. His focus shifted from acquiring power through the ballot box to sharing it in a just and equitable way with the other communities.

The coups hastened the departure from the national scene of the paramount Fijian chiefs who had for long dominated the affairs of their people and of the nation at large. The four great chiefs of their time, Ratu Sir George Cakobau, Ratu Sir Edward Cakobau, Ratu Sir Penaia Ganilau and, of course, Ratu Sir Kamisese Mara, were tutored by the United Kingdom for national leadership, to take charge when the independence train took off in the early 1960s. The first two went early, but Ganilau and Mara were fated to live through the traumatic transition effected by the coups and variously touched by the many controversies generated by them. By then they were not the same influential, awe-inspiring figures they had once been, their life's work being undone before their eyes, their overarching influence unobtrusively on the wane. The May 1987 coup was ostensibly carried out in the name of the Fijian people, to preserve the central tenets of traditional Fijian society from erosion by the forces of modernity, but its cumulative effect ironically was to achieve quite the opposite: to undermine the ideology and structure of chiefly leadership. It also opened up deep fissures within indigenous Fijian society which had been carefully hidden from the public view by the policies and artifices of the colonial administration and the overarching influence of chiefly leadership. Fijian political fragmentation, which would have appeared unthinkable in the 1970s, became a troubling, persistent reality in the 1990s, and it is unlikely ever now to disappear.

Rabuka's public attitude towards chiefs, once dutiful and reverential, changed over time. He publicly clashed with Ratu Mara who, in turn, sought to undermine the young 'upstart,' to use his words, by encouraging the formation of rival political parties, most notably the Fijian Association Party. Rabuka's defeat in 1999 was attributable in part at least to Mara's continuing, subtle behind-the-scenes influence. Nonetheless, Rabuka remained the preeminent Fijian leader in the 1990s. His presence at the helm was significant for the political developments that unfolded and defined

the decade, not the least because Jai Ram Reddy could work fruitfully with Rabuka better than he ever could with Mara. At the time of the coup in 1987, though, Rabuka was a fire-breathing nationalist, a religious fundamentalist determined, he said, to convert the 'heathens' to his faith. In the early 1990s, he was still erratic, making contradictory statements, still courting the nationalist fringe perhaps as a survival strategy. But from the mid-1990s he changed and became a committed multiracialist. A part of the reason was the endless informal conversations Rabuka had with Reddy. There was a developing mutual trust between the two men. Rabuka 'trusted' Reddy in a way he did not trust Mahendra Chaudhry, even though the Labour leader had helped launch his political career in 1992. Reddy saw the possibility of change in Rabuka and sought to work with him. Mara was Olympian, a seasoned politician who could never quite fathom Reddy and who, for all his proclaimed commitment to democracy, believed deep inside him that Fijians, and especially chiefs, should take the lead in running the country. Rabuka hindered his dynastic ambitions.

Jai Ram Reddy entered politics when the Indo-Fijian community was nearly half the national population. It was, in the early days of independence, a moderately prosperous and settled community. The future of the sugar industry looked bright; rural schools were full and run well, and school leavers were able to find public sector jobs of varying degrees of attractiveness and financial satisfaction. By the late 1960s and early 1970s, as Canada opened up its immigration policy under the progressive Liberal Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau, some were beginning to emigrate or were contemplating it, though for most that prospect seemed remote on the horizon. But politically, the Indo-Fijian community was marginalized. The leaders of the National Federation Party had been in the vanguard of the independence movement, but their people were not fated to enjoy its fruits as equal partners in government because of a race-based electoral system that manifestly disadvantaged them, consigning them to a permanent place on the Opposition benches. By the time Reddy departed the political arena, the Indo-Fijian community had been reduced to a sizeable

but diminishing minority of the total population, with attendant political consequences.

Fear of 'Indian dominance' lay very near the surface of Fijian political thinking in the 1970s and 1980s, that Fijian people would be dispossessed of their fundamental birthright, especially their rights to land, if Indo-Fijians, with their superior numbers and inherent cunning, were ever allowed to assume the reins of power. 'Blood will flow' was a commonplace phrase in the immediate post-independence years uttered ominously by Ratu Mara himself, meaning Indian blood would flow if Fijian land and leadership were ever threatened. A system of racial representation in parliament ensured that politics was racially organized. It was so from the beginning. The National Federation Party was based in the Indo-Fijian community and the Alliance in the Fijian and General Elector. Both paid obligatory lip service to the principles of multiracialism, but the underlying truth of racial compartmentalization was never quite hidden from view. In this scheme of things, appealing for political support from members of other communities was seen not as an opportunity to increase the space of genuine multiracial politics, but rather as an attempt to divide the people, which worsened relations at election time. Elections in truth became racial censuses, racial contests. Victory had to be obtained at any cost, for the very survival of a particular 'race' depended on the outcome, the politicians told the people. Politics was a deadly zero-sum, winner-take-all game, which left little space for consensus and compromise.

This was the world of politics that Reddy inherited and which he inhabited for the first part of his career. But soon he despaired at the futility of it all. With the grossly inflated numbers of General Voters in parliament, Reddy realized that Fijians would always remain in power and that his people would be consigned to the political wilderness forever. Preoccupation with race was detrimental not only for his own community but for the country as a whole. Power sharing, he was beginning to feel, was far better than openly competing for it in the traditional Westminster style. He accepted that, at least for the foreseeable future, political activity in Fiji would

be organized along racial lines. Rather than fight that truth, it was better to acknowledge it and devise a political arrangement that would facilitate genuine power sharing between the two major communities. Reddy had experience to go by. 'The communal pools are extremely strong,' he said in 1992, and multiracialism through open competition for power was 'a bit premature for Fiji' for the foreseeable future where race would continue to play an important role in forming perceptions.¹ Instead of denying it, Reddy argued, it was best 'to accept it because neither party [Alliance nor the NFP] has been very successful in attracting support from the other community over the years.' Any effort to gather support from another group fostered suspicion and hostility about divide and rule. 'Let us accept that we must co-exist and work together and work with each other.'²

The concept of power sharing that Reddy had been advocating for nearly a decade by the 1990s, had been around in continental Europe for decades, its principal theorist being the Dutch-born political scientist, Arend Lijphart.³ Consociationalism, which was the name given to the power-sharing arrangement, rests on some fundamental pillars. It involves guaranteed representation of recognized communities in parliament and state apparatus on the principle of proportionality, respect for the 'segmental autonomy' of the different groups in the management of their internal affairs, 'mutual veto' over matters of importance to the different communities and a 'grand coalition' where elites of the different communities cooperate for the harmonious functioning of society. Political stability is thus achieved through a formally recognized and mutually respected system of structured power sharing. The fear of dominance of one group over another is reduced, if not eliminated. And this was what Reddy wanted for Fiji. 'We are not seeking dominance,' he said as early as 1993. 'All we are seeking is a fair chance. We are seeking fairness, equity and justice which are recognized human right.'⁴ So, from open to structured competition for power was one important change in Reddy's out look.

There was another: the tone and tenor of Indo-Fijian political discourse. For a very long time, Indo-Fijian politics was suffused with a large

dose of grievance and flourished on a confrontational style of politics. This was understandable in the circumstances. In many sectors of life — in the allocation of tertiary scholarships and employment in the public service, for instance — Indo-Fijians were systematically discriminated against purely on the grounds of ethnicity, and their leaders were obliged to raise their concerns in public, even at the expense of incurring the wrath of the government. But this is more or less all they did: talk; and they received a predictable response from the government: closing of rank along racial lines. Every issue of public policy in time came to be viewed through the prism of race. There was little opportunity, and even less political incentive, to see problems from the other side of the divide. In this environment, leaders often talked at each other rather than to each other, often through the media. Race, Ratu Mara often said, was a fact of life in Fiji. It was also becoming a way of life.

By the early 1990s, Reddy was moving decisively away from the old style of politics. This is evident, for instance, in his address to the NFP convention in Suva in 1994. There, Reddy talked about the various problems facing Fiji, including unemployment, crime, poor health care, declining social welfare. His approach was inclusive and far-sighted: ‘These are not communal or racial issues,’ he said. ‘I am just as concerned with Fijian poverty as I am with Indian poverty. My desire for better health care is not limited to the Indian community. Hunger and disease make no racial distinctions: they affect us all in the same way. Our need for a robust and successful economy bringing prosperity to every citizen, likewise, offers us a common purpose.’ It was the same message he gave in an address to the Fiji Principals Association in 1994. ‘There can be no dissent from the aim of increasing indigenous Fijian participation in education and enhancing the performance of Fijian students. We must all share in the concern about the results coming from some Fijian schools. The trend cannot be ignored. We will never succeed in shaping a model of multiracial society if the curriculum, the facilities and the teaching environment are not responsive to the particular needs of the indigenous community.’

The search for a common, uniting purpose, the common space, would be Reddy's major preoccupation throughout the 1990s. He told the 1994 NFP convention that there should be 'no place in our thinking for what might be called a zero-sum game, in which one community must lose for the other to gain.' It was the same message Reddy delivered to the General Voters Party. 'I am not interested in the tired old rhetoric of racial politics,' he said. 'I am weary of pointless bickering, ugly innuendoes and raking over old coal.' There were challenges ahead which would not be met by 'perpetuating the recriminations and narrow racial perceptions of the past.' He asked people to be open-minded and accommodating. Speaking on multiracialism at the NFP's 1997 convention, he said that the concept to him was 'an attitude, a state of the mind.' He continued: 'Multiracialism to me means sensitivity to and understanding of other people's feelings and needs,' 'a capacity to understand and care about others who may be different from me,' 'a willingness to be accommodative,' 'and the ability to appreciate and rejoice in other people's cultures and accomplishments.' Such talk would have been rare in the 1970s and 1980s.

By the 1990s, Reddy's early impatience and a preoccupation with a speedy resolution of problems were gone, as he realized that he was embarked on a massive project of social and political reform and reengagement which might conceivably go even beyond his own life time. What was important for him was to make a start in the right direction, and not worry about the final destination of a long and difficult journey ahead. He began to take a long-term view of things, while his opponents focused squarely on things here and now. Reddy would say, for instance, that the 1997 Constitution, with its novel power sharing idea at the centre of it, should be given time, perhaps even at the expense of party political activity for some years, to prove its potential. He asked questions that transcended the narrow confines of communal politics. 'Unless we have a clear sense of who we are,' he told a Fijian Association Party function in May 1996, 'we cannot proceed to determine the place we want Fiji to be, we can't expect to find our niche among nations.' Valuable time was being wasted. 'We seem to be

struggling in the torrent of history, unable or unwilling to chart a course that will take us safely through to nationhood. And if we lack a clear vision of what we want for ourselves as a people — all of us — how can we hope to define ourselves as a nation or plot a future for our children. Not only do we seem unsure of precisely how we are to set out on this mission, we sometimes appear unable to accurately identify our destination.'

This enlarging, encompassing, approach was an important part of Reddy's political repertoire in 1990s. He was now focused on the process of bringing about change, not some clearly identifiable end result. 'What we are saying,' Reddy remarked in 1992, 'is that we will try our best by the most honest and practical way we know' to bring about change. '[The] rest I would leave to Providence.' The contrast with Labour's more agitational, outcome-oriented style of politics could not be greater. Reddy agreed with Rabuka who had likened a nation to a family. 'Like all families, we have our disagreements, our sibling rivalries, if you like,' he said. 'But don't we also have a real sense of the intrinsic virtue of unity and togetherness? Don't we have a sense of what we can achieve if we realize that we are interdependent, that we all need each other?' To be sure, members of a family had varying interests and worries. Nonetheless, 'we share a common love for our home, for the land that gave us birth, and in whose service we are now called to find common cause and unity.' Reddy said in October 1995: 'The coup did many bad things, but it made both Fijians and Indians realize that coexistence is not enough. The two races must become one nationality. It's time.'⁵

The early years of Reddy's career were spent almost entirely in the world of Indo-Fijian politics. Both the community and the party were bitterly divided as became painfully clear in the 1977 elections. The leadership ambitions of NFP's political leaders hobbled the party and virtually destroyed its prospects as a government-in-waiting. Reddy, as a newcomer and as a person with a clean image, was called upon to mend fences, build bridges, to put out the intra-party fires. An enormous amount of his energy went into healing the wounds within his own party. To his credit,

he succeeded in rebuilding a shattered political organization into an effective fighting machine by the early 1980s, enough, as we have seen, to come within two seats of capturing power in the 1982 general elections. But the overwhelming impression of the early years is of incessant fighting over small things that in the larger perspective did not matter. Essentially, the NFP was a party of the Indo-Fijian community with a small sprinkling of non-Indian support. Reddy realized that things had to change if the party was to make a serious bid for national power. It would have to reach beyond the Indo-Fijian community for support. To that end, he attempted a coalition with the Western United Front. In line with his developing philosophy of consociationalism, he would seek partnership with a representative Fijian party as he would with the SVT in the late 1990s.

Reddy also brought a degree of professionalism to the proceedings of the National Federation Party beyond his role as the repairer of damage: The NFP conventions of the 1970s appear to have been occasions beset with intrigue and machination, concerned to ensure the election of 'right' people as office bearers. Speeches were made, but no archival record survives of them. The convention brochures are perfunctory, containing messages from branch presidents and other worthies, snippets from public speeches, advertisements from companies supporting the party. Under Reddy's leadership, I have no doubt there was plotting and campaigning going on behind the scenes, but this was not the main feature of the event. As two speeches (of the Cuvu and the Ba conventions) included in this book show, the Party Leader's address was the main event of the day. The speeches are, by any yardstick, remarkable documents of power and persuasion. Reddy raises substantial issues; he talks *to* the people, not *at* them. He invites reflection and feedback. There is a seriousness of purpose in the speeches that is refreshing and stimulating. Reddy appears to be using the occasion to reach out to a larger constituency beyond his party. And this would be the hallmark of all NFP conventions throughout the 1990s, with one added feature: the engagement of a keynote speaker, who was not usually a member of the party, but who was expected to raise pertinent issues for discus-

sion and reflection. Among those who addressed the NFP convention in the 1990s was (the now disgraced) Justice of the Federal Court of Australia and former Human Rights Commissioner, Justice Marcus Einfeld. I spoke at the convention in 1993.

Beyond politics, Reddy began to engage more broadly with other communities. 1987 was perhaps the first occasion that Reddy appeared on the political scene not simply as an Indian leader, but as a national figure. Non-Indians for the first time saw him as a speaker and a campaigner, and were impressed by what they saw. In the 1990s, as his stature grew, he gave talks and addresses to non-Indian audiences: to the General Voters Party, the Fijian Association Party, to the Queen Victoria School, to multi-racial business communities and non-government organizations. He was deliberately reaching out, sharing his vision with a wider community which had hitherto remained inaccessible to him and to most Indo-Fijian leaders. Reddy realized that to break the ice, he would have to make the first move, and he did. On all these occasions, he talked about the broader national interest, the need for national unity and cohesion, the necessity to move away from a preoccupation with race. He told St Joseph Secondary School in Suva: 'The path you follow, the steps you climb, the dream you dream, is yours. How we want the future to be is up to us. If we dream that dream, we can have it. It is just a matter of working towards it.' He told the QVS students: 'You belong to a proud race of people. You have much to be proud of. While you must be firmly rooted in your own culture, language and traditions, you must also recognize you have nothing to lose, to gain much, by learning of, and about, the language and culture and ways of life of other communities around you.' The last time an Indian leader had addressed QVS was AD Patel in 1968. And giving the concluding address to mark the 'Year of the Indigenous People,' celebrations, Reddy spoke warmly of the 'folklore, the songs and dance, the art and artefacts of the Fijian people,' their 'wonderful seafaring skills, the awe-inspiring ocean-going canoes,' 'their well-organized, self-contained and resilient society built in harmony with their environment,' and embraced these as 'part of my own heritage.

The full speech is reproduced later in this book. The culmination of these efforts was, of course, Reddy's history-defining address to the Great Council of Chiefs in 1997.

By the late 1980s and early 1990s, Reddy was in complete command of his party, its universally accepted leader, in the same way that AD Patel had been in the 1960s. There were no hints of dissension, which was a far cry from the days of the 1970s and the early 1980s. All the old warriors were gone. Karam Ramrakha had migrated to Australia in the early 1980s, from where he wrote the occasional article about local politics, but made no other intervention. Siddiq Koya, denied a seat in the 1987 general elections, was out of politics and in the twilight of his public life. Mrs Irene Jai Narayan had self-destructed. She had joined the Alliance and after 1987, even more incredibly, Sitiveni Rabuka's military government. After that involvement, there was no coming back for her; her bridges to her former party and to her community, were burnt for good. Vijay Parmanandam and Shardha Nand and Sir Vijay R Singh, among the prominent players in the earlier days, and other manufacturers of intrigue and instability and insurrection, were all gone or in retirement. Reddy was now in complete control of a new team. Their loyalty was assured.

For all his time in parliament, Jai Ram Reddy was the parliamentary leader of the National Federation Party as well as the Leader of the Opposition. The office of the Leader of the Opposition is unique to the Westminster system of government. The office is traditionally held by the leader of the largest parliamentary party not in government, who is also seen as the alternative Prime Minister. Reddy holds the unenviable record of being the longest serving Leader of the Opposition in Fiji's parliamentary history. The job, if conscientiously done, is taxing and inordinately time consuming. It demands a mastery of parliamentary and committee procedures. It requires providing cohesion and leadership to the Opposition team, a careful and searching scrutiny of government initiatives and policies, and an alternative vision to the electorate. More, it requires a competence to speak on a mind-boggling array of often mundane subjects — with persuasion

and eloquence, if you are to make any impression on the government, or anyone else — as this typical list for the period August-December 1978 would suggest, when Reddy spoke at varying lengths on: Bill on Edible Oil, the Civil Service, Debt Servicing Budget Deficit, Nadi Airport Tender Situation Operating Expenditure, Flour Mills of Fiji Company Tax, Taxation, Sugar Industry Board, Third Party Insurance, Customs and Tariff Bill, Fiji National Provident Fund Amendment Bill, Guarantee of Loan to Fiji Electricity Authority, High Drainage Rates, Parliamentary Salaries Review Committee, Petroleum Exploration and Exploitation Bill, Business Fee for Medical Practitioners, Commission of Enquiry to Review all Reports of Treatment of Offenders, Ombudsman Report on Alleged Brutalities, Report on Motor Vehicle Insurance, Traffic Amendment Legislation, Supplementary Appropriations Bill, Unit Trust Amendment Bill

If you add to this list the literally hundreds of speeches the Leader of the Opposition is expected as guest speaker to give on public occasions outside parliament, and the countless articles he has to write for the annual school magazines and brochures of community organizations, you begin to appreciate the sheer enormity and tedium of the task. Some contributions are, of course, more important than others, and perhaps few as eagerly anticipated as the Opposition's Budget Reply when the government's program of expenditure for the following year is presented for parliamentary approval. Reddy gave the annual Reply throughout the early-mid 1990s, when the responsibility was assumed by the economist Wadan Narsey, to Reddy's enormous relief. Each Reply is a small monograph really, carefully thought out and accessibly written. The degree of professionalism that went into its preparation is impressive.

In the 1970s and 1980s, as the Leader of the Opposition, Reddy had raised issues about discrimination against Indo-Fijians in the civil service, and about education or the reservation of Crown land. But these were seen by many Fijians as simply 'Indian' issues, and treated accordingly: disregarded. It must have been soul-destroying for the Opposition benches to be repeatedly dismissed by the government of the day no mat-

ter how genuine or serious their grievances. The frustration caused by this may have contributed to Reddy's decision to leave parliament in 1983. By the 1990s, when Reddy was in the second phase of his parliamentary career, while many similar issues were raised, the tone and tenor of the discourse changed, which brought more receptiveness from the other side of the House. It helped that Sitiveni Rabuka, not Ratu Mara, was at the helm of the government. Mara could be cold and curt, as was his wont when challenged, while Rabuka was courteous and collegial and open to persuasion. By the 1990s, Reddy had a commanding presence in the House as its elder statesman. When he spoke, people listened. There was his spellbinding oratory of which people spoke, his careful marshalling of the evidence to make a compelling case. He put his forensic advocacy skills as a barrister to effective use. People crossed swords with him at their peril. Once when Semesa Sikivou interjected to say that Reddy was an exception to his *own* rule, Reddy responded: 'You are an exception to *every* rule I know.' When Sakeasi Butadroka peppered parliament with his trademark racially provocative remarks, Reddy said: 'I cannot help thinking that the Honourable Member sometimes, or most of the time, has his head in neutral and allows his tongue to idle off.' And when Labour's Vinod Maharaj asked for ninety-nine year agricultural leases, Reddy shot back, 'Is native land your father's private property?' *Tumhaar baap ke zameen hai?* This was the only time in Fiji's recent parliamentary history when a free-flowing (and predictably acrimonious) debate was conducted in Hindustani. But there were lighter moments as well. Once Reddy used the word 'albeit' in the course of his speech, which to a somnolent Dan Costello sounded like 'bullshit,' whereupon he promptly asked for the Speaker's ruling on the use of unparliamentary language by the Leader of the Opposition! When KN Rao, speaking on the Fiji National Provident Fund, ponderously asked, 'What will be my position when I am dead,' someone remarked to much mirth: 'Horizontal.' And once, when a speaker, getting carried away, said that Fiji could become a Utopia, someone whispered 'More like Ethiopia.'

Jai Ram Reddy played the leading role in exposing two of the worst scandals in Fiji's postcolonial history, one which led eventually to the toppling of the first Rabuka government, and the other which took Fiji to the brink of bankruptcy. The first was what came to be known as the Tony Stephens affair. Stephens was a conman who had been detained by the security forces in 1988 for allegedly importing pen pistols into Fiji. Discharged, he sued the government for \$F30 million in damages, but agreed to settle for a mere \$F10 million. Under a deed of settlement surreptitiously signed by the Attorney General, Apaitia Seru, Stephens was to be paid \$F980,000 in cash in an out-of-court settlement. For the remaining amount, the government agreed to pay off two mortgages under Stephens' name with the Home Finance Company and the National Bank of Fiji; settle claims with the ANZ for a guarantee to Stephens and dismiss a bankruptcy case against him; transfer a plantation in Taveuni under mortgage control of the National Bank of Fiji; and settle all matters relating to three land titles owned by Stephens' family. The deed was astonishingly exempt from income tax, land tax and value-added tax. Fortunately, before the deed could be executed, Reddy exposed the scandal in parliament as an example of 'gross corruption,' 'gross incompetence,' and 'an attempt to swindle the government.'⁶

Jai Ram Reddy pressed for a binding judicial enquiry, but the government settled on an ordinary commission of inquiry, headed by retired high court judge, Sir Ronald Kermode. In a damning report, Kermode concluded that 'the Prime Minister's actions as regard the events leading up to the execution of the Deed were not only improper but *prima facie* illegal.' The government sought to dismiss the report, which led Reddy to remark: 'If we treat Commissioners like this it would not surprise me if no judge worth half a grain of salt would undertake an enquiry of this nature.'⁷ The proper place to test the findings of the report, Reddy argued was in a court of law. The whole saga tarnished the government's reputation for probity. Rabuka's moral authority as the leader of government was compromised, and it emboldened his critics within his party to move against him, which they did two years later.

The other major scandal which Reddy exposed in parliament involved the National Bank of Fiji. On 15 June, 1995, Finance Minister Berenado Vunibobo announced that the government-owned commercial bank had accumulated a debt of around \$F220 million, or about eight percent of Fiji's GDP, leading ultimately to its collapse.⁸ How did this come about? Reddy had been concerned for sometime about rumours surrounding the Bank's financial status, and raised questions about its integrity, internal corruption, alleged kickbacks and unsecured loans. The Bank, he told parliament, 'never followed prudent banking practices, its directors never carried out the task that was assigned to them; the management broke every rule in the book on [its] lending services.'⁹ 'There is even talk of NBF being insolvent,' he continued, asking whether it was 'not time we probed a little more deeply into the affairs of the Bank.' He was convinced that 'there is more than just carelessness in NBF.' He talked of corrupt transactions and negligence, pointing to irregular securities on loans, lack of insurance cover on properties mortgaged to the Bank, irregular or no loan repayment, defaulting clients, and poor or no recovery strategy.¹⁰ Reddy attacked the Minister of Finance Paul Manuelli for not accepting 'the responsibility for the mess that has been created,' and pressed for an independent and comprehensive enquiry into the Bank's affairs.

When the government invoked the confidentiality principle to block any enquiry, Reddy responded that 'the doctrine of confidentiality does not extend to fraudulent actions or those actions which constitute gross and serious abuse of office.' It was a fine point, but the government was not listening. Instead, it clamped down on the media for exposing the scandal. 'They do not want you to know about the abuse of public office and public corruption and the growing cancer of corruption across our land,' Reddy said. 'They don't want the free flow of information which citizens need to make informed decisions. They only want you to know what they think you should know.'¹¹ In 1996, under enormous public pressure, the government introduced the NBF Restructuring Bill to clean up the debris left behind by the debacle. Reddy had played a seminal role, in parliament and outside,

in raising public awareness of the issue. Some in government thought this was an 'Indian' attempt to malign a 'Fijian' government institution, among them Sitiveni Rabuka who portrayed 'the attack on the National Bank of Fiji [as] orchestrated against Fijian businessmen and companies,'¹² but the charge carried no weight. As a *Fiji Times* editorial said forthrightly: 'Let us get some things straight. There is no foreign plot. The media is not trying to topple the government. Criticism of the NBF debacle has nothing to do with race.'¹³ The NBF, Sir Vijay R Singh quipped, should have been in the business of lending money, not giving it away.¹⁴ Reddy's national stature as a leader of conscience and commitment remained intact.

It is a truism in the Westminster system of government that all too often, governments propose and oppositions oppose. The adversarial system of politics allows little space for concession, dialogue and negotiation, which could be construed as signs of weakness. So, governments often carry on 'right, wrong, or indifferent.' 'Unless we can devise a format in which intelligent and meaningful discussion can take place,' Reddy said in December 1983, 'within the scope of which intelligent and meaningful changes can be brought about, there is really very little scope for a constructive or meaningful debate.'¹⁵ In this respect, the 1970s and the 1980s were wasted years because the Alliance was intent on governing on its own, rarely ever taking the Opposition into confidence. Jai Ram Reddy had more luck in the 1990s. By then, he was the senior member of the House whose views commanded respect and attention, if not universal acceptance. On one occasion, his eloquence and persuasive powers won over several ministers, leading them to vote for an Opposition motion against their own government! The motion moved by Reddy condemned the resumption of nuclear testing in the Pacific by the French.¹⁶ The French decision, Reddy said, 'displays an arrogant and blatant disregard for the views of the sovereign nations of the Pacific Region, and denies its people of various ethnic origins and groups their basic human rights to continue enjoying a healthy and wholesome environment, completely free from radiation and other nuclear testing consequences and dangers.' The Pacific, Reddy said, 'is not a laboratory for

testing nuclear bombs; it is our home. There is no guarantee for the safety of nuclear testing, and, therefore, Fiji should not accept the assumption that these tests are safe. If the tests were safe, they should be carried out in France, and not at Mururoa or anywhere else in the Pacific region.'

Sitiveni Rabuka, caught off-guard, endorsed the spirit of Reddy's motion, but moved an amendment which condemned 'the development of nuclear technology for war-like devices and arsenal developments, and their testing whether they be atmospheric or subterranean, regardless of geographical locations of test sites,' urging 'nuclear-armed powers to proceed with the dismantling of nuclear war heads and other weapons of mass destruction.' Finance Minister Berenado Vunibobo urged a soft approach because, he said, Fiji's sugar export to the European Union might be placed in jeopardy if France took umbrage at Fiji's anti-nuclear stance. And the sovereignty argument was raised as well. Reddy replied with cool precision and devastating logic. 'I find the sugar argument the most spurious of all. It can be put as being the most ridiculous. If the Honourable Minister of Finance [Vunibobo] had to choose between contaminating Fiji with nuclear waste or nuclear pollution and not selling sugar, what would you choose? Is that not the bottom end of the argument?' As for the sovereignty argument, Reddy responded that his motion was not against France or the French; it was against nuclear testing in the Pacific. Sovereignty was never an absolute concept anyway because 'there are a host of things that countries are not allowed to do because they offend international law, international conventions and, above all, decency and humanity that we should learn to bear towards each other.'

Regarding the economic argument, Reddy said that the 'Europeans are very much economically inter-dependent but that did not stop European leaders from telling the French that what they were doing in the Pacific was not right.' Rabuka's amendment 'unnecessarily dilutes this debate,' Reddy argued. 'It takes the focus away from the issue that we are trying to address.' Two ministers, Leo Smith and Taufa Vakatale, agreed with Reddy and voted for his motion, thereby forfeiting their place in cabinet,

Taufa Vaʻkatala in conversation with Reddy in Parliament House at the time of the debate. Azam Khalil is in the foreground. Photo courtesy of Fiji Times.



while another, Isimeli Bose, abstained. 'I have to give it to him,' said Etuate Tavai of Reddy's performance. 'The politician that he is and the lawyer that he is, it was very convincing. He said this motion is not against the government, this motion is not against France. It is against nuclear testing in the South Pacific. And I am sure he must have convinced some of the members.'¹⁷ In truth, Reddy had most of the country behind him, including many prominent Church leaders who had petitioned him to take the cause up in parliament.

Just when things were looking to settle down for Reddy, there emerged a very tenacious Mahendra Chaudhry, leader of the Fiji Labour Party, who had begun stalking him for the leadership of the Indo-Fijian community since the early 1990s. Reddy informed his party colleagues of his desire eventually to hand over the reins of leadership to Chaudhry, whom he saw as his natural successor as the leader of the Indo-Fijian community, to the dismay of some in his own party who had their own private aspirations. But Chaudhry was impatient. He was keen to get to the top quickly. Reddy's political demise was, therefore, imperative for his ascendancy. For Reddy, it was like falling from the frying pan of his colleagues' leadership ambitions of the 1970s, into the fire of Chaudhry's determined quest for political dominance, and that too at a time when fundamental problems, such as the constitution and ALTA, were still to be resolved. The manufactured

differences were really paltry and inconsequential in the long term, but they took their toll at the time. 'Can you imagine any situation more depraved than the one we are in now?' Reddy asked in 1993. 'We have been denied everything; all our rights were taken away. What was 1987 but a virtual conquest! Our political rights were taken away, the government we helped get elected taken away, our constitution was taken away, and many senior civil servants were removed at gun point. And what are we doing now? We are busy undoing each other. It is an embarrassing situation to be in. I have to admit with some shame to people overseas that this is the situation.'¹⁸ *Soot na kapaas, kolia me lattha latthi*, as AD Patel used to say in the 1960s: the weavers [Indians] had neither thread nor cotton, and yet they were breaking each other's heads over it: fighting futile battles for no larger purpose at all.

For Reddy, the one paramount concern throughout the 1990s was the preservation of the unity of the Indo-Fijian community. He had experienced at first hand the deep hurt and lingering animosity intra-communal conflicts unleashed which took decades to heal. If April 1977 elections were a 'wake-up' call for Ratu Mara to mend fences with his Fijian constituency, the September elections of that year performed a similar role for Reddy. Throughout the 1990s, despite his often bitter battles, Reddy sought to maintain dialogue with Labour, despite Chaudhry's oft-repeated intention to 'finish NFP off.' In 1992, after initially supporting Reddy for the Leader of the Opposition, Chaudhry sought the support of four Fijian nationalists to have himself appointed to that position, but Reddy continued working with him. In 1995, for instance, he agreed to make a joint submission with Labour to the Constitution Review Commission when he could easily have gone alone. That same year, when a group of disgruntled NFP supporters, essentially Reddy's supporters, formed a new 'Janata Party' to contest a by-election against Labour's Gaffar Ahmed, Reddy actually campaigned for Labour when, given the circumstances, he might have been expected at the very least to remain prudently neutral. Privately, some battle-eager party supporters chafed at Reddy's strategy, raring to take the fight to the Labour leader, to meet him on his own terms and on his own turf, but none dared

to confront him publicly because Reddy was doing the right thing for the community, if not strictly in the narrow interests of his party.

The community which Reddy was leading in the 1990s was not the same as the one in the early 1970s when he entered politics. It had undergone a fundamental transformation caused by changes in travel and technology. Many people were moving away from villages and settlements to urban and peri-urban areas, both out of choice (because jobs could be had there) and by necessity (because agricultural leases were not being renewed). For these people, desperate and displaced, living in precarious circumstances in mushrooming squatter settlements, 'bread and butter' issues were all that mattered. They were therefore a natural constituency for Labour. And many in large numbers were emigrating to Australia, New Zealand and North America, people of talent and skill and commitment to the party (such as Girdhar (Gary) Raniga, Chandu Lodhia, Ahmed Bhamji, members of the professional and middle classes who had once formed a solid base for the National Federation Party. Even those who remained in Fiji saw no future in the country for themselves and their families and dreamed of leaving one day. Getting into politics was the last thing on their minds. Interestingly, many Indo-Fijians living overseas became vocal Labour supporters for a whole variety of reasons ranging from revenge for past injustices against them, to vague ideological commitment to the labour movement. They raised funds and even campaigned for Labour. It was not an insignificant factor in Labour's victory in Fiji.

By the 1990s, the culture of political campaigning in Fiji had changed. In the 1970s and the 1980s, big rallies full of rousing speeches were the order of the day. Political rallies were serious business as well as serious theatre, a valuable source of 'infotainment.' It was through this route that Reddy had entered the political arena. But by the late 1990s, not large rallies, but small 'pocket meetings' had become the norm of electioneering. What was said in these small gatherings, what message was sent out, what ideas planted in peoples' heads, no one outside the small circle knew, and there was no way of checking. But the new technique was effective. Labour was better

at playing this game than the NFP, with their extensive network reaching the grassroots. New entertainment had arrived in the form of videos and television. For the younger generation, large political rallies, never a part of their immediate personal experience anyway, had little appeal. The television gave them all they thought they needed to know about what was happening in the country. And the people, too, had changed, demanding immediate satisfaction and resolution of their daily problems, and leaders who would keep in constant touch with them and respond to their concerns and needs. Reddy's long term vision for his people and for the country were not falling on receptive ears.

Reddy's opponents accused him of 'lacking a strategy' for the Indo-Fijian community. Reddy had his eye on the larger picture for his community and the country. Krishna Datt dramatized the issue this way. He told a rally in Ba in 1994 that politics was a bit like fishing. You drop your anchor here, and if there are no bites, you move to another place; you keep moving until you catch something. The problem with Jai Ram Reddy, he said, was that he was simply sitting with his anchor in one place. (To which an old man sitting at the back of the crowd said: 'Son, what would you know about anchors; you have none yourself!'). Reddy abhorred Labour's tactics of boycotts, strikes and confrontational politics. They had been counter-productive, he had learned from personal experience; and the people who suffered most were not well-heeled trade union leaders but ordinary workers and farmers. 'In the context of multiracial societies, demands don't work,' Reddy said. 'We have to work slowly through consensus building exercise where we are able to identify areas of agreement and narrow down areas of disagreement and work around areas of disagreement to find compromise solutions.'¹⁹

Any confrontation with Fijians would hurt his own people more than anyone else. 'We will have to stop, as a matter of priority, inciting the ordinary people of this country,' Reddy argued. 'We will have to stop all forms of grandstanding and dramatics. We will have to show by our utterances and conduct that we have sincerity of purpose and, above all, we must resolve to

find the solutions to our problems, however intractable these problems may seem to us.²⁰ So Reddy, his mind set on the fundamentals, worked not to a pre-determined plan of action but instead entered into discussions with an open mind with a view to exploring possible common ground. Reddy took nothing for granted. Throughout the early 1990s, Sitiveni Rabuka ducked and manoeuvred, supporting the constitutional review process in one breath and asserting Fijian nationalist dogmas in another. He was, it is not too harsh to say, a bundle of contradictions, unpredictable. But Reddy persisted with him. Indeed, Rabuka came to be a part of Jai Ram Reddy's luck. Without him at the helm of Fijian leadership in the 1990s, Reddy is certain that the progress of the kind that took place may not have been possible or perhaps prolonged.

But it was not without cost, as we know. In the 1999 general elections, both Sitiveni Rabuka and Jai Ram Reddy would be punished by the electorate. As we shall see, neither Reddy nor Rabuka would have any regrets about the path of reconciliation and moderation and power-sharing they had chalked together. Both men had made the impossible possible. Rabuka, the coup maker, had emerged as a constitutionalist. And Jai Ram Reddy, the communal leader from the cane belts of Fiji, had emerged as a respected statesman admired more by members of other communities than by his own people. He spoke forthrightly about the problem of communication in multi-ethnic societies as he saw them. 'In our own lives, as we grow older and reflect upon the years,' he said in 1996, 'if we are honest with ourselves, we all know that there were roads that we took that perhaps we should not have taken; and the roads we should have taken, but did not.' That was hindsight. 'But I believe one of the greatest difficulties of interacting, particularly at the political level, is the difficulties that arise due to our lack of knowledge of each other. I think in the course of our lives, we pick up many stereotypes, prejudices and preconceptions, which upon reflection, after the benefit of better interaction and better knowledge and understanding of others, you are compelled to admit are not really correct.'²¹ He spoke about the pernicious legacies of colonial rule

in Fiji and urged its leaders to meet the challenges bequeathed by it. It was a remarkable transformation in a leader who had grown up in the cane belts of Fiji, and formed by its needs and aspirations but who was nevertheless able to transcend it to embrace a larger vision for his people and his country.

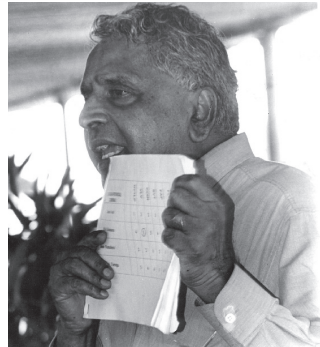
Some of the transformation is captured in the words he spoke in 1994, the speech remembered across the years as the 'Suva Declaration':

Let us declare that we believe in a Fiji which offers fair and equal rights to all her people. Let us declare on behalf of the dignity of the individual, and in the individual's right to freedom of speech, expression, conscience and religion. Let us declare that, though we oppose the 1990 Constitution, we stand prepared to join in reshaping it into a document which reflects the unique circumstances history has bequeathed to us. Let us declare ourselves not only representatives of the Indian community, but seekers of equality for all. Let us declare that we are enemies of none, and dedicate ourselves to unity with the indigenous people of this land in securing their future and ours. Let us declare our love for Fiji and our desire for a common and united future for the generations which will follow. And, most of all, we declare our willingness to toil side by side in equal partnership with all of Fiji's communities, so that their children and ours may live together in peace.

TRANSITION



*Campaign speech-making, 1970s to
1990s. Courtesy of Fiji Times
and National Geographic.*



INTERLUDE

'FIJI'S PLACE IN THE MODERN WORLD': JAI RAM
REDDY'S ADDRESS TO THE FIJIAN ASSOCIATION
PARTY, MAY 3, 1996

I have been asked this evening to reflect on Fiji's place in the modern world. And so I shall, in due course. I believe, however, that before I can do that, there are some fundamental questions which need to be considered if we are to place this subject in its proper perspective. I also must observe that this is a hugely demanding topic to speak on at an occasion such as this. I trust you'll agree that without presenting a thousand word thesis it's not going to be possible to discuss all the factors that contribute to making Fiji what it is, and what we would like it to be. I'm happy to try, but I hope you'll forgive me if I don't solve all our problems in the next 15 minutes or so! I wish to start by submitting that, unless we first have some clear sense of who we are, we cannot proceed to determine the place we wish to occupy in the modern world. Until we decide what sort of place we want Fiji to be, we can't expect to find our niche among nations.

Ladies and Gentlemen, I have previously referred to our generation of Fiji citizens as the 'Lost Generation.' It is my conviction — and I think many would agree — that we have lost our way. We do not have a clear sense of national identity, of where we are going, a perception of ourselves as citizens of this country or of our destiny together. We seem to be struggling in the torrent of history, unable or unwilling to chart a course that will carry us safely through to full nationhood.

And if we lack a clear vision of what we want for ourselves as a people — all of us — how can we hope to define ourselves as a nation, or plot a future for our children? Not only do we seem unsure of precisely

how we are to set out on this mission, we sometimes appear unable to accurately identify our destination.

So having made these points by way of introduction I will now offer some broad ideas about this matter of 'place,' and generate, I hope, constructive public debate about it.

Having stated my belief about our lack of a unified vision, I must also say I firmly believe there are in fact many things on which we agree. And I here refer specifically to what we want — and what we don't want — our homeland to become.

In recent days, we have watched as the horror of war plunged Lebanon back into the abyss. We have seen innocent people die. We have seen lives lost or torn apart, all in the name of divisions and causes not totally different from many of our own. After all, the various factions in that tortured land, and its neighbours, all believe they are fighting for the rights and aspirations of their respective peoples, religions and ideologies. Each has fears of being submerged by the other, of losing identity, or land, or way of life. From our safe vantage point in the Pacific, we have watched as young men and women hurl themselves and others to needless death for those causes. We have watched as our Fiji soldiers sought to bring comfort and refuge to the innocent victims of the fighting. Who among us has not felt the pride of watching our countrymen's brave efforts to bring peace to Lebanon? Who among us has not been touched by the sight of hardened veterans weeping for the dead of Qana? And who among us has not whispered a quiet prayer of thanks that our own land has never known the torment of the Middle East. Nor have we seen the fratricide of Northern Ireland, or the civil war that has ripped asunder so many nations and communities.

And in Lebanon, and our role there, we have an example both of our place in the world, and of our agreement on what Fiji is not: while our peacekeepers carry the standard of one of Fiji's most honourable

contributions to the modern world, we at home are united in our belief that this country is not like the land in which they serve. We are not a people of violence, a community which has allowed its fears and insecurities to boil over into hatred against our neighbours.

What, then, do we want Fiji to become? Each of us would doubtless have a slightly different picture of the future we would like to create. But I suspect, for the most part, our differences in this area are in the detail, rather than in substance.

I think we can all agree that we want a harmonious, law-abiding, economically-successful island nation — retaining the special cultural elements which make our communities what they are. We want the rights and aspirations of all our communities secured and upheld. We would like to see our unique ethnic identities existing within a social and political system that provides for a national identity and encourages loyalty to the country, and that adheres to international standards and charters on personal freedom and human rights. I should add here that if we are to take our rightful place in the world we must also begin to urgently address the emerging cancer of corruption and nepotism. We must demonstrate that our society practices certain principles and precepts, especially in relation to accountability and integrity of those who hold public office.

I believe all right thinking people must view with trepidation recent developments which show that some of our values are becoming warped, that what should be considered by any reasonable standard as unacceptable is apparently being tolerated. We need to move decisively to stop this rot in the system before it eats right into the heart of our nation. We have, I think, agreed that we want a nation retaining its traditions but accepting and embracing the modern economic order. We aspire to be a country that provides enough economic growth to provide work for up to thirteen thousand school leavers a year. We dream of a caring

Fiji in which people are prepared to help each other, a nation of good neighbours and strong families. We want to play a leading and helpful role in the region and in the wider international community.

The question before us is: how do we get there? How do we turn this dream into fact? Indeed, can we do it?

If I can address my second question first, I wish to say that I believe the answer is Yes, we can. I remain convinced that there are enough people in Fiji, of all races and political persuasions, who understand and realize that there is more to be gained for everybody if we put our minds and talents together to deal with the real problems that confront us. I am heartened there are more people publicly expressing these sentiments today than there were five or six years ago. This represents real progress, changing attitudes to the issues which challenge us. If you study the record, I think you will find that most of us see things a little differently than we did a few years ago. One of the benefits of adversity is that it forces us to look hard at our beliefs, convictions and prejudices, and reassess them in the light of new insights.

I am reminded here of an anecdote about Mahatma Gandhi. Never a man to be reticent about his beliefs, he often confused his closest friends by apparently contradicting something he had previously said. The story goes that one day, frustrated by one of his statements, one of his confidantes burst out: 'But, Bapu, just yesterday you said the opposite!' 'Ah, yes,' replied the Mahatma, 'but I have learned something since yesterday.'

There is a message there that we would all do well to take to heart. Certainly, we have strong convictions. But not all of them need to be carved in stone. They are based on our experience and knowledge at any given point in time. As we live, we learn, and as we learn we can change. Certainly, we in Fiji know more today about the concerns of our brothers and sisters of other ethnic group than we did ten years ago. And, as I have said, many of us have adjusted our approach to the future

accordingly. We are not less committed to certain fundamental beliefs. But, through a greater understanding of each others' fears and needs, we stand a better chance of finding mutually-acceptable solutions to our problems. This sort of thinking which, as I have said, I see reflected increasingly in the public statements of political and community leaders, gives me the confidence to continue with the process of consensus and dialogue to which I have committed myself.

Which brings me back to the first of the two questions I posed a moment ago: how do we reach the goals to which we aspire as a nation? I don't want to make a partisan political speech, but no discussion of our national place in the world, and our sense of our individual places within a nation, can ignore some of the pressing questions which have to be answered. And, yes, I am thinking here of such things as the Constitution and ALTA. But rather than repeating everyone's stated positions, I would like to consider our overall approach to nation building. I want us all to bear in mind also that we are developing a nation here. This requires careful thought, discussion and debate. Many are agreed that the system of political representation and government we have at present is far from ideal. To the Indians of Fiji it is simply unjust — a formula for unhappiness and alienation. We feel excluded, deprived and marginalized — and that is why we are looking for a better way of governance, a way that will bring us together as a nation. Gatherings of goodwill like this are vital in this process. In that spirit, then, let me give you some personal reflections on our current efforts towards a political prescription unique to our circumstances in Fiji.

Let us start with this concept of Government of National Unity — the familiar GNU. While this idea has had its ups and downs as political flavour of the month, and may very likely not in fact work in the forms that have been suggested, it has served a very useful purpose in stimulating discussion and thought. With so many divergent views on the political

approach for Fiji, how do we form a government that really combines all of them? Does the current constitution lend itself to such a GNU? Probably not. Frankly, it's just so controversial that it would be likely to work against the very unity we are trying to achieve. To establish such a government and have it fall apart a few months later would do more harm than good.

But although a GNU might not be feasible right now, this does not mean our political parties must always be deadly enemies. The Opposition need not automatically oppose everything the Government does, any more than the Government must always consider itself to be right and enforce its strength of numbers to get its way. Surely it is more sensible to try and co-operate, to look for consensus rather than confrontation. Why not adopt a 'Fiji Way' of governance? We could then co-operate in that spirit to develop a framework which institutionalizes a model of administration uniquely ours. What I am saying, I suppose, is that, rather than trying to impose a Government of National Unity over a constitution which itself is an obstacle to unity, why not work together towards unity, and develop from this a constitution which reinforces it?

In recent times, we have seen exactly this sort of formula succeed, not just in rhetoric, but in reality. The Serious Fraud Bill, a major piece of legislation, serves as a dramatic example. Although the government may well have been able to enforce its majority and pass the legislation, it was decided to refer it to a multi-party select committee. The Indians on this occasion were thus admitted to the provinces of power usually denied to them. Although outnumbered, the Opposition made a very real and substantial contribution to this committee, which considered the view of a wide range of people. At the end of the day, it was decided by consensus not to proceed with the Bill. I stress 'by consensus,' because that is the point here. By adopting this method, we were able to bring

what were initially two widely different positions together and agree on a mutually acceptable course of action. We have now begun a similar process for the Public Enterprise Bill.

Am I attaching too much importance to this at a time when the Indian position is so precarious? Is this grasping at straws? I don't think so. They are positive signs of what is possible. Certainly they might be small steps, but they are important steps. And, like Gandhi, we are learning something each day. Most of all, we are learning, as leaders, that we can come together, that we can find common ground. We are learning that we don't have to fear, hate or distrust one another. We are learning that there is another way. What we must constantly seek is the courage to take that way, and not fall into the cycle of confrontation that leads inexorably to disaster.

Leadership, Ladies and Gentlemen, is about averting disaster, not creating the conditions in which it thrives.

And creating an environment conducive to unity can be a slow process. There is no overnight solution. We must possess ourselves of patience and remain firmly persuaded that the only sensible way to proceed is through sincere discussion, negotiation, and compromise. We must recognize that truth, and be united in our determination to face it together. Without these things, there can be no place for us in the modern world — or at least not a place we would wish to occupy.

I would like to finish by returning to our central theme. It seems to me that our greatest contribution to the international community would be to follow our path of self-discovery — our national learning curve, if you like — to its most positive conclusion. If we can remain steadfast in our refusal to make the mistakes of so many other countries, if we removed the present injustices and find acceptable joint solutions for Fiji's problems, we will be able to offer the world a better way. We can do this if we allow ourselves. We can do it.

Most of all, Ladies and Gentlemen, let us bring our lost generation in from the cold. We need to end our wanderings in search of something we cannot yet see and join hands to go forward together, no longer lost but with a clear gaze towards the road of unity. It may be long and it may be difficult but it is the right course for us, the only one.

Only when we are marching surely in this direction can the children of the lost generation come home. Only then will we, their parents, be able to look them in the eye, knowing that we have served them well, and with wisdom, in making this nation. Only then will Fiji truly be able to take her place in the modern world — a place distinguished by pride in distinctive cultures and peoples and a great and loyal love for these islands and the one destiny that we can — that we must — create together.

REFLECTIONS, 1987–1997:
AN INTERVIEW WITH JAI RAM REDDY ²²

Q: How do you see the coups and what has happened in the last 10 years since 1987?

A: My appointment as Attorney General by Dr (Timoci) Bavadra (Labour leader and Prime Minister in 1987) seemed to create resentment, particularly among those who had lost power and felt threatened by the changes. But I am not embittered. My approach is to learn from it, look to the future, and see how we might reshape the affairs of Fiji. There are many things about the coup that people do not understand. One of the most stark things was how the coup victims gave in so easily. That is why it was such a bloodless coup. If they had resisted, a good deal of blood would have been spilt. I do not believe anyone has gained from the coups, neither the indigenous Fijians nor the Indians. We have

gone backwards. Any objective observer would have to agree the coups were unnecessary. No rights of the indigenous people were being threatened. The true reason is that those who lost power just could not stomach it. They were engineered to regain political control. But maybe things did not go the way even they intended. So, in a sense, they too were losers. I am not forgetting the coups and the hardships and humiliation that we suffered individually and collectively, but they should not be dwelt upon in a disproportionate way so that it becomes a hindrance to the future healing process.

Q: Were pre-coup race relations a façade?

A: Certainly. There was more rhetoric than action. Also, tokenism was the order of the day which is why Indians felt a strong sense of alienation from independence to 1987. Under the old cross-voting system, there were token Indians in government. That is why I am opposed to cross-voting. It is worse than communal voting.

Q: Do you think 1987 has given us a chance to sort these issues out by bringing them to a head?

A: Somebody said that the Fijian leaders accepted the 1970 Constitution because they were told that they would never lose power under it if they remained united.²³ If the reality was that the 1970 Constitution was supposed to ensure that the Alliance Party remained in government all the time, yes, I am glad that 1987 happened. Because that myth was exposed. And those who were paying lip service to democracy were found wanting. At least now, people are facing up to the truth. No constitution will [can] keep [a] people in power [permanently].

Q: What, since 1987, disturbs you most in our society?

A: The level of violent crime. I can understand someone stealing because he does not have money to buy food. But the violence? It almost seems like there is something else that is bugging the

criminals. I wonder if it has something to do with the forces that the coups unleashed — a license of sorts that means it was all right to be violent to get what you want. This was not there before the coups. Add to this the corresponding collapse of morality in the public service, the level of corruption and all the shortcuts that people take, the things that went on in the National Bank of Fiji and the Housing Authority. I cannot see anyone arguing that this has nothing to do with the coups.

Q: Does this have the potential to undermine any of the gains that might be made?

A: Definitely. My hope is that with an improved constitution and more representative government, some of these issues can be tackled vigorously and effectively. Probably the most valuable thing that could come out of this would be a re-establishment of a sense of confidence. However, there are so many ifs and buts.

Q: What are some of the lessons that you are mindful of as you help in reshaping the future of Fiji?

A: There is no future if any community tries to pull its weight in an exclusive fashion to create an environment in which it sees itself as dominant in government. What we need is to form a partnership. That is probably the most important thing. This was not addressed seriously enough in the years before the coup, because we all underestimated the depth of feelings that existed, particularly within the indigenous Fijian community. We all got carried away by elections, democracy and by a constitution which allowed for governments to be voted in and voted out. But we never really understood the human dimension, until raw emotions erupted post-coup.

Q: Was it an inability to perceive the feelings at the grassroots level?

A: Maybe a lot of leaders did perceive [it]. When the NFP won in 1977, I did raise the concern whether an Indian government

might be acceptable to Fijians. I articulated it in another way and people came down on me like a ton of bricks. Ten years later, what I had said actually happened.

Q: Do you think the leaders at the time did enough?

Yes, sure. Because they were making judgments in 1985, '86 and '87.

Not June 1987 or 1990. Everybody is wise after the event. The Coalition was conscious of this which is why they did not want a government which was visibly Indian although it drew its support mainly from the Indian community. So it readily embraced a Fijian leader and accepted that at least half of the cabinet should be Fijians. But on hindsight, it appears that was not enough.

Q" That is at the political level. Was enough done on the social front to develop multiracialism?

A: Social initiatives should be taken by the people. Political leaders cannot take all the initiatives. They can show the way. But every Indian should ask how many Fijian friends do they have? You might argue that these things should have been foreseen by every school teacher, every court clerk, every bank officer and every farmer. I am at the tail-end of my career. I can speak freely. Unless the Indian people honestly confront these questions, we will always have problems. Indians were confronted by an overwhelming show of force during the coups, and they had no answer. They still have not found that answer. That is why you hear everyday that when people break into their homes, they do nothing. They say, 'take everything but leave me alone.' We can have the most perfect constitution in the world but it will not be able to help them when their homes are invaded. The coups and the current political arrangements have given the two sides totally wrong messages. The message to the Fijians is they can

do as they like and the Indian feels that because he is intended to be the victim, he sees this violence against him as a kind of a logical extension of his status in society. The ordinary Fijian feels that the Indian is fair game. It is okay to rob him or beat him up. The aggressor probably does not see it any other way. And the first base towards changing that is the constitutional review. The supreme law of the land currently makes discrimination against an Indian legitimate. When his status under the constitution is changed, only then will this be changed. That is why I emphasize the need to reform the constitution. Even the land problem cannot be solved until that is solved because everything is a logical extension of that.

Q: Is migration an indication of the attitude in the Indian community?

A: Well, take the leadership, for example. It is very hard to get anybody interested [in politics]. Those who have talent are either migrating or are so absorbed in their personal lives, in their professions or as academics. There may come a time when we as a community will have no effective spokesmen. We had to literally beg people in 1992 to be candidates, yet some are now being criticized because they hold permanent residence overseas. But if people who have the ability are not willing to serve, what is the leadership supposed to do?

Q: How is this going to be resolved?

A: I will be 60 next month [May]. My hope is that with a better constitution, more young people will see a career in politics. Part of the problem in 1992 may have been disillusionment with the 1990 Constitution. But that constitution has to be changed and somebody has to work for it. Politics is not about coming in when things are good.

Q: Do you think the current review process will eventually give form to the country's true identity?

A: I think so. People are a lot more realistic. The Indians are a lot more realistic. And why not? What really is taking place is a search for accommodation between the three major groups that will give the sense of security that we all want. But which is also honest, not some bluff about democracy, multiracialism, etc. This is why I desperately hope that some sort of power-sharing formula can be worked out so people are forced to work together.

Q: What is your vision for Fiji in the next decade?

A: I would like to see that the next general elections are fought not on an Indians versus Fijian basis, or vice versa, but through a type of national front where a number of political parties are in partnership and forming a kind of government of national unity that is in place for at least 10 years. That can be a period of consolidation, rebuilding of genuine multiracialism, accommodation by the communities and a period of economic growth and prosperity. If Fiji can have a 10-year period of harmony and stability, then the foundations will be laid for long-term prosperity.

1987–1997: AN ERA OF TURBULENCE²⁴

1987

- Apr 11: Final election results come out, confirming NFP–FLP Coalition victory, 28–24 seats.
- Apr 13: Coalition leader Dr Timoci Bavadra is sworn in as Fiji's second Prime Minister by Governor General Ratu Sir Penaia Ganilau.
- Apr 19: Tavua villages erect road blocks in protest against the new government.
- Apr 21: About 3000 protesting Fijians meet at Veseisei village, Lautoka, calling for cancellation of leases to Indo-Fijians and the entrenchment of Fijian political control.
- Apr 24: At 10 am, 5000 Fijian protesters, led by Taukei Movement leaders Taniela Veitata, Rev Tomasi Raikivi, Viliame Gonelvu and Ratu Inoke Kubuabola, march through Suva to demand Fijian political paramountcy and to ask the Governor General to sack the new government.
- Apr 25: Taukei Movement leader Apisai Tora and Tui Vuda Ratu Josiaia Tavaiqia lead a protest march through Lautoka.
- May 2: Petrol bombs damage Jai Ram Reddy's Lautoka law firm office.
- May 8: Parliament opens. Alliance member Militoni Leweniqila sworn in as Speaker of the House of Representatives.
- May 14: Lieutenant Colonel Sitiveni Rabuka takes over parliament in a military coup. Government members arrested and detained. The constitution is suspended. Rabuka appoints himself Commander-in-Chief, and appoints a 15-member Council made up of Alliance and Taukei Movement leaders.
- Ma 15: Governor General assumes executive authority, and issues a media statement deploring the coup.

- May 19: Sitiveni Rabuka is sworn in as head of the military government and granted immunity by Governor General Ratu Sir Penaia Ganilau.
- May 20: Riots break out at Albert Park as Coalition supporters are attacked with rocks and sticks. Violence spreads to Nausori, Delainivesi, Naosle and Raiwaqa.
- May 22: Council of Advisors, consisting of the Alliance Party and the military, is sworn in by the Governor General.
- July 6: A Constitution Review Committee, chaired by Sir John Falvey, begins public hearings on the 1970 Constitution, and issues a divided report.
- Sept 23: Party talks, initiated by Ratu Sir Penaia Ganilau, lead to the Deuba Accord in which the Coalition and the Alliance agree to participate equally in a caretaker administration chaired by Ganilau; Taukei Movement outrage and violence.
- Sept 25: At 4pm Rabuka stages a second coup, citing dissatisfaction with the terms of the Deuba Accord.
- Oct 1: Rabuka issues two decrees formally abrogating the 1970 Constitution and sacking the Governor General.
- Oct 6: At midnight, Rabuka formally declares Fiji a Republic, temporarily severing Fiji's membership of the Commonwealth.
- Nov 4: Sunday Observance Decree is promulgated banning recreational and trading activities on Sunday.
- Dec 5: Rabuka dismisses the military administration and announces a 25-member mostly Alliance cabinet headed by Ratu Sir Kamisese Mara, appointed by a newly installed President, Ratu Sir Penaia Ganilau.

1988

Apr 11: Discovery of a large quantity of arms in Sydney, some of which was smuggled into Fiji.

1989

Sept 23: The Manueli Committee issues its report on the future Constitution of Fiji, recommending Fijian dominance in parliament and elections from exclusively racial electoral rolls.

Nov 3: Dr Timoci Bavadra, 55, passes away at Lautoka Hospital, succumbing to the cancer of the spine.

1990

July 25: President Ratu Sir Penaia Ganilau decrees a new constitution based on the Manueli Report.

1991

July 11: Sitiveni Rabuka resigns from the military under pressure and accepts the post of co-deputy Prime Minister in the Ratu Mara-led interim administration.

July 27: The NFP decides at its national convention to participate in the forthcoming general elections to be held under the 1990 Constitution.

1992

May 30: The Great Council of Chiefs-sponsored Soqosoqo ni Vakavulewa ni Taukei (SVT) led by Sitiveni Rabuka wins 30 of the 37 Fijian seats. NFP wins 14 of the Indian communal seats and Labour 13.

Dec 4: Prime Minister Sitiveni Rabuka proposes a Government of National Unity.

1993

Sept 14: The Terms of Reference for the review of the 1990 Constitution is passed by parliament.

Nov 30: The Government Budget falls with 8 Government back-benchers voting against it, paving the way for fresh elections.

1994

Jan 15: A new Fijian Association Party is launched with Josefa Kamikamica as leader

Feb 28: SVT wins the February elections, capturing 31 seats to Fijian Association's 5. NFP wins 20 of the 27 Indian communal seats to Labour's 7.

June 24: A Joint Parliamentary Select Committee on Constitution Review is established.

1995

Mar 15: President Ratu Sir Kamisese Mara appoints a Constitution Review Commission chaired by Sir Paul Reeves, with Tomasi Vakatora and Dr Brij Lal as its two other members.

Oct 27: Sunday Observance Decree is repealed in parliament.

1996

Sept 6: The Fiji Constitution Review Commission hands its report to President Mara at Government House, recommending a gradual but decisive move away from race-based politics.

1997

May 14: The Constitution Amendment Bill unanimously passes both Houses of Parliament.

Oct 1: Fiji officially re-joins the Commonwealth.

NOTES

1. *Hansard*, 24 July 1992.
2. *The Weekender*, 30 Apr. 1993.
3. See particularly his *Democracy in Plural societies: A Comparative Exploration* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1977), and 'Constitutional Design for Divided Societies,' *Journal of Democracy* (2004), 15: 2, 96–109.
4. *Review* magazine, Mar 1993: 13. See also *Pacific Islands Monthly*, Sept. 1997, 23–24.
5. Quote from *National Geographic* vol. 188: 4 (Oct 1995), 134.
6. Quote from reports in *Fiji Times*, 1 Oct. 1992.
7. *Fiji Times*, 22 Oct. 1993.
8. For the NBF saga, I draw at length on Roman Grynberg, Doug Munro and Michael White, *Crisis: Collapse of the National Bank of Fiji* (Adelaide: Crawford House Publishing, 2002).
9. *Hansard*, 28 Mar. 1996.
10. There is an extensive coverage in *The Review Magazine*, Nov. 1995.
11. Reddy's fight for a free press was longstanding. He told parliament in 1982 (8 Dec): 'A free press is absolutely vital for the survival of democracy, for the maintenance of decency in public life and for the purposes of projecting the wider public interest. I would be the last person to advocate any form of control of the press. I think the control has to be self-imposed.'
12. *Daily Post*, 19 Aug. 1995. Filipe Bole was another minister who raised the race issue.
13. *Fiji Times*, 12 Dec. 1995.
14. *Daily Post*, 19 Aug. 1995.
15. *Hansard*, December 1983.
16. *Hansard*, 27 July 1995.
17. *Review Magazine*, Aug. 1995, 20.

18. *Review Magazine*, Feb/Mar, 1993: 18.
19. *Weekender*, 30 Apr. 1993.
20. *Weekender*, 16 July 1993.
21. *Hansard*, 28 Mar. 1996.
22. The interview is from *The Review*, June 1997, 16–17. The magazine is now dead, but my thanks for using the interview are hereby expressed.
23. It was David Butler, of Nuffield College, Oxford, who Ratu Mara had consulted during the independence negotiations.
24. This tabulation is drawn from *The Review* magazine (May 1997), 25, and Sanjay Ramesh, 'Chronology of Fiji Events, 1987–1997,' in Brij V Lal et al. (eds), *1987: Fiji Twenty Years On* (Lautoka: Fiji Institute of Applied Studies, 2008), 205–215.