

Rabuka Biographies: Race, Land and Political Reform in God-given Paradise

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Introduction

In 1988, Fijian journalists, Eddie Dean and Stan Ritova, wrote the first biography of Major-General Sitiveni Rabuka. The biography, called *No Other Way* provided Rabuka's justifications for the first military coup in Fiji, which ousted the democratically elected Fiji Labour Party and National Federation Party Coalition Government led by the indigenous Fijian Dr. Timoci Bavadra as Prime Minister. In the eyes of indigenous Fijian ethno-nationalists, Rabuka was seen as the saviour of Indigenous Fijian race from Indo-Fijian political domination. This biography of Rabuka provided 'insights' into Rabuka's views on Indo-Fijians with references to the prevailing geo-political pro-US mindset, as well as the coup leader's views on Indigenous Fijian land, Fiji politics and the Methodist Church.

Some twelve years later, a second biography of Rabuka, written by John Sharpham, a professor of Central Queensland University and a senior leader of the CQU Campus in Fiji, retraced Rabuka's influences behind the coups of 1987. In this biography, Rabuka attempted to tone down his racial rhetoric against Indo-Fijians and provide a more measured view of the 1987 coups and his efforts in the 1990s to provide a multiracial constitution, following deep divisions within Indigenous Fijians. In many respects, this was by the same person, a different account of the same set of events containing Rabuka as the central character. Many believe that this is what defines Rabuka the public figure.

Rabuka: No Other Way

The influence of Methodist Church in shaping Rabuka's views on Indo-Fijians and against the Coalition Government that came to power fol-

lowing the April 1987 general elections is highlighted as one of 'fundamentalist Methodism'. For Rabuka, 'god chose Fiji for the Fijians, it is the land that god has given to them' and 'when the missionaries came to Fiji in 1835, they brought Christianity and turned Fiji from cannibal land to paradise but early in 1987, Rabuka saw this god-given treasure under threat from an immigrant race that would ascend to a position of political power to complete its control of Fiji'. Rabuka saw this prospect as an 'inevitable flow - on from the election on 11 April 1987, of a government which - although led by a Fijian - was dominated by Indians. The removal of the month old Coalition government was, therefore, essential for the survival of the Fijian race. As simple as that' (p. 11).

The survival of Indigenous Fijian race argument was also supported by the growing Indo-Fijian population that had over taken Indigenous Fijian population since 1945. Many Indo-Fijians during this time became part of Fiji's growing middle class. According to the 1986 Fiji Census, there were 329,305 Indigenous Fijians (46 per cent) compared to Indo-Fijians 348,704 (49 per cent). Rabuka argued that Indigenous Fijians had become a minority in their own land as many in the Indo-Fijian community had moved on from sugar cane farming and dominated professions such as accounting, finance, business, teaching, law and agriculture. For the Indigenous nationalists, the progress of Indo-Fijians out of sugar cane farming was due to their culture of saving and investing in education which took away opportunities from Indigenous Fijians who required targeted assistance from the state in commerce, financial management and education.

The idea that the Coalition Government, influenced by non-Christians, could undermine the survival of the Indigenous Fijian race, was first made public by the nationalist *Taukei Movement*, which was established by members of the defeated Alliance Party and political activists from the Methodist Church. One such person, Reverend Tomasi Raikivi played a leading role in the events leading to the military coup and 'became Advisor for Information in the Caretaker Government formed after the 14 May coup'. Raikivi was later appointed as the Minister for Social Welfare in Rabuka's Executive Council of Ministers put in place after the second coup in September 1987 (p. 23).

In fact, the NFP-Labour Coalition was the first ethnically balanced government in the history of Fiji. Of the fourteen cabinet members, six were Indigenous Fijians, seven were Indo-Fijians and one a part-European. Under the 1970 Constitution, swings in communal voting pattern had the potential to influence a change in the government. This was established during the 1977 elections when the Fijian Nationalist Party managed to drive support away from the Alliance Party, leading to the latter's shock defeat at the

polls. However in 1987, the vote had moved away from Alliance to the Coalition. According to Anthony Payne, 'the Coalition had only been elected because it succeeded in winning a critical 9.6 percent of the ethnic Indigenous Fijian vote' (1989: 441).

Rabuka alleged that the Fiji Labour Party and the National Federation Party Coalition had links with Libya, India and the Soviet Union. The Cold War rhetoric reached fever pitch following the military takeover on 14 May 1987. According to Rabuka, 'there was a real threat of Russian and Libyan influence reaching into Fiji under the Coalition government. On the Libyan influence, Rabuka said there is firm evidence that approaches had been made. Unconfirmed documents had suggested that Libyan funds had been used as early as the 1982 Fijian election' (p. 46). Rabuka was also concerned 'about the Indian component of the new Government because of the strong relationship between India and the Soviet Union' (p. 47).

In 1982, the Alliance Party had accused the National Federation Party of Soviet influence. Under the Prime Ministership of Ratu Mara, the Alliance Party government allowed the Asia America Free Labour Institute (AAFLI) to open its offices in Suva in 1984. According to Brij Lal, 'AAFLI sponsored a series of well publicised seminars designed to promote conservative ideologies and to help defeat causes which were harmful to the US interest, such as the issue of nuclear free Pacific' (Lal 1988: 34).

Rabuka singled out Dr. William Sutherland, a Fiji born former University of the South Pacific lecturer, who became Bavadra's Permanent Secretary and special aide. In Rabuka's view, Sutherland had not only engineered the winning Coalition's strategy in the election, but had introduced what Rabuka saw as an unacceptable foreign flavour to the political debate. Terms like 'brothers', 'sisters', and 'comrades' were not uncommon in speeches given by Dr. Bavadra, speeches which Rabuka believed were written by Dr. Sutherland. They were, in the Colonel's mind, 'socialist' terms, deployed by somebody who could have had contact with Eastern bloc countries' (p. 72).

Rabuka's allegations against the Coalition were grounded in pro-West propaganda, following the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979. The Fiji Labour Party was formed by multiethnic trade unionists in 1985 who were disenchanted with the Alliance government's economic and social policies, which were aimed at augmenting the power of the chiefly elite and their business associates. The Fiji Labour Party was launched on 6 July 1985 and formed a coalition with the National Federation Party in 1986. During the 1987 election campaign, the Coalition emphasised better prices for Fiji produce, better infrastructure, fee-free education, teacher training, and a nuclear free Pacific (Bain & Baba 1991: 19). Coalition's theme of an anti-

nuclear Pacific was seen by Rabuka as anti-West and Pro-Soviet. However, the Coalition policy on the ban on nuclear powered vessels to Fiji was informed by the position taken by the New Zealand Government in 1984 which professed a non-aligned policy in international affairs after growing concerns on environmental damage caused by US and French nuclear tests in the Pacific.

Besides the heightened rhetoric on the undesirable political affiliations of the Coalition, Rabuka was also troubled by the growing militancy of the Taukei Movement which he sympathised with. Rabuka explained that 'the Taukei Movement could really stir up a lot of Fijian support. I am not only talking about Fijians in the villages. I am more worried about Fijians in the towns and cities, who are unemployed'. Rabuka was adamant that there was a 'potential danger of civil disobedience posed by the Taukeis' (p. 37-38). For Rabuka, the Taukei Movement started mobilising following the April 1987 election; it 'was getting very serious: meetings, marches and demonstrations were being proposed, or organised, all directed outrage and virulent antagonism towards the Coalition and its Indian Ministers and Members' (p. 38).

Prime Minister Dr. Bavadra in a radio broadcast asserted that the Taukei Movement was created to destabilise the new government. The law offices of the Minister for Justice, Jai Ram Reddy, were fire bombed on 2 May 1987' (Howard 1991: 234). . In a very sketchy statement after the coup, Rabuka told the press that the Taukei Movement activists had plans to attack Indians and assassinate Bavadra and Coalition members. 'One commentary expressed pointed disbelief by asking Rabuka that if this were so, why arrest the proclaimed targets of the plot, the victims, instead of the perpetrators' (Premdas & Steeves 1991: 156) Four months later in September 1987, Taukei Movement activists armed with axes and petrol bombs rampaged through Suva city. Surprisingly the army deliberately refrained from apprehending the rioters. After the September riots, Rabuka's justification for the coup was more like a prediction of planned Taukei Movement events which were yet to materialise back in May 1987.¹

Rabuka and the Taukei Movement members were skeptical about the constitutional safeguard for Fijian land and custom, but this skepticism was based on misguided interpretation of the 1970 constitution. According to

¹ According to Michael Howard, on the night of Thursday, the seventeenth, leading Taukei extremist Taniela Veitata arranged for a group of thugs to arrive in Suva from Lau. Under Veitata's direction (and apparently with the foreknowledge of the army), this group and local gangs went on a rampage of rioting, burning and looting on Friday 18 September 1987 (Howard 1991: 309).

Rabuka, after the election of the Coalition Government, Governor-General Ratu Sir Penaia Ganilau 'was unable to reassure him about the security of Fijian land rights'. Rabuka stated that the 'Governor-General's lack of certainty on the land issue influenced him to go ahead with his coup' (p. 45).

Professor Raj Vasil elucidated that the 1970 constitutional arrangement gave the Fijians a dominant position. According to Vasil, 'in the Upper House they could count on the support of 16 of the 22 members. And in the more important Lower House they could count on the backing of at least 30 (22 Fijian and 8 General Electors) of the 52 members. This arrangement was thus clearly geared to the establishment of Fijian political paramountcy (Vasil 1984: 126).

The 1970 constitution further provided that any amendment to laws affecting Indigenous Fijian land and custom could not be made without the supporting votes of 6 out of 8 members of the Senate nominated by the Great Council of Chiefs. There is no doubt that any move by the Coalition on native land would have been met by a fierce Fijian resistance. Dr. Bavadra found out that an attempt to reform Indigenous Fijian institutions like the NLTB was extremely difficult due to the entrenched political position of the established chiefly oligarchy, which wanted to preserve the status quo. In retrospect, the Coalition could not expropriate native land. Coup leader, Sitiveni Rabuka, and the Taukei Movement used Indigenous land and their potential alienation under a Coalition Government to mobilise ethnic Indigenous Fijians to support the overthrow of an elected government.

While executing the coup, Rabuka thought that god was telling him to execute the coups and following the coup, 'Rabuka prayed briefly, thanking god for the achievement' (p. 71). After thanking god, Rabuka established his Council of Ministers which included the defeated Alliance Party leader and chief Ratu Sir Kamisese Mara, who was alleged to be one of the principal back-office engineers of the coup. Also on the spot light was the Great Council of Chiefs and the Governor-General Ratu Sir Penaia Ganilau who was accused of sympathising with the coup makers. After Ratu Penaia had dissolved Parliament, deposed Prime Minister Dr. Timoci Bavadra launched a Supreme Court challenge to Ratu Sir Penaia's authority. The writ alleged that the Governor-General 'did not have the power to dissolve the parliament and dismiss the Coalition Government' (p. 102). The Taukei Movement members immediately took offence to the actions of the deposed Coalition members, warning those who had challenged the authority of Ratu Penaia risk being 'roasted' in a 'lovo pit' if they continued to disrespect their chiefs.

Meanwhile, Ratu Penaia continued to build bridges between the Alliance Party and the Coalition. A Government of National Unity was agreed to at Deuba. But Rabuka intervened in the political reconciliation process with another coup, 'to protect Indigenous Fijian political interest' and deposed the Governor-General. According to Rabuka, 'he has little confidence in the ability of politicians to come up with an agreed formula which would also ensure that the coup objectives were attained' (p. 104). Rabuka believed that 'Dr. Bavadra's group were up to all kinds of tricks even before the Deuba negotiations. They were trying to disrupt the path the Governor-General had mapped out'. Rabuka executed the second military coup on 25 September 1987 after which strict censorship on the media was imposed and amnesty was given to individuals involved in the coup, following the establishment of the Interim Government in late 1987.

In the first biography, Rabuka presented his justifications for the two 1987 coups. While he wanted to disassociate from the Taukei Movement, he found himself increasingly sympathising with their cause and those of the chiefly establishment. The result of the coups of 1987 were the Sunday Observance Decree that banned all commercial activities in Fiji on Sundays in line with Rabuka's 'fundamentalist' Methodist beliefs, and the promulgation of the 1990 Constitution that ensured Indigenous Fijian political hegemony.

The next biography, more than eleven years later, saw a different Rabuka emerging - from a soldier to a political reformer. But this transition was fraught with difficulty because by removing Indo-Fijians from political power, Rabuka had inadvertently set in motion Indigenous Fijian political struggles that created further political instability in Fiji.

Rabuka of Fiji

The much anticipated second biography of Rabuka was launched in Canberra, Australia on 15 March 2000. Written by John Sharpham of Central Queensland University, the book traced various stages in Rabuka's life. Perhaps the most interesting aspect was his interpretation of the events leading up to the coups of 1987, and seven years as a Prime Minister and constitution reformer.

Sharpham provides an interesting insight into Indigenous Fijian community, particularly of eastern Fiji. While accepting that Indigenous Fijians were in a state of incessant warfare, he noted that the community was a fairly structured and a hierarchical one. With the influx of Europeans, however, traditional warfare changed and the acquisition of muskets became a fundamental characteristic of power and status in pre-Cession Fiji. Not only

the Europeans, but Wesleyan missionaries had enormous and far reaching cultural and social impact in reinterpreting the Indigenous Fijian political landscape. The king of Bau, Ratu Seru Cakobau, initially refused to accept Christianity but changed his mind when faced with a formidable opposition in the person of Ma'afu. Sharpman is instructive in his analysis but misses an important event - the battle of Kaba in 1856 that established Bauan political and cultural hegemony. The battle fought between the opponents of Ratu Seru Cakobau and Tongan warriors was a turning point in pre-Cession Fiji. Nevertheless, Sharpman makes an important observation: the mataqali, tokatoka, yavusa and matanitu system as one primarily evolving from Bau.

Following Cession of Fiji to Great Britain in 1874, the hill tribes of Fiji refused to recognise Christianity or the colonial authority. After a series of confrontations, an armed expedition was sent to subdue dissents in the hills of Western Viti Levu. In the end, dissident chiefs were rounded up and sentenced to death under the colonial penal system. However, members of the tribes continued to secretly practice their ancient custom and religion and by the end of the nineteenth century, a number of anti-establishment movements surfaced, including the *Tuka Movement* and the *Luve-ni-wai* or water babies that challenged colonial views on Indigenous Fijian culture. Sharpman does not acknowledge these movements, which provided an ideological and spiritual basis for dissent against the colonial government and collaborator Indigenous Fijian chiefs. Some of these ideas were later on picked by Ratu Apolosi Ranawai, who went on to challenge European dominance in commerce by establishing an indigenous Fijian Viti Company. After his exile (Weeks 1995: 27), other movements emerged in the twentieth century and these too had pronounced anti-colonial theme. However, these Indigenous Fijian anti-establishment movements failed to link up with their Indo-Fijian counterparts and as a result dissent in post-colonial Fiji was fragmented along ethnic lines.

Sharpman is correct when he criticises the colonial policy of keeping the races apart. He handles with care the issue of Indo-Fijians and their leaders who were given as prime reasons for the 1987 coups. The need for cheap and abundant labour led Sir Arthur Gordon to acquire Indian indentured labourers, who were brought to Fiji on a five year contract from 1879. By 1916, there were some 60,000 Indians in Fiji and many chose not to return to India. Once free from indenture, Indo-Fijians in Fiji started to organise under the leadership of Indian activists, who came from the colonies to fight for the rights of their compatriots. However, unfortunately, the activists were followed by missionaries, who virtually split the Indian community into many factions - Fiji Muslim League, Sangam and within North Indians, Arya Samaj and Sanatan Dharam. Since then, Indo-Fijians remained a di-

vided community and is one that still is fiercely communal. Sharpman notes that the Indian struggles against the colonial government had a negative impact on race relations. Following a harvest boycott during the height of Second World War, Indigenous Fijians and Europeans saw Indians as unpatriotic, selfish, cunning and power-hungry.

Moving on from the Indians, Sharpman deals with Rabuka's childhood, including an insightful family history from his father. Rabuka was born in 1948 and during his formative years was influenced by his soldier uncle. The militaristic ambition remained with Rabuka as he moved from primary school to Queen Victoria School (QVS) which, as Sharpman points out, was an elite school for grooming future leaders. Due to changes in the school policy, Rabuka got the rare opportunity of participating in that highly structured and regimented boarding life. Nevertheless, he remained steadfast in his ambition to pursue a career in the army, despite a series of disappointments on the academic front. It was clear from the outset that Rabuka was a product of a colonial system, which perpetuated a myth of racial solidarity between Indigenous Fijians and Europeans by stereotyping Indo-Fijians and their leaders.

Rabuka was overwhelmed by the Indigenous Fijian involvement in the Malayan campaign and as he began a career in the army in the late 1960s, he remained very well indoctrinated in the prevailing ideology of the West. The first notable evidence of politicisation of Rabuka and the Fiji Military Forces is revealed in the biography by the responses of Rabuka following the 1977 general elections, which was won by the Indo-Fijian dominated National Federation Party. The 1977 election outcome was unacceptable to Rabuka, who saw the results as a threat to Indigenous Fijian political hegemony. In 1979, Rabuka had an opportunity to go to the staff college in Tamil Nadu in India, where he expressed strong anti-communist views on the fledgling relations between India and Soviet Union. In 1981, he was alarmed over the alleged political involvement of the Indian High Commissioner, Ms. Sonu Kochar, in Fijian political affairs. As discussed earlier, Rabuka saw India as an agent of Soviet Union and Indo-Fijian political leaders as agents of India.

Not only India but the Fiji Labour Party, formed in 1985, was placed under a cloud of suspicion by Rabuka of being 'left-wing' and Socialist. Rabuka, as discussed earlier, was an Indigenous Fijian Cold Warrior who, by 1987, had become frustrated with the social policies of the Fiji Labour Party (FLP) and in particular with the general Indo-Fijian demand for a common roll electoral system. The constant agitation of Indo-Fijian leaders in particular was seen by Rabuka as an attempt by Indo-Fijians to rule Fiji on the strength of their growing population. As

evidence, Rabuka argued that Indo-Fijians had in 1977 won the Fiji general elections due to Indigenous Fijian disunity.

However, that the same was to repeat in May of 1987 when urban Indigenous Fijians voted for social justice policies of the Coalition, is not the critical factor in the biography. The Indigenous Fijian vote in support of the Coalition was compromised when on 14 May 1987, Lieutenant-Colonel Sitiveni Rabuka along with ten soldiers in gas masks captured and incarcerated the elected government of Dr. Timoci Bavadra. According to Rabuka, there were a number of players involved in the coup - members of the Fiji Military Forces, the Taukei Movement, and prominent high chiefs. Ratu Inoke Kubuabola, Viliame Gonelevu and late Jone Veisamasama were known Alliance stalwarts who refused to accept the result of the April 1987 elections, and through a series of church meetings formalised a destabilisation campaign against the elected Coalition government. Later in the biography, other names appear, particularly of a notable Methodist Church minister mentioned earlier, Reverend Tomasi Raikivi, who became a religious ideologue for the coup sympathisers. Apart from him, Ratu Finau Mara, Filipe Bole, Qoroniasi Bale, Ratu George Kadavulevu, Apisai Tora and Taniela Veitata (pp. 85-98) were all part of a conspiracy to undermine an elected government. However, revelations that Ratu Mara gave his blessings to a military takeover were quite remarkable, since Rabuka had in his 1988 biography maintained that Ratu Mara had 'no knowledge of the coup whatsoever'.

In May 1988, Auckland Star journalist, Karen Mangnall, wrote a telling article titled 'Blueprint for SUPREMACY'. In it, she quoted Ratu Inoke Kubuabola as saying that 'after presenting the Taukei Movement plans to both the high chiefs (Mara and Ganilau), he took two things away with him: A silent nod from Ratu Mara and the push from Ratu Sir Penaia to get the other provinces behind us' (Fiji Post, 26 May 1988). It follows from this that not only Ratu Mara but Ratu Penaia had knowledge of the destabilisation campaign against the Coalition Government. After the coup, Ratu Penaia issued a proclamation on 24 May 1987 granting amnesty to Rabuka and those associated with the coup (Sharpham 2000: 123). Besides that, Rabuka painfully defended his officers during the Taukei Movement riots of September 1987. The soldiers were ineffective in quelling or controlling the Taukei Movement's rampage of Suva city on 21 September. After the destruction of Suva city was over, only one Taukei Movement member was apprehended after being accidentally shot

in the leg.²

The stage was simply being set for the second military coup. This coup, unlike the first one, ousted the Governor General Ratu Penaia Ganilau, removed Fiji from the Commonwealth of Nations, installed a military republic and imposed a Sunday ban. According to Sharpham, 'Rabuka believed Fiji should be declared a Christian country and follow strict Christian observances' (p. 143). This was in line with Rabuka's claim in the earlier biography of 'Methodist fundamentalism'. Following the second military coup in September 1987, harassment and intimidation of Indo-Fijian political activists and their leaders continued.

In 1988, political instability continued with the discovery of weapons which were alleged by the Fiji military to be imported by political dissidents. Following a period of intense military activity against mostly Indo-Fijian farmers, the Constitution Inquiry and Advisory Committee under the leadership of Paul Manuelli was set up in 1988 to investigate and report on a suitable constitutional structure that guaranteed Indigenous Fijian political paramountcy. This was one of the objectives of Rabuka's coups.

Rabuka kept a watchful eye over the constitution review process. His popularity among Indigenous Fijians was confirmed when he was made a lifetime member of the Great Council of Chiefs in 1988 (p. 153). By 1990, Fiji had a new Constitution. This was denounced as 'overtly racist' by many Indo-Fijians including the Fiji Labour Party and the National Federation Party. One of the protestors of the 1990 Constitution, Dr. Anirudh Singh of the University of South Pacific, was abducted and tortured by members of the Fiji Military Forces. This episode was carefully avoided by Rabuka in his second biography and so were the many premeditated attacks on Hindu temples by suspected Taukei militants following the coups of 1987.

On a brighter side, Rabuka was active in bringing about a resolution to a long running dispute in the sugar industry. During his last days in the military, Rabuka was also active politically in bringing an end to a long-standing crisis in the sugar industry. He sympathized with the farmers, members of the National Farmers Union, and their overall demand for a price increase, but he urged them to consider the national interest (p.

² The riots of September 1987 highlighted that the military was actively supporting Taukei Movement members, who were looting and burning Indo-Fijian shops, and harassing, threatening and beating Indo-Fijians in Suva. Ian Boxill (1997: 38) argues that the burning of Indo-Fijian shops by Taukei Movement members provided the rationale for the second coup by Rabuka in September 1987.

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Apart from playing an active role in the sugar dispute in the early 1990s, Rabuka closely followed the formation of the Soqosoqo ni Vakevulewa ni Taukei (SVT) party and successfully contested for its leadership in 1991. However, by then, Ratu Mara had endorsed Josevata Kamikamica as a potential Prime Minister under a SVT government. According to Sharpham, there was serious political in-fighting among SVT members; this had the potential to compromise the political order envisaged by Rabuka (p. 170). Indigenous Fijian political in-fighting was an unintended consequence of removing Indo-Fijians from political authority or any form of power sharing following the 1987 coups. The situation deteriorated following the 1992 general elections after which Rabuka worked to secure his Prime Ministership by finalising an arrangement with the Indo-Fijian dominated Fiji Labour Party. By 1992, it was clear that Rabuka was slowly moving away from simple communal sentiments expressed in his first biography, which led him to execute the coups of 1987, to that of a national leader who saw national inter-ethnic unity and political consensus as keys to national development. Despite his commitments, Rabuka was plagued by a series of bad decisions and internal party revolts.

First, Rabuka found himself caught in a difficult political situation, following the disclosure of the Kermode Report into Tony Stephens million dollar settlement issue.³ The settlement between the state and Tony Stephens was an acknowledgement that the military had misused its authority. Second, Rabuka faced a bitter revolt over the 1994 Appropriation Bill. For Rabuka, it was less a vote against the Budget than an effort to unseat him. According to Rabuka, 'in retrospect, it was clear to him that the dissidents in his ranks had not been so much opposed to the Budget as consumed by their determination to sink him'. By the end of 1993, Rabuka had lost the support of the Fiji Labour Party, which conducted a lightening Parliamentary walkout in June 1993 over what Labour alleged were Rabuka's broken promises. Another major challenge was the formation of the Fijian Association Party in January 1994.

After being forced into a second general election in less than two years, Rabuka found himself battling charges of sexual misconduct; he

³ Tony Stephen sued the interim government (1987-1992) for unlawful detention in 1988 under the Internal Security Decree. He was charged with importing pen pistols into the country; he sued the state for \$10 million. Prior to the conclusion of the case, the Attorney General agreed to pay \$980,000 as cash settlement and the rest of the amount as debts, mortgages, and land titles (See Lal, 2015: 124).

bravely confronted the allegations at an internal caucus meeting (p. 189). Increasing the pressure on Rabuka was Jo Nata who used his newspaper *Weekender* to publish the names of women with whom the Prime Minister had sexual relations. Sharpham notes that:

There was no doubt that Rabuka liked women, for as many colleagues said of him, "he had an eye for women", and there seemed little doubt that he had been having a number of affairs since he had become Prime Minister. Members of his staff were concerned about his roving eye and the problems it could cause. He found women as attractive now as he had in his younger days and no doubt the aphrodisiac of power had certain attractions for some women (Sharpham, 2000: 190).

Rabuka tried desperately to juggle the often conflicting forces of Fijian political paramountcy on one hand and the involvement of other ethnic groups in the decision making process on the other. To achieve a balance, Rabuka set in motion the review of the 1990 Constitution by at first agreeing with the NFP to the Terms of Reference for a review and then announcing, in June 1994, the Joint Parliamentary Select Committee to review the Constitution. Also on the agenda was the question of the composition of the Constitution Review Commission (CRC), which was finalised by March of 1995. During submissions to the CRC, the National Bank of Fiji scandal erupted, and Adi Samanunu lost her Fijian citizenship in an emotionally charged court battle in the Fiji High Court. The National Bank of Fiji fiasco dragged on; in the spotlight were two notable Rotumans, Visanti Makarava and Paul Manueli. Runaway corruption at the National Bank of Fiji rendered the bank insolvent. A series of investigations and court actions followed. Unfortunately, due to the cumbersome nature of Fiji courts and a lack of resources for dealing with white-collar crimes, the National Bank of Fiji culprits got off on technicalities by 1999. Nevertheless, the whole saga haunted the SVT government and provided political ammunition to the opposition.

By the mid 1990s, Rabuka had become a constitutional reformer and a man who now challenged established belief by suggesting 'Fijian' as a common name. He battled his own extremist colleagues in support of a new multiethnic constitution. Those in the SVT who resisted changes to the 1990 Constitution were Kelemendi Bulewa, Jim Ah Koy and Ratu Inoke Kubuabola (p. 221). Rabuka realised the disincentive of Indigenous Fijian provincialism and argued against it, calling it an 'ugly animal,' (p. 227) but he also understood the conservatism of grassroots Indigenous Fi-

jians. Many of Rabuka's political problems with Cabinet colleagues had unfortunately come from their provincial ties.

Despite Rabuka's difficulties, the constitution review was on schedule. After Reeves Commission completed its work, it was up to the Joint Parliamentary Committee to endorse or modify its recommendations. The Fiji Labour Party wanted nothing less than the recommendations in the Reeves Commission Report while the Indigenous Fijian nationalists felt that the Constitution Review Commission went too far and compromised Indigenous Fijian political paramountcy, which had been a recurring theme for an ethnicised Fijian state since 1987. Nevertheless, significant progress had been made by February 1997. Rabuka continued his uphill battle with his own colleagues (p. 229) and triumphed in the end when on 3 July 1997, the Constitution Amendment Bill was passed by the Fiji Parliament unanimously.

After successfully introducing the new Constitution, both Jai Ram Reddy and Rabuka played an important role in bringing Fiji back into the Commonwealth, Rabuka remained suspicious of Indo-Fijians. This was revealed when he, during a visit to New Zealand stated that 'he really does not like Indians' (p. 256), and further refused to be welcomed in a traditional Hindu ceremony' (p. 266) at a religious gathering with Opposition leader Jai Ram Reddy.

Worst perhaps was the surprise apology to Indo-Fijians during the 1999 election campaign. The apology infuriated many Indo-Fijians who saw the apology as disingenuous and a political ploy to win Indo-Fijian votes. Indo-Fijians remembered the enormous pain and suffering caused by Rabuka and his colleagues in the Taukei Movement in 1987. Indo-Fijians were overwhelming in their belief that Rabuka could not be trusted and the Indo-Fijian political party NFP, which itself was a victim of the 1987 coup, by associating with Rabuka, could not be trusted either.

While Rabuka expressed disappointment at Indo-Fijian bloc voting in the 1999 elections for his rival parties, it was not surprising at all for the Indo-Fijians who felt that the coup leader was rightfully punished at the polls. But the coup was not the only factor in the election. A series of problems on the economic front propelled voters, regardless of ethnic origin, to dump SVT and its coalition partners in the 1999 Fiji elections.

Conclusion

At the end of the two biographies, one gets a feeling that Rabuka, at least, tried to rise above simple communal sentiments and initiate consti-

tutional reforms. However, it seemed that he fundamentally failed to understand Indo-Fijians, despite having a number of Indo-Fijian friends in his seven years as Prime Minister. The suffering caused by the 1987 coups remained well embedded in the minds of Indo-Fijians. Meanwhile, a greater problem, identified by Rabuka in his last biography, was Fijian disunity. This disunity played a large role in defeating the Alliance in 1977 and in 1987, and in defeating Rabuka in 1999. It seems that Indigenous Fijians were temporarily united in 1987 to counter the perceived Indo-Fijian threat. With no threat on the horizon, Indigenous Fijian unity collapsed leading to further coups and political instability in Fiji.

The two biographies of Rabuka reflect contending political discourse. In the first biography, there is an attempt to justify Indigenous Fijian ethno-nationalism, Methodist faith and Cold War rhetoric against non-aligned policies. In the second biography, on the other hand, Rabuka attempted to rise above communal, religious and geo-political considerations to embrace multiethnic democracy in a country that was divided along racial and provincial lines. Both the Indigenous Fijians and the Indo-Fijians shunned Rabuka's SVT Party and its coalition partners, including the NFP, in the 1999 general elections. Rabuka had failed to establish himself as an honest broker ready to bring about constructive changes in a divided community. The later biography makes a heroic effort at re-asserting these credentials for Rabuka and establishing him as a changed man who now can be trusted to advance democracy, peaceful co-existence and nation building. Whether this is the definitive Rabuka, and Sharpham (2000) the last biography on the man Sitiveni Ligamamada Rabuka, remains to be seen.

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