

**DEMOCRACY AND ITS PROSPECTS IN FIJI,
1997-2011**

*Dissertation submitted to Jawaharlal Nehru University
in partial fulfilment of the requirements
for award of the degree of*

MASTER OF PHILOSOPHY

ROHAN PHARKA



SOUTH EAST ASIAN AND SOUTHWEST PACIFIC STUDIES DIVISION
CENTRE FOR SOUTH, CENTRAL, SOUTH EAST ASIAN
AND SOUTHWEST PACIFIC STUDIES,
SCHOOL OF INTERNATIONAL STUDIES
JAWAHARLAL NEHRU UNIVERSITY
NEW DELHI-110067

2012



Date: 26 July 2012

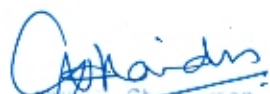
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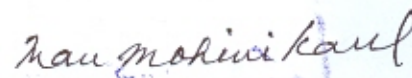
I declare that the dissertation entitled “**DEMOCRACY AND ITS PROSPECTS IN FIJI, 1997-2011**” submitted by me for the award of the degree of **MASTER OF PHILOSOPHY** of Jawaharlal Nehru University is my own work. The dissertation has not been submitted for any other degree of this University or any other university.


 ROHAN PHARKA

CERTIFICATE

We recommend that this dissertation be placed before the examiners for evaluation.


 Prof. G.V.C. Naidu
 Chairperson
 Centre for South, Central, Southeast Asian and South West Pacific Studies
 School of International Studies
 Jawaharlal Nehru University
 New Delhi - 110067


 Prof. Manmohini Kaul
 Supervisor
 Centre for South, Central, Southeast Asian and South West Pacific Studies
 School of International Studies
 Jawaharlal Nehru University
 New Delhi - 110 067
 Ph.: (O) 26704350, (R) 26188817

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

I express my deep sense of gratitude to my supervisor, Prof. Manmohini Kaul, Southeast Asian Southwest Pacific Studies Division, School of International Studies, Jawaharlal Nehru University for her impeccable guidance, valuable suggestions and continued support throughout this dissertation. I am indebted to her for the earnest and painstaking interest she displayed in instilling confidence in me. She examined the drafts not only with remarkable promptness but also with meticulous care. Her observations and scholastic comments have helped me to improve the draft to a significant extent within stipulated time. She guided, motivated, encouraged and supported me throughout my dissertation and i am very thankful to her for this support in spite of her busy academic work.

I am thankful to the staff members of the JNU Library for their timely rendered assistance in finding out the right materials in right time. I convey my gratitude and thanks to our school and centre's staff for their source of inspiration.

I will be forever indebted to the unconditional and immeasurable love and support of my parents. I am delighted by recalling the adorable moral back-up that I have received from my younger sister Isha.

I owe my sincere gratitude to my friends Rishika and Nishant, whose unmatched support and constant encouragement helped me a lot to complete this work.

ROHAN PHARKA

PREFACE

Fiji is one of the most ethnically polarised countries in the world, with a population largely split between indigenous Fijians and ethnic Indians. It comprises of over 300 islands of which approximately 100 are inhabited. The British colonized Fiji in 1874 and adopted the policy of non interference in the Fijian culture and did not allow them to work in the sugarcane fields. The British developed a plantation economy in Fiji based on the indentured labour from India. What started with only 463 indentured labours from India in 1879 quickly rose to over 61,000 in the next 37 years. In 1920 when the indentured labour was abolished, the Indo-Fijians were given the option to go back to India, but they preferred to stay back and worked on leased lands from the ethnic Fijians for the sugarcane cultivation. In 1929, in contrast to the indigenous Fijians who were enfranchised in 1963, the Indians were enfranchised for the first time and were elected to the Legislative Council.

Another legacy of the British policy of ‘divide and rule’ was that of the ownership of the land will be with the ethnic Fijians which was non-transferable to the Indo-Fijians. As the Indo-Fijians could not have a major land ownership, they felt a bit vulnerable and laid their emphasis towards education which resulted in their dominance in trade, commerce and the white collared jobs. The negative of this was that there were hardly any Indo-Fijians in the police services or the armed forces. The British intentionally kept the two communities at bay from each other and fed to the feelings of separate identity. The successive government in the post independence era also did very less to make any significant effort towards the assimilation of these two major communities. As a result of this, the Indians prospered, and the Fijian suspicion and fear towards then increased and with the two communities maintaining a separate identity, the ethnic divide grew and continuously manifested itself into social and political unrest. Even in the present time, both the communities of the ethnic Fijians and the Indo-Fijians have fears of their own regarding their safety and their growth in the country. Today, the divide between the two communities has become more of a political agenda and even if the tensions between the two communities are reducing, the political parties make sure that it remains present in the country for them to gain the support of the people to get the power over the country.

Fiji became independent in 1970 and chose a democratic, parliamentary form of government. It remained so till 1987 when the military staged a coup. In 2000, another elected government was removed by a coup led by a civilian but largely supported by the military, resulting in the power transfer to the military. Again in 2006, after prolonged confrontation between the government and the military, another coup was staged and since then the military has continued to rule Fiji.

Reasons for these three military coups are different and complex. While ethnic divide between the ethnic Fijians and the Indo-Fijians was instrumental for the first coup, the second one was largely motivated by vested interests of some businessman and military elite. The third one on the other hand was a result of a conflict between the military and the conservative ethnic Fijian Prime Minister brought to power by the military. One could easily see the different behaviour of various interest groups like ethnic groups, church, police, regional and international powers during each crisis.

Till 1987, Fijian politics was dominated by the Alliance Party except for a brief period in 1977 when the National Federation Party (NFP), represented mainly by Indo-Fijians won the election but failed to form a government. The coups of 14 May and 28 September, 1987 resulted in the overthrow of the Prime Minister, abrogation of the 1970 constitution and in declaration of Fiji as a republic. The coups also triggered sizeable emigration by Indo-Fijians, Making them a minority in 1994.

In 1990, a new constitution was ratified which reserved the offices of the President and the Prime Minister, along with two-thirds of the Senate seats, and a substantial majority of the House of Representatives for the ethnic Fijians. Ethnic tensions simmered in 1995-96 over the renewal of Indo-Fijian land leases and over the mandated 7 year review of the 1990 constitution. During the 1999 elections, the coalition government was formed led by Indo-Fijian Mahendra Chaudhry, and this did not go down well with many ethnic Fijians.

The coup of 2000 took place when a group led by George Speight, entered the Parliament building on 19 May, 2000. It was supported by a very disparate group of individuals, all for diverse reasons of their own. After Commodore Bainimarama declared martial law and resolved the crisis by force, an interim government was sworn in, headed by Laisenia Qarase. Qarase was democratically elected as the Prime Minister in the elections of 2001 and 2006.

A long running conflict between the government and the military reached the crisis point in early December 2006. The catalyst for the unrest were three bills under consideration by the Fijian Parliament, one of which would question the illegality of the coup of 2000 and offer pardons to some of the people involved in it. On 5 December, 2006, Commodore Bainimarama staged a third coup and assumed power. This coup was a result of a political conflict between Bainimarama and Qarase over the issues of corruption, government functioning, and three potentially divisive pieces of legislation.

Since the coup, Fiji has abrogated the constitution of 1997, was under the martial law until January 2012, without any progress in bringing back democracy in the country, due to which it has been suspended by the Pacific Islands Forum and the Commonwealth of Nations. Other major nations have also been very critical of Fiji during this period. Unlike Australia, New Zealand, the UK and the US, which imposed economic and political sanctions against Fiji, China has maintained a normal relation and the EU has chosen to remain engaged with the administration to encourage a return of democracy. India has taken calculated steps of not interfering in a direct manner.

To sustain democracy in Fiji, the political parties need to be broad based in its membership and appeal. The Judiciary should be more upright and proactive. Similarly, the international community, particularly regional powers like Australia, New Zealand as well as India will have to exert more pressure on the military government.

Against this backdrop, in an endeavour to answer few research questions, the proposed study attempts

1. To critically examine the prospects for a democratic and demilitarised Fiji.
2. To analyse the impact on democracy by the polarisation of Indo Fijians and native Fijians.
3. To critically examine the role of the coups in promoting and protecting the interests of indigenous Fijians.
4. To examine the 2000 and the 2006 coups and their impact on the democratic political setup.
5. To assess the response of the external actors towards the coups in Fiji.

Few hypotheses for the proposed research work include the following:

1. Democracy in Fiji will succeed only if Fijian culture, custom and tradition are willing to reflect social change.
2. Military will play a significant role till there is a genuine reconciliation between the Indo Fijians and the native Fijians.

The methodology for the research will be analytical and descriptive. The study will be based on primary sources such as government publications of Fiji, Australia, New Zealand, Pacific Islands Forum, etc., and it will also include secondary sources such as books, journals, articles, newspapers and interview with scholars and diplomats working in this sphere.

This dissertation has been divided into five chapters.

1. **Introduction:** This chapter will look into the history of the Fijian politics and its emergence as a democratic country in 1970. It will also discuss the political and constitutional problems during and after independence.
2. **Impact of Ethnic division on Fijian Democracy:** This chapter will discuss in detail the role and impact of the ethnic division between the Native-Fijians and the Indo-Fijians. Race remains an unavoidable facet of Fiji life which has kept them separate.
3. **Role of Military in the various ‘coups’ in Fiji:** This chapter will discuss in detail the dimensions of militarisation on Fijian Democracy. In this context an attempt will be made to understand the rationale behind the coups of 2000 and 2006.
4. **Role of Regional Powers towards Fiji’s crisis:** This chapter will discuss in detail the role played by the major external powers Australia, New Zealand and the Pacific Islands Forum along with other major Countries and organisations, and their effort at restoring democracy in Fiji.
5. **Conclusion:** This chapter would conclude with the observations and congregate the assessments of each chapter.

ABBREVIATIONS

ACP	African, Caribbean, Pacific Summit
CMAG	Commonwealth Ministerial Action Group
CRC	Constitutional Review Committee
EEZ	Exclusive Economic Zone
EU	European Union
FHRC	Fiji Human Rights Commission
FICAC	Fiji Independent Commission Against Corruption
FLP	Fiji labour Party
FOC	Fiji India Foreign Office Consultations
GCC	Great Council of Chiefs
IG	Interim Civilian Government
KDPOs	Key Defence Policy Objectives
MSG	Melanesian Spearhead Group
NAM	Non Alignment Movement
NFP	National Federation Party
NLTB	Native Land Trust Board
PIF	Pacific Islands Forum
RFMF	Republic of Fiji Military Forces
RTU	Reconciliation, Tolerance and Unity Bill
SDL	Soqosoqo Duavata Ni Lewenivanua
USP	University of South Pacific
WTO	World Trade Organisation

TABLE OF CONTENT

CONTENTS	PAGE NO.
Declaration and Certificate	ii
Acknowledgement	iii
Preface	iv
Abbreviations	viii
Table of Contents	ix
CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION	01
CHAPTER 2: IMPACT OF ETHNIC DIVISION ON FIJIAN DEMOCRACY.	10
<i>The Early Years</i>	11
<i>Fiji's Path towards Independence</i>	16
<i>The Coup of 1987 and its Aftermath</i>	18
<i>The Constitution of 1997 and the 2000 Coup</i>	21
<i>An Evaluation of the Fijian Fears</i>	24
<i>An Evaluation of the Indian Concerns</i>	27
CHAPTER 3: ROLE OF MILITARY IN THE VARIOUS 'COUPS' IN FIJI.	31
<i>The Fijian Military</i>	32
<i>The Coup of May 2000</i>	34
<i>Reasons for the Success of the Coup</i>	36
<i>The Coup of December 2006</i>	37
<i>The New Interim Government</i>	42
<i>Abrogation of the 1997 Constitution</i>	43
<i>A Coup different from the Fijian Coup Culture</i>	45
<i>Reasons for the 2006 Coup</i>	46

<i>Impact and Implications</i>	47
CHAPTER 4: ROLE OF REGIONAL POWERS TOWARDS	53
FIJI'S CRISIS.	
<i>International Response to 2006 Coup and the</i>	55
<i>Abrogation of the 1997 Constitution</i>	
<i>Australia</i>	56
<i>New Zealand</i>	58
<i>Pacific Islands Forum</i>	61
<i>The Commonwealth of Nations</i>	63
<i>The European Union</i>	64
<i>The United States of America</i>	66
<i>India</i>	67
<i>China</i>	70
CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION	72
REFERENCES	80

CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

INTRODUCTION

The Republic of Fiji is made up of two main groups of islands, Viti Levu and Vanua Levu and has an area of over 194,000 square kilometers, mainly consisting of an archipelago of coral reefs, atolls and islets (Burns 1963). There are over 300 islands in Fiji, out of which around a hundred are still inhabited. It is believed that the first settlers in Fiji were Polynesians who later migrated to the neighboring islands. The present ethnic population of Fiji is Melanesian with a similar culture to that of the Western Pacific, but some connections to the older Polynesian cultures like the ones in Tonga and Samoa are still visible.

The European settlement on the islands of Fiji began in the nineteenth century and the first to settle were the Beachcombers, the missionaries, the whalers and those who were engaged in the then booming sandalwood trade. The British colonized Fiji in 1874 and adopted the policy of non interference in the Fijian culture and did not allow them to work in the sugarcane fields. The British developed a plantation economy in Fiji based on the indentured labour from India. What started with only 463 indentured labours from India in 1879 quickly rose to over 61,000 in the next 37 years. In 1920 when the indentured labour was abolished, the Indo-Fijians were given the option to go back to India, but they preferred to stay back and worked on leased lands from the ethnic Fijians for the sugarcane cultivation. In 1929, in contrast to the indigenous Fijians who were enfranchised in 1963, the Indians were enfranchised for the first time and were elected to the Legislative Council.

Another legacy of the British policy of 'divide and rule' was that of the ownership of the land will be with the ethnic Fijians which was non-transferable to the Indo-Fijians. As the Indo-Fijians could not have a major land ownership, they felt a bit vulnerable and laid their emphasis towards education which resulted in their dominance in trade, commerce and the white collared jobs. The negative of this was that there were hardly any Indo-Fijians in the police services or the armed forces (Ali 1991). The British intentionally kept the two communities at bay from each other and fed to the feelings of separate identity. The successive government in the post independence era also did

very less to make any significant effort towards the assimilation of these two major communities. As a result of this, the Indians prospered, and the Fijian suspicion and fear towards them increased and with the two communities maintaining a separate identity, the ethnic divide grew and continuously manifested itself into social and political unrest. Even in the present time, both the communities of the ethnic Fijians and the Indo-Fijians have fears of their own regarding their safety and their growth in the country. Today, the divide between the two communities has become more of a political agenda and even if the tensions between the two communities are reducing, the political parties make sure that it remains present in the country for them to gain the support of the people to get the power over the country.

When locating Fiji on the scale of democratic politics, it is a challenge, given the many interruptions to democratic rule in the country's history. Fiji has been classified by some as an example of a 'limited democracy' while some have labeled Fiji as a 'communal democracy', a mixture of Westminster and indigenous traditions and there exists strong ethnic divisions inherent in its society and politics (Morlino 2009: 287-293). Like many former British colonies, Fiji inherited a form of Westminster parliamentary government (Ratuva 2005). The 'parent model' was modified to the extent that it incorporated a number of provisions designed to secure a special position for indigenous Fijians vis-à-vis the Indo-Fijian community. This deviation from modern democratic norms was meant to stabilise Fiji's 'plural society' by ensuring equal representation in the House of Representatives for the two major ethnic groups. Indeed, one of the major causes of political instability in Fiji has been the ethnic divide between native Fijians and Indo-Fijian immigrants which had been promoted by the British since their colonization of the islands in 1874. Indians were encouraged to immigrate and work on the sugar plantations while native Fijian labor was discouraged and their culture was respected.

Following consultations between the British Governor and local chiefs over the governing of indigenous Fijians, the *Bose Levu Vakaturaga* (Great Council of Chiefs) was established in 1876. The Council dealt with all the matters affecting the ethnic Fijians and post independence, had an even more important role to play, with the 55 member council advising the government and also functioning as an electoral college to appoint the President of the Republic of Fiji, as well as 14 of the 32 Senators (Lal, 2003). Ethnic divisions in society, therefore, along with the institutionalization of

influence by one ethno-cultural body over future governments, would characterize the nature of Fijian politics following independence in 1970.

Democracy in Fiji is assessed on the basis of individual security and civil order, institutional and administrative capacity, and effective fight against corruption, has undergone a series of fluctuations and erosion since independence, and particularly in recent years. Following independence, Fiji underwent a 17-year period of constitutional parliamentary democracy under the rule of the native Fijian Alliance Party. In 1987, an Indo-Fijian coalition party won the general election with overwhelming support from the Indo-Fijian community but with very little support from ethnic Fijians. Two military coups occurred in 1987, led by Colonel Sitiveni Rabuka, followed by a new Constitution in 1990 that institutionalized the dominance of ethnic Fijians in Fijian politics. A president, to be appointed by the Great Council of Chiefs, would replace Fiji's former Governor General and, at least in name, the country would become a republic. This led to further communalisation of politics and worsening of economy under massive international pressure, temporary trade boycotts and withdrawal of opposition parties from the political process, the ruling elite decided to review the 1990 constitution. A Constitutional Review Committee (CRC) was set up by the president in 1995 which led to the establishment of a non racist constitution of 1997. It survived for a short while when a third (civilian) coup in 2000 followed the elections of 1999 which had returned the Indo-Fijian Labour Party and for the first time had brought an Indo-Fijian Prime Minister, Mahendra Chaudhry to power. The civilian coup led by the Fijian national George Speight instigated the sacking of the Chaudhry government by the president, Ratu Sir Kamisese Mara. The coup was suppressed by the Republic of Fiji Military Forces (RFMF) under the command of Commodore Voreqe (Frank) Bainimarama who appointed the ethnic Fijian Laisenia Qarase as 'interim prime minister' (Selochan, 2004). Qarase formed a new political party, Soqosoqo Duavata Ni Lewenivanua (United Fiji Party or more commonly, SDL) to successfully contest the 2001 and 2006 elections in a coalition with the Matanitu Vanua (MV) party that was formed in Vanua Levu by chiefs and supporters of the 2000 coup.

Fiji's coup of late 2006 was unlike the previous coups because the event was not aimed at protecting the interests of indigenous Fijians against ethnic Indians. Rather, it came about as a result of a culmination of personal grievances held by its leader,

Bainimarama, and others against the government and the impending legislation of Prime Minister Qarase. In contrast to Bainimarama's call to apply the rule of law to rebels and perpetrators of the 2000 coup, the Qarase government sought their amnesty and pushed for the establishment of an independent unity commission as part of a reconciliation initiative, the Reconciliation Tolerance and Unity (RTU) bill to address the causes of the crisis and to resolve Fiji's ongoing political instability. Qarase had announced two more contentious bills before the 2006 election – one concerning customary fishing grounds (the Qoliqoli Bill), the other concerning ancestral land claims (the Indigenous Claims Tribunal Bill). Bainimarama claimed all three proposals would cause division and conflict among Fijians. The tension between the government and the military highlighted both modern and traditional conflicts expressed through state institutions. The RTU Bill promoted reconciliation through 'restorative justice' based partially on the Fijian custom of veisorosorovi (traditional apology) where the 'wrong' and the 'wronged' are brought together to discuss and resolve their problems. Yet this approach was not welcomed by non-Fijian ethnic groups who saw that the Bill, if adopted, would endorse two sets of laws in Fiji – a rule of law for all as well as a rule of customary law primarily for the benefit of indigenous Fijians. Hence Bainimarama's grievances in this instance aligned strongly with those of the non-ethnic Fijians. In addition, whereas Qarase respected the positions held by those in the Great Council of Chiefs (GCC), Bainimarama marginalized the GCC and paid scant regard to the people in those positions. In this sense, Qarase's respect for traditional sources of legitimacy and customary law in Fiji opposed Bainimarama's militaristic application of the rule of law.

Upon seizing power in late 2006, Bainimarama appointed an interim Prime Minister and dissolved Parliament. Unlike his predecessor Sitiveni Rabuka in 1987, or himself in 2000 after the Speight coup, Bainimarama chose not to immediately abrogate the 1997 Constitution and went to great lengths to appear to be operating within the rule of law. He removed only chief figures in government institutions opposed to his regime; these included the president, vice-president, police commissioner and acting police commissioner, the solicitor general, the chairman of the public service commission, the chief justice and the chief magistrate. He also later reappointed the president so that he and his new interim cabinet could be 'legally' appointed.

The Fijian economy had struggled to perform before the coup and budget cuts since have raised the potential for corruption in the government and public administration. Members of the public service were not required to publicly declare their assets or gifts received in the course of their work and there was no independent audit of the assets or interests of senior public service officials prior to 2006. Numerous allegations of corruption at senior levels were made, former Auditor Generals had exposed widespread abuse and ineptitude in government agencies and cases were filed with the courts. However, recommendations by the Law Reform Commission in 2003 to set up an independent anti-corruption commission were never acted upon by the government. Following the coup, and the military's announcement of a big 'clean up' campaign to eradicate corruption within the public administration, government and politicians, Bainimarama removed a layer of senior officials, heads of government departments, statutory bodies and public enterprises, and demanded that allegations of executive level corruption in government be investigated. Reforms were introduced aimed at cutting expenditures and initiating staff replacements with little to no experience job cuts occurred across the public service and forced early retirement (at the age of 55) was introduced for a large number of senior managers. Many public offices were filled by military officers or civilians appointed by the military, thus reducing the scope for professionalism or better performance.

The interim government set up the Fiji Independent Commission Against Corruption (FICAC) but it was to be headed by the deputy military commander and staffed mainly by ex-police and army officials. The few cases which eventually appeared before the courts were the targets of Bainimarama's original campaign – board members of statutory bodies, public enterprises and Qarase himself. A strong suspicion, therefore, developed over FICAC's independence from political interference. The interim government also announced that there would be major reforms to Fiji's twelve municipal councils in an effort to clean up corruption. The 12 mayors and municipal councillors had their terms shortened from four years to three. Though their contracts expired in 2009 and fresh elections are not due to be held until the reform process is carried out. It will take some time before more professional appointments to the Anti-Corruption Commission are made and concrete measures to identify and prevent corruption are adopted.

Fiji's judiciary had maintained a reputation for independence prior to 2006 although lengthy delays were experienced in bringing cases before the courts. In the Prasad case of 2000, the Fiji High Court had ruled that Bainimarama's earlier revocation of the 1997 Constitution in 2000 was unconstitutional and the decision was upheld the following year by the Court of Appeal. Judicial independence has suffered considerably since the coup as many expatriate judges resigned from their positions, arguing that their positions and their independence had been compromised. Nevertheless, the courts continued to sentence army and police officers found guilty of crimes. In 2008, the High Court ruled in favour of the interim government in *Qarase v. Bainimarama* and declared that the president was entitled to use prerogative powers that existed outside of the Constitution in exceptional circumstances. In 2009 the Court of Appeal reversed the High Court's decision and declared that the president had no such prerogative powers, that the Constitution thoroughly delimits the powers of the president to dismiss an elected prime minister, and that the Constitution was drafted on the basis that the people of Fiji wished to avoid a recurrence of such instability and coups. This triggered the president's abrogation of the Constitution, the dismissal of the judiciary, and the ushering in of a 'new legal order' of Public Emergency Regulations or rule by decree. Since abrogating the Constitution, the interim government has intimated that the basic rights of Fijians are still in place (although they are no longer guaranteed under the Constitution), and the president declared in his Revocation Decree that all other existing laws, decrees and promulgations were still in force. The government also took over the regulatory powers of the Fiji Law Society, a military officer was appointed chief registrar of the court in charge of the registration of all practising lawyers in Fiji.

The Fiji police force was undergoing significant reforms prior to the 2006 coup and its reputation for professionalism was improving and allegations of misconduct in both the military and the police force were investigated and officers and soldiers were punished with suspension or dismissal. The police commissioner was sacked following the coup and the police force was disarmed by the military. Having no previous police experience, the former head of the navy division of the RFMF was installed as the new commissioner but was replaced in 2010. Appointments and promotions within the force have taken place along kinship lines and since 2006 have been used as a way of rewarding loyalty to the regime. Complaints of corruption and

police brutality have been investigated by FICAC and the CID, leading to the suspension and sentencing of some officers. However, it can no longer be assumed that the courts would challenge any arbitrary police or military action that is justified on national security grounds.

The response of the international community to the unfolding of the political crisis in Fiji is also very interesting. While Australia, New Zealand, the United Kingdom and the United States have declined to recognize the new government and have imposed economic and political sanctions against Fiji, China has had a great relation and the European Union has also chosen to remain engaged with the administration to encourage a return of democracy. India has taken very calculated steps of not interfering in a direct manner but has shown its support towards Fiji. The Commonwealth of Nations has suspended Fiji's membership on December 8, 2006 and in May 2009 the Pacific Islands Forum too suspended Fiji from its membership.

The period of 1997-2011 has a great importance to this study as 1997 was the year when the Fijian government came up with a new and unbiased constitution which gave equal opportunities to the people of the nation. The future of the nation looked bright but that was not the case as the country witnessed two major coups in 2000 and 2006. During this period the situation between the native Fijians and the Indo Fijians has been on a downhill. The military has played an important role during this period and currently rules the state of Fiji and has great democratic plans for the nation. The year 2011 is also an important year because towards the end of it Commodore Bainimarama has talked positively of a democratic setup in Fiji in the near future and has taken a giant step towards this by abolishing the martial law in the nation.

The main objectives of this study are to critically examine the prospects for a democratic and demilitarised Fiji; to analyse the impact on democracy by the polarisation of Indo Fijians and native Fijians; to critically examine the role of the coups in promoting and protecting the interests of indigenous Fijians; to examine the 2000 and the 2006 coups and their impact on the democratic political setup and at last to assess the response of the external actors towards the coups in Fiji. With the above mentioned objectives in mind, the study will try to test the following hypothesis. The first hypothesis to be tested in this study is that "Democracy in Fiji will succeed only if Fijian culture, custom and tradition are willing to reflect social change". The second

hypothesis of this study is that “Military will play a significant role till there is a genuine reconciliation between the Indo Fijians and the native Fijians”.

CHAPTER 2
IMPACT OF ETHNIC DIVISION ON FIJIAN
DEMOCRACY

IMPACT OF ETHNIC DIVISION ON FIJIAN DEMOCRACY

The Republic of the Fiji Islands is one of the world's most ethnically polarized countries, with a population largely split between indigenous Fijians (52%) and ethnic Indians (41%) and neither group being strictly homogeneous. In common with other Pacific islands the indigenous population exhibits significant variation in terms of ascribed status, education and provincial allegiance, while within the Indian community there have been differences on the basis of religion, class and even the manner of their arrival in Fiji (Mayer 1973). What separates Fiji from its neighbouring countries like Tonga or Samoa, and what drove its recent political history and fuelled the emergence of Fijian nationalism, is its distinct ethnic polarization. Thus the prime focus of this chapter is to understand the influence of ethnic difference on the politics of Fiji.

The conflict that often accompanies ethnic division (Vanhanen 1999), while present, has been of low level when compared to other countries in terms of violence or death. However, since independence in 1970 the degree of conflict has been creeping upwards, with attitudes hardening and ethnic competition for political power increasing, as demonstrated most tellingly in the coups of 1987 and 2000 (Davies 2000). This chapter will explore the root cause of the ethnic rivalry and the causal factors underlying the recent strengthening of nationalistic sentiments. This chapter also intends to establish a perspective from which a more realistic view of the country's fault lines can be distinguished, a perspective that further hints at the necessities for Fiji and all its constituent peoples' to enjoy lasting stability.

The Early Years

The islands of Fiji were discovered around 3500 years ago by the Lapita people when they voyaged from the New Britain region in the central South Pacific. They not only brought the technology and navigational skills needed for deep-sea exploration with them but also the capacity to exploit both pelagic and inshore marine resources. Further, they did not arrive not accidentally to these islands but were “fully equipped to establish permanent settlements, carrying with them domestic animals and planting

stocks of tuber, fruit, and tree crops, as well as a sophisticated knowledge of horticulture and plant manipulation” (Kirch 2000). Throughout this time period, contact with the west (Vanuatu and Melanesia) and more regular exchanges with the east (Tonga and Samoa) introduced a genetic and cultural influence that left their marks on the unique society that evolved on the islands of Fiji (Kirch 2000). Thus the Fijian people entered modern times with a philosophy that saw the land and themselves as inseparable.

Abel Tasman, the Dutch explorer was the first European to set eyes on islands of Fiji, although the first precise recording of its location belongs to William Bligh, made in 1789 (Derrick 1946). The European settlers first made a casual at first in the early 19th century as shipwrecked sailors, runaway convicts from Australian penal settlements, sandalwood traders and as missionaries, united only in seeing the country as either a refuge or an opportunity. The strategic importance of Fiji to the Europeans increased dramatically as the century progressed, propelled largely due to the US Civil War (1861 – 65), which produced a steep increase in the world price of cotton and thus induced the search for a substitute location for its production. Fuelled by this possibility, European settlement accelerated and with it came the associated need to alienate Fijian land and to co-opt or placate the populace to the extent needed to permit that alienation (Davis 2005). Though in all likelihood unrelated, the twin agents of placation were Christianity and debt enslavement. Christianity helped in ending cannibalism, which elevated the stature of the Europeans and through the Ten Commandments they placed additional controls on customary taboos and common law, containing thereby the most overt of improprieties.

Debt enslavement, which was not a sin under the Ten Commandments, involved negotiation of a commercial contract or an appeal to some legal principle with which the native party, willing or unwilling, would eventually find it impossible to comply. The aggrieved European party, to whom some debt was now apparently owing, assisted by the invocation of compound interest, became thereby positioned to claim from the native transgressor such assets as he judged would fairly compensate for his ‘loss’. The most dramatic example of this started in 1849 when a celebratory Fourth of July cannon display let off by a US trader on Nukulau Island caused a fire that led to damage and some looting (Derrick 1946: 96). The latter and some other acts of

violence allegedly perpetrated on US citizens set in train. The US demanded for Seru Cakobau, Fiji's most powerful chief, to pay \$45 000 in compensation. To collect this sum, as Leo Tolstoy relates it, the Americans sent a battalion, which seized some of the best islands as security and even threatened to bombard and destroy the settlements unless the contribution was paid to the American representatives by a given date. Meanwhile the American government having observed the prosperity of the people, raised its demand from \$45 000 to \$90 000, and threatened to raise it still further if Cakobau did not pay promptly (Tolstoy 1886).

On recognizing that the revenue potential of both customary tribute and a poll tax which he had introduced on all adults under his jurisdiction (Derrick 1946: 209) were completely insufficient to meet the US demands and also facing similar threats from the French and Germans and the added fear of the annexation of eastern Fiji by the Tongan maritime empire, Cakobau and 12 other high chiefs representing the different regions of Fiji turned towards the British for assistance. Strategically they ceded their country to the United Kingdom in return for the payment of outstanding debts and the protection of Fijian interests. Thus on 10 October 1874, the treaty, 'The Deed of Cession' was signed and Fiji became a colony of British (Ravuvu 1991).

In many ways the British rule in Fiji was benevolent. It was administered indirectly through the local chiefs who were educated and taught to speak in English to effectively interact with the colonial authorities. In fact, the degree of indirect rule was such that the early days of colonial administration resembled more of a shared form of governance than traditional colonial authoritarianism (Legge 1958). The cultural vulnerability of the native people was recognized, as was their ownership of land, which before 1874 was acquired by the Europeans. Cakobau's poll tax transformed into an in-kind tax which was payable in the form of agricultural produce in designated amounts. Any production remitted in excess of the tax obligations was purchased by the colonial government at better prices than those paid by European traders (Legge 1958).

The colony was obliged to contribute to the colonial coffers and large scale plantation agriculture was the vehicle chosen by the British. Sugar cane which was an indigenous crop replaced cotton and became the target crop, thus evolved to grow

under Fijian conditions. Capital, transportation and milling for large scale cane production were provided by Britain's private commercial interests (Knapman 1987), while suitable land was obtained either from the freehold estates acquired by the Europeans or else from natives leases. As for the labour, the imported diseases resulted in the collapse of the Fijian population, falling from possibly 300,000 in the early days of European settlement (Derrick 1946: 48), to 84,000 after the 1918 flu. Further, the chiefs were reluctant to permit the able bodied to leave their villages for communal projects and tax production.

Slavery was outlawed in the Empire in 1833 and the supply of indentured labour from Vanuatu and the Solomon Islands was completely insufficient to meet the combined needs of the expanding plantation economies of Queensland, New Caledonia and Fiji (Fickling 2004). Given such constraints, innovative thinking was needed to solve the labour supply problem and the solution was the importation of indentured labour from India, a practice that the then Governor, Sir Arthur Gordon, had observed to be 'successfully' working in Mauritius and the Caribbean. So on 14 May 1879, the *Leonidas* docked in the port of Levuka carrying from Calcutta a human cargo of 522 persons, the first in a fleet of 87 similar vessels that eventually introduced from the Subcontinent over 60,000 indentured workers (Mayer 1973).

Indenture ceased in 1916 and the ongoing indenture contracts were cancelled by the colonial government in 1920 and while the government offered the workers to be shipped back to India at the end of their five-year contracts, a great majority of them chose to remain in Fiji. Faced with the frailty to recruit more indentured workers, the sugar industry judged that its ongoing labour needs could be best maintained by breaking up the prevailing sugar estates into 10-acre plots and then inviting the Indian workers to lease them and work on as independent and highly motivated farmers (Moynah 1981; Lowdes 1965). This strategy was not successful but it remains the cornerstone of sugar production in Fiji. It also galvanized the self confidence of the formerly docile indentured workers. This, coupled with the arrival of nationalist envoys sent from India to agitate for change, encouraged the Indian workers to rebel against the British, striking for higher wages in the mills and their demand for greater land security. The latter increased the competition for land and began to drive up rents. In 1921 the colonial authorities feared that this would penalize the European

planters and traders of modest means and thus they responded by replacing the market for leases with a system of rent controls, which still remain in place and has served to transfer real income from native landowners to immigrant tenants (Heartfield 2002).

In 1940 Fijian landowners agreed to establish the Native Land Trust Board (NLTB), a lawful authority in whose hands the landowners were to place their land and which had the sole right to issue leases, with the fear of compulsory seizure of land on not accommodating the increasing demands for subsidized leaseholds (Nayacakalou 1971). This body, in turn, leased the land to the Indian smallholders and the sugar company (the Colonial Sugar Refining Company), and distributed the rent to the native landowners. The actual terms of the leases were controlled by colonial statute till independence and then by acts of parliament. In turn, this controlling legislation has proved contentious for both tenant and the landowner. For the tenant, the current 30-year lease durations are judged too short to confer enough security of tenure and for the landowners, not only was their best land locked up for a generation, but the controlled rents were so low that returns were minimal. Thus today, a black market in leases has developed in some areas, in which rental rates up to 10 times the controlled level have been reported (Eaton 1988).

While the colonial importation of indentured labour resulted in chronic difficulties relating to the competition for land, its most obdurate legacy lies in the social and political fracas arising from demographic changes in some areas which saw the Fijians quickly diminished to a minority and became bemused foreigners in their own homeland. Yet indenture was often rationalized by the colonial authorities as a way of protecting the Fijians and their culture (Heartfield 2002). According to the 1946 Census, Fijians as a whole found themselves reduced to a minority, numbering 118,070 as against 120,414 Indians (Fiji Islands Bureau of Statistics 2004). This numerical inferiority remained until the coup of 1987 which triggered a large-scale Indian emigration.

Further, the geographical separation of the Indian settlement from Fijian, the emergence of separate religious based schools, the colonial policy of divide and rule, the Native Administration 'pass system' under which the Fijians could not leave their villages without the express permission of the colonial District Officer and mutual

antipathy between the two races meant that there was little interaction or assimilation between the two populations (Oliver 1961). The existence of these two demographic and cultural solitudes was gravely to shape the evolution of political and ethnic attitudes.

Fiji's path towards Independence

Indian political activism took off in 1929 on the 50th anniversary of their arrival in Fiji, with calls for “the full and unrestricted rights of British citizenship”, including common roll elections (Kelly 1991: 145). During the 1950's, when decolonization was proceeding throughout the British Empire, Indian political leaders had stepped up their demands for constitutional and electoral reform and had joined the Fijian leaders to work against the British to end the colonial control. The prospect of independence, however, particularly a post-independence political regime based on common roll elections did not sit well with the native Fijians, who feared that the removal of the colonial power would lead to the takeover of their country by the Indian settlers (Mara 1997). This fear was rooted not simply in demography but also in the realization that the Indian community was playing an increasingly dominant role in small-scale retailing, small business, buses and taxis, and other professions, as well as dominating employment in the all important sugar industry (Davis 2005). Indicative of the scale of this is the fact that as late as 1987, the year of Fiji's first coup, “the public service apart from police and construction staff was predominantly Indian and on the legal side there were 197 Indian lawyers against 12 Fijian, and out of the 8 judges only one was a Fijian” (Hickling 1998).

The desire of the Fijians for their country to remain a part of Britain was hopeless considering the fact that the Indian push for independence occurred at a time when Britain was actively committed to getting out of the colony business. Recognizing this, in 1965 some Fijian and Indian delegates sat down with the British authorities in London to work out a revised electoral and constitutional provision. This eventually resulted in the Constitution of 1970, which paved the way for Fiji's independence in the same year and also proved to be remarkable in two distinct ways. First, the Deed of Cession, which was a legal treaty that had spelled out the rights of Fijians when the country became a colony, was not formally made part of the constitution. This

omission was again repeated in each of the future constitutional amendments of 1990 and 1997. This act was in sharp contrast to the case of New Zealand, where The Treaty of Waitangi in 1840 (the Maori's equivalent to the Deed of Cession), became part of the legal conventions that effectively formed its constitution (Davis 2005). Second, to diffuse the Fijian fears of democratic demographic dispossession, the Constitution guaranteed that of the 52 parliamentary seats, 22 would be reserved for Fijians and 22 for Indians, and the rest eight for others. Thus the parliamentary democracy practically became married to ethnic quotas in the interest of stability.

1972 was the year when the first election under this constitution took place. It was won by the 'Alliance Party', which was led by Ratu Mara and consisted of Fijians and some of the Indian business class with the primary aim to keep the 'National Federation Party' (NFP) whose electoral base were the Indian cane farmers, out of power. During the 1970's, the political pressures began to build. Agreeable to the Lome convention which saw Fiji's sugar exports to the European Union become three times subsidized than the world market prices, the ruling Alliance Party tried to remove the income tax exemption that the cane farmers had previously secured for themselves, but were unsuccessful in their attempts. The Alliance's efforts to maintain racial parity at the newly created University of the South Pacific (USP) by applying lower admission standards for Fijian students further angered the Indian voters. At the same time the nationalistic sentiments were also on an upward surge among the Fijians, fuelled by an extension of the tenant-friendly land legislation and the emergence of an overtly nationalist party which had argued that the Alliance had made too many concessions towards the Indian interests (Mara 1997). The allegations of corruption and the perception that the Alliance Party had taken the leadership of the country for granted further eroded the support of the people towards them.

By the 1980's, the growth in urbanization along with the increasing participation of Fijians in the formal economy resulted in the convergence of economic interests between the Fijian and the Indian workers. Further, the urban working Fijians saw the ever increasing economic and political influence of the Indian workers through their labour unions. Part of this growing influence arose from the efforts of the Alliance government to change the existing character of the government–union relationship through an unwritten policy of docile capitulation to the demands of the union.

Accordingly, trade unionism became an attractive proposition for the workers and especially the union leaders. However, rather than joining the existing union structure and seeing their own interests being served, most Fijians formed their own unions by claiming the existing ones to be Indian-dominated, a view that the colonial authorities had earlier encouraged (Heartfield 2002). Despite the emergence of a combined working class, coupled with the concern among some Indian workers that the established Indian political party 'The National Federation Party' was becoming increasingly dominated by the business class and their interests, led to the formation of the Fiji Labour Party (FLP) in 1985. This was a party that though being Indian dominated had some appeal for the urban Fijians and to make it more appealing, a Fijian Dr. Timoci Bavadra, was installed as its titular head.

The Coup of 1987 and its Aftermath

In 1987 a coalition of the FLP and NFP won the country's fifth general election and managed to pick up 9% of Fijian votes, only to be overthrown shortly thereafter by a military coup led by Lieutenant Colonel Sitiveni Rabuka. Rabuka (Premdas 1992). His justification to the coup was that the Fijian Labour Party's victory threatened instability and communal violence in the country. Specifically, in the minds of many Fijians the result of this election added with the Indian domination of the professions and small and medium sized business, confirmed their worst fears of losing their country to the Indian settler community. Such was the magnitude of these fears that Rabuka's coup was intensely popular and along with the preceding election results, it brought a striking change of attitude and a 'closing of ranks' amongst the vast majority of ordinary Fijians (Ewins 1998).

Regardless of being a bloodless coup, it had a profound effect on the society of the Fiji Islands. With respect to the race relations, the Coup of 1987 brought out the tension that was quiescent and whipped up the chauvinistic sentiments in the normally non-confrontational Fijians. Undoubtedly the military intervention, the intermittent violence and the possibility of a worse future created fear and presage among the various settler communities, something that they had not seen before (Premdas 1992). The coup also created similar insecurity in less obvious ways as well by bringing the Fijians and Indians into direct competition for jobs in several key economic sectors.

Affirmative action in the civil services pushed the Fijian participation towards the 50% level and often much higher in its upper positions (Lawson 1991). In higher education also the Fijian representation rose to new highs due to the greater accessibility to scholarships.

Thus the competition for jobs, housing, scholarships and commercial capital all increased after the coup and the competition for many had become unfair and unjust. Thus the Indian anger became targeted at the civil service, licensing arrangements, scholarships and loans, where government decree was able to force greater Fijian penetration (Lal 1992). On the other hand, the Fijian concern was directed towards cementing control over the instruments of government, promoting educational opportunities and making inroads into the private sector (Davis 2005).

The discriminatory hiring and housing practices limited the Fijian participation in the employment side of the private sector and similarly on the ownership side the Fijians were faced with the prospect of entering the marketplace almost completely bereft of the business knowledge and then either competing against with well established businesses or else eking out a living in unknown niche markets. Of course it is somewhat superficial to try to quantify the individual components of the Rabuka years, given that fact that their main consequences were psychological not material. Overall the economy and the business life of the country were not significantly altered despite greater competition from the Fijians in paid employment. However, the coup ensured the death of the dream that had sustained the Indian community since the days of indenture, the dream of creating in these islands a home for themselves where their industry could flourish and their culture and values would be second to none. The shattering of the Indian dreams resulted in the Indian emigration which reached over 60,000 in the post-coup decade (Lawson 1990).

The emigration mindset also influenced the Indian entrepreneurs to reallocate their assets into liquid transferable instruments with the effect that private sector capital investment fell sharply and had remained low. Even the Indian academicians, who once endeavoured to enlist the Fijians in their struggles against the British, had now made an appeal back to Britain and the West for moral and material support in their bid to end the undemocratic rule of the military-backed Fijian government. As for the

Fijians, the coup provided them the impetus to cast off what the Australians would call their ‘cultural cringe’, the gamy colonial dependency mentality that had prevented them from adopting a more assertive role in the modern world and which encouraged perennial deference to European and Indian expertise and counsel (Davis 2005). At the same time for many Fijians the coup eventually became a source of embarrassment and the notion that their assertion of power had created such blatant fear and insecurity among their Indian neighbours was something that did not go down well with them.

With respect to the political developments after the 1987 Coup, the military-backed government drafted a new constitution in 1990 which was designed to strengthen the position of the Fijians within the state (Lal 2003). To achieve this, the positions of the Prime Minister, President and the head of the armed forces were reserved for the Fijians (Jeffery 1991). 37 of the 70 parliament seats were reserved for the Fijians as opposed to 27 for the Indians and the system of affirmative action was instituted, which mainly tried to ensure that at least 50% of all civil service positions were filled by Fijians and Rotumans (Lal 2003). In 1992, Rabuka himself brought legitimacy to his rule by organizing a general election under this new constitution and stood for parliament (Sharpman 2000). He represented the SVT, a new party which he was partly instrumental in creating. While the SVT won the election, Rabuka, ironically had to enlist the support of the FLP, the very party his military had overthrown, to secure for himself the position of Prime Minister from his Fijian rival Jo Kamikamica (Sharpman 2000).

Rabuka’s leadership eventually proved to be less than effective and under the constant pressure from the Indians within Fiji as well as suffering international diplomatic isolation and economic mismanagement, his administration struggled (Grynberg 2002). Eventually he became worn down by the world opinion, by the self-serving behaviour of his camp followers and by the realization that a prosperous, modern economy and society could not develop if Fijian nationalism provoked the Indians into adopting the role of either reluctant partners or fifth columnists. Accordingly he became an isolated man and distanced himself from those unaffected by the pressure or direct responsibility, and whose advice was simply more of the same inward ethnic

chauvinism. This changed outlook had a critical effect on the development of the 1997 Constitution and its aftermath.

The Constitution of 1997 and the 2000 Coup

The Constitution of 1990 contained provision for a review after seven years and as the review commenced, Rabuka's image fell sharply among Fijians. Some questioned the need for a review, while others questioned his womanizing and moral integrity, along with the circumstances surrounding his acquisition of a huge estate near his home village in Vanua Levu and his ability to run the government or the nation (Davis 2000).

The constitutional review was a remarkable affair in itself as the three member committee that conducted it, consisted of Tomasi Rayalu Vakatora (a Fijian who was the sole Fiji resident on the team), Brij Lal (an expatriate Fiji Indian) and Sir Paul Reeves, a former Governor General and Anglican Archbishop of New Zealand, who chaired the committee. The recommendations of the review emulated the joint submission put forward by the FLP and the NFP, a submission written by the Indo-Kenyan Yash Ghai, who had earlier written the FLP's critique of the military's 1990 Constitution (Cottrell and Ghai 2003). Surprisingly, Rabuka himself wanted Ghai to chair the team, while other Fijians had suggested the name of Sir Ian Thomson, a long time colonial administrator. Sir Ian did not get the support of the Indian political leaders as they feared that his solid understanding of the Fijian language, institutions and culture might create partiality, thus compromising with Sir Paul Reeves. The final document, entitled 'Towards a United Future' appeared in 1996 (Reeves 1996), it was drafted by an overseas counsel and there was hardly an evidence of any Fijian input whatsoever. This was completely unsurprising as the written submissions by the Fijians were very poorly articulated, perhaps because they lacked the resources of the Indians in crafting documents that captured their real objectives in a compatible language with acceptable constitutional expressions.

Despite noticeable opposition from the Fijians led by Rabuka and the outright rejection by eight of the country's 14 provinces, the report formed the basis of a new constitution that came into effect in July 1997 (Fraenkel 2002). This new constitution

had introduced some major and controversial changes to the electoral system. The number of parliamentary seats had been increased from 70 to 71, of which 23 were reserved for the Fijians, 19 for the Indians, one for the Rotumans, three for others and 25 seats were left for open election without any ethnic criteria (Norton 2000). But still the most controversial change was the application of the 'Alternative Vote' electoral system, whose main global application was to elect members of the Australian Lower House. In the general elections of 1999, the first under the new constitution, the Fijian Labour Party assisted by the Australian Labour Party were able to use this system to their own advantage by winning 52% of the seats despite polling only 32% of the overall vote and a mere 1.9% of the Fijian communal vote, making it the most unrepresentative election result in the country's history (Fraenkel 2000).

The Fijian Labour Party's victory was however a short one. Mahendra Chaudhry's aggressive and confrontational style of leadership and his plans to establish a Land Use Commission generated a widespread Fijian protest (Tarte 2000). On 19 May 2000, George Speight and an armed gang seized the parliament and held Chaudhry and his cabinet as hostages (Alley 2000). Speight had hoped to use the popular Fijian animosity towards Chaudhry to achieve acceptance and validation of his coup but the reverse essentially transpired (Lal 2000). Grassroots Fijians hijacked Speight's coup to express their own frustrations over what was happening to their country, regarding Chaudhry and the 1997 Constitution.

Speight's revolt was short lived and somewhat complex as it was a civilian insurgency and not a military coup. Yet, while he was held up with his hostages, the Army took control and ended the crisis by agreeing to extend an amnesty to Speight provided he released all the hostages and returned all the arms (Davis 2005). It was again the Army that eventually arrested Speight and his co-conspirators after they reportedly failed to return all the weapons. However, to implement its own emergency powers, the Army annulled the 1997 Constitution and established an Interim Civilian Government (IG) led by Interim Prime Minister Laisenia Qarase, who formed a completely Fijian government (Alley 2000). As for Speight himself, in February 2002 he was convicted of perfidy and sentenced to death. However, the President, Ratu Josefa Iloilo accepted the advice of the Commission on the Prerogative of Mercy and immediately commuted the sentence to life imprisonment (Emde 2005). But, despite

ending up in jail, many of Speight's claimed objectives relating to the reclaiming of the Fijian control over their country were in fact met.

The prime goal of the interim government was to achieve stability by balancing the Fijian fears of losing control of their own country. To achieve this, the interim Prime Minister Laisenia Qarase desired to introduce much more aggressive affirmative action programmes for the Fijians which would be designed to bridge the representation gap in business and education and also had a plan to again rewrite the constitution. However, the ability of the Interim Government to implement its plans were annihilated as Chaudhry, first went to India and then to other overseas countries to press for the imposition of sanctions to help restore his government. Later, Chandrika Prasad, a farmer, backed by the FLP and human rights lawyers from Britain and Australia, launched a lawsuit against the government alleging that the abrogation of the 1997 Constitution and the post-coup ethnic violence where his house and livelihood were destroyed, was a violation of his fundamental human right to equality, as enshrined in the 1997 Constitution, and that no administration had the legal power to take this away from him. Prasad's case reached the Fiji Court of Appeal where five expatriate judges ruled in his favour, stating that the 1997 Constitution had not been properly abrogated by the Army, and that it therefore remained the supreme law of the land. Thus declaring the Interim Civilian Government an illegal one (*Republic of Fiji and Attorney General v. Prasad* 2001).

On 14 March 2001 the President, allegedly acting under Section 109(1) of the now restored 1997 Constitution, dismissed Chaudhry as the Prime Minister with immediate effect. A caretaker Prime Minister in Ratu Tevita Momoedonu was then sworn in who in no time dissolved the parliament and set an election for September 2001, and then immediately resigned. The President, under the provision of Section 109(2) reappointed Laisenia Qarase as caretaker Prime Minister until the general elections which was eventually won by a new political party, the SDL. The SDL which was initially formed by the province of Naitasiri quickly developed into a national party and invited the IG ministers to join them including Qarase who became its leader. However, to actually form a government the SDL had to enter into a coalition with the nationalist CAMV party which included many of Speight's

supporters and Speight himself. With the help of the CAMV, the election elevated Qarase from a caretaker to the official Prime Minister of Fiji. .

An Evaluation of the Fijian Fears

Among the academics of Fiji's Indian and expatriate communities and to an extent amongst some Fijians themselves, little efforts are spared in endeavouring to deconstruct and diminish Fijian fears. This endeavour can be put across in two ways. The first line of attack involves the pushing of a class based view of the country's troubles, a view that conveniently exculpates its proponents from addressing the more uncomfortable and cantankerous issue of ethnic solidarity, while passing the blame for the conflict completely on to the Fijian shoulders alone. Thus, as Teaiwa puts it, Fijian nationalism and the associated conflict between the Fijians and the Indians cannot be the source of the country's difficulties because a Fijian nation does not exist and has never existed. The country's issues are intra-Fijian, starting from the clash between the chiefs and the commoners, the emergence of the Fijian middle class and Fijian intellectuals demanding a place at the decision making table, all set in a context of intense provincial rivalry and splits within the Fijian army (Teaiwa 2000).

Similarly, Brij Lal argued that race had been portrayed in the media and popular commentary was the main issue behind the turbulence. Race is an issue, but there is more to it than what meets the eye (Lal 2000). In the same manner a fact finding mission of the European Union was totally convinced of these positions that it was able to conclude, that inter-ethnic conflict has not been the main driving force, in fact it constituted a convenient masquerade and an outlet for smouldering tension and power struggles among the indigenous (ethnic) Fijians'' (Retiere and Schurmann-Zeggel 2002).

One of the major justifications for downplaying the ethnic roots of conflict is the apparent lack of routine communal violence. From this, and from the public decorum normally displayed in civic engagement between the races, deductions are made that Fijians have no reservations over the demographic transformation of their country (Ewins 1998). While it is completely true that issues relating to class, educational levels, the crumbling of the traditional authority and status, provincial loyalties,

economic inequalities, and urban dissatisfaction are all important in Fiji, but believing them to trump ethnicity as the prime source of conflict is questionable for several reasons.

First, this thinking ignores the global empirical evidence that significant ethnic division leads to ethnic conflict in all societies, and that the more a society is divided ethnically the more political and other conflicts become channelled along ethnic lines (Vanhanen 1999).

Second, the relative absence of ethnic violence has a clear alternative explanation. The Indian population is peaceful and to date has not had a violent reaction to any Fijian provocation, something that would accelerate a backlash and further ratchet up tensions. Moreover, the Fijians too are very peaceful, accommodating and hospitable even when provoked. Complementing this has been the quality of the Fijian leadership which has always successfully attenuated the simmering tensions. Similarly, the social control exercised by traditional village and extended family hierarchies, and the fact that the majority of the Army is Fijian, have likewise contained the reactions to events that might otherwise trigger violence.

Third, Indian commentators frequently overemphasize the nature and significance of intra-Fijian conflict, perhaps because the promotion of such division would serve the strategic political objectives of weakening and disintegrating the opposition (Scarr 1988).

Fourth, if the root cause of Fiji's instability is perceived to be an intra-Fijian conflict, then the solution is far easier to implement and far more attractive for the concerned liberals to accept than the solution to ethnic conflict. The solution to the intra-Fijian conflict simply involves inculcating into Fijians the nonpareil virtues of multiculturalism, pluralism, individual human rights and democracy. However, if the root cause is ethnic conflict between the indigenous and the immigrants, not only is the accommodation on both sides required but more precarious issues arise, such as, cultural imperialism, the philosophical enigma of whether a community has the right to defend and promote its collective interests in the one and only spot on the planet

where that is possible, and the role of the colonial power in not just the creation of the conflict but also in its solution.

For all these reasons, the class based intra-Fijian view of conflict has been described as a victory of ideology over history (Scarr 1988).

The second line of attack on the Fijian fears of losing their country involves arguing that the actual basis of such fears is misplaced. Rather it is the product of ignorance because of the inbuilt constitutional protections of the Fijian indigenous rights, land, culture and interests, and of the control exerted by the Fijian army and civil service.

With respect first to land, while Fiji's various constitutions have all affirmed native title, it has not invested native owners with the acumen actually needed to exercise the rights that are normally understood to flow from ownership. Thus, from 1940, native owners have not been able to decide when, how or even if their land should be leased, and neither have they had any control over the rents at which their lands were to be leased (Kurer 2001). The reason for this is that the presence of the NLTB, and the landlord and tenant legislation under which the NLTB was forced to operate and thus removing this right from the owners. Under these constraints, therefore, the constitutional affirmation of native title has related simply to nominal not actual ownership.

Concerning the protection of cultural and indigenous rights in the Chandrika Prasad case, the London based Australian lawyer Geoffrey Robertson had told Fiji's Court of Appeal that the country's 1997 Constitution was one of the finest in the world in safeguarding the indigenous rights (Pacific Nius Media Release, 21 February 2001). The indigenous rights to which he referred related to relic communities interacting with the dominant settler group. In such cases it is without a doubt true that Fiji's constitutional recognition of the native land and even having Fijian as an official language alongside English and Hindi, looks good. However the problem with this was the implication that what was appropriate for the Fijians was simply those forms of 'protection' that looked good to the overpowered, the dispossessed, the remnant indigenous communities of the world (Davis 2005). Unfortunately this is hardly enough to invest the Fijians today with the sense of nationhood that they desired.

Again the decisive issue is that the Fijians simply do not want just to be equal to the Indians, what they want is the country they had discovered and had occupied for over 3000 years to reflect primarily themselves and not the Subcontinent.

Finally, while it is all too easy for the advocates of the Indian interests or the casual Western observer to conclude that the institutions of the law and constitution will properly safeguard Fijian interests, whereas the actual experience of the Fijians shows a different story. As the late Ratu Mara, the country's first Prime Minister and an individual whose experience and commitment to multiracialism are recognized by all Fiji's communities, puts it, "The Fijians now realize that through Western values they have been swamped and economically subjugated by a migrant race who were brought over by an alien race for their sole economic benefit. All the highlights of Western democratic values, like, freedom of speech, association, religion etc. exacerbate the inferior position of the Fijian people in their own country. The Western media ridicule our leaders, insult, vilify and do violence to all Fijian customs and traditions. (Mara 1997: 203)

An Evaluation of the Indian Concerns

The Indians have the tendency to see themselves as victims and thus have been motivated by the need to establish a political system that ensures they are never again second class citizens. While the experience of indenture was clearly traumatic and humiliating, and while, through being abject to British imperial and Australian capitalist control, they were second-class citizens, a comparison which is in some ways misleading. After all, the contemporaneous experience and hardships of the British working classes in the factories and the mines would not be completely dissimilar to that of Indian workers in Fiji. And while indenture may have equated to hardship and humiliation for the Indian, for the Fijian it meant permanent transformation and the permanent abatement of their place in their own country. Further, the Indians had the opportunity to return to India at the end of their contracts of indenture but only a few went for this opportunity. Thus while not underplaying the very real suffering caused by indenture, that system nevertheless offered an escape from the grinding and unrelenting poverty of India. Colonialism and its legacy, in

addition to creating hardship and embarrassment also brought with it various benefits and opportunities for the Indian people of Fiji.

The limited freehold land obviously lessened the possibilities of purchasing it and passing it on in the family but against this the benefits of being able to lease land at rates that are among the lowest in the world must be weighed. Similarly, while affirmative action can be ethnically restrictive and coercive of meritocracy, it starts out from a base of manifest under-representation and is aimed simply at closing gaps, at moving towards equal participation in education, the professions and business (Davis 2005). Thus, in the same way the Fijians nationalistic fears can be reduced by evaluating the appearance of each in isolation, the Indians projection of victimization, when broken down, while no doubt having much objective truth, is nothing but the product of clear exaggeration. While the propensity for exaggeration is well understood within Fiji (Ravuvu 1991: 94), Western media and advocates of human rights regularly and uncritically confuse the exaggeration with the actual substance (Spickard 2001).

If the concept of victimization at least admits of some debate, the question arises of why it has been such a dominant theme. The answer is simple as its promotion serves to create a politically valuable sympathy in the West, and a feeling of guilt amongst the majority, moderate Fijian population. After its coups, the West has been way too quick to apply sanctions against Fiji, either by expelling it from the Commonwealth or by cutting off their aid. Similarly the constant domestic projection of being the victim and the selective use of international constitutional comparisons, served to create in the Fijians the feelings that any assertion of Fijian pride or nationalism must be anti Indian, unchristian and possibly criminal. No wonder that the Fijians are labouring under an 'indigenous identity crisis' (The Fiji Sun, 5 October 2004).

Despite arguing that the victim thesis has been exaggerated and cultivated for political purposes, there is an additional dimension that is not simply fully legitimate but is surprisingly understated. This relates to not being accepted as part of Fiji and being treated as visitors rather than the native sons, and to the associated debate over what the Indian community should do to address their desire to belong, to be accepted and to overcome the repulsive force of Fijian nationalism. While colonialism in part

contributed to this through the separation of the races, in perhaps larger measure the problem is one of the Indians own makings.

As Bhat puts it, “Indian Diaspora has distinction of resisting assimilative efforts by their host societies and they maintain and promote the Indianness with great care, with a very few exceptions” (Bhat 2002).

Similarly Amaraiya Naidu, former Fijian Ambassador to the UN, in a presentation to the 1999 Global People of Indian Origin Conference argued, “there is no substitute, as we migrate out of India for education and preservation of our identity” (GOPIO, 1999).

The problem here is that, in the context of a small nation, the active promotion of the culture of one billion people serves to crowd out indigenous space and identity. Further, there comes a point where the deliberate maintenance and promotion of ‘Indianness’, the lack of assimilation and the unwillingness to see the relevance of the Fijian traditions and protocols crosses the line between pride in one’s heritage and outright racism. In turn this leads not only to the very repulsive force that impedes the acceptance of Fiji’s Indian community, it creates a more aggressive backlash under which the natural Fijian feelings of cultural pride become transformed into an ugly, inward looking ethnic nationalism.

Within Fiji’s Indian community, the contradiction between the promotion of Indianness and becoming an accepted part of Fiji and the South Pacific is creating its own strains. While many admit in private the need for a greater degree of assimilation, only a handful will publicly pronounce it. An exception is the constitutional and human rights lawyer Imrana Jalal, who has acknowledged the need for her people to change, to show more commitment to the country, to learn and appreciate the Fijian culture and language, to recognize their own racism, and increasingly to see themselves as Fijian rather than Indian. Such views, however, were treated with outrage by many in the Indian community, who labelled her a traitor to her own people (Davis 2005). Fortunately, others who have a broader and a more open perspective are finally recognizing the need to make common cause with Fijians using Fijian protocols (Pacific Islands Report, 17 November 2003). So while it is a

doubtless truth that the Indians of Fiji are victims of history, in no small measure they are also victims of themselves.

CHAPTER 3
ROLE OF MILITARY IN THE VARIOUS 'COUPS'
IN FIJI

ROLE OF MILITARY IN THE VARIOUS ‘COUPS’ IN FIJI

The Fijian Military

Since its commencement in the 1870s the Fiji military has been confronted with a number of dilemmas which have shaped its own image and consciousness about itself. The first dilemma was the image on the one hand as a respected institution with a credible international reputation as a peacekeeping force, and on another hand was the perception that, through coups, it had become an instrument of internal repression. The second dilemma was based on the contradiction between the military being seen as a supporter of ingenious ethno-nationalism on one hand and its declaration that it tries to promote multiculturalism. These dilemmas posed difficulties for the military since independence because it had to operate within the framework of two inimical principles. Firstly was the philosophy of liberal democracy and associated principle of civic accountability and secondly was the notion of primordial ethnic and communal loyalty. While the military saw itself as an independent praetorian institution along the lines of the liberal democratic state system, it also saw itself as a guardian of the indigenous Fijian establishment (Sandy 1989).

The ambiguity between the role of the military as a national security institution and as an ethnically aligned organization created considerable dilemma even before 1987. For instance, in 1920 troops were deployed to suppress a strike by Indo-Fijian farmers against the poor working conditions and the rising food prices, and a year later in 1921 about 300 indigenous Fijian policemen were deployed to stop a strike by the Indo-Fijian cane farmers (Gillion 1962). The same happened in 1943 and 1960 when the indigenous Fijian troops were deployed to contain strikes by the Indo-Fijian cane farmers. The largely indigenous Fijian Special Constables were also used during the 1959 oil workers' strike and the 1968 cane strikes as a means of sorting out industrial unrest on behalf of capital, colonial state and Fijian chiefly interests (Hempenstall and Rutherford 1984; Sutherland 1993). After the Indian dominated National Federation Party (NFP) won the 1977 election, there were rumours of a military take-over to avoid the formation of an Indo-Fijian government but perhaps this was avoided when

the Governor General, himself an indigenous Fijian, appointed an indigenous Fijian government under Ratu Sir Kamisese Mara, the first prime minister, to rule Fiji (Mara 1997).

On 14 May 1987, the very first coup of the Fijian history was led by Lieutenant Colonel Sitiveni Rabuka as the military displaced the newly elected NFP and Labour Party Coalition government led by Dr Timoci Bavadra (Lal 2006). This victory of the multiracial but predominantly an Indo-Fijian Coalition threatened the indigenous Fijians dominated Alliance Party hegemony, which was under the leadership of Prime Minister Ratu Sir Kamisese Mara, who had been in power since Fiji's independence in 1970 (Robertson 1998). This started a nationwide ethno-nationalist protest, spurred on by the nationalist agitators. The military, which constituted of more than 90% indigenous Fijians, intervened on behalf of indigenous ethno-nationalism and took control of the government and the state institutions with the aim of returning the state control to indigenous Fijian elites. But an attempt to form a government of national unity by Bavadra and Mara, under the Deuba Accord on 23 September 1987 threatened to undermine the ethno-nationalist agenda and this forced the military to stage the second coup and recover the lost ground (Ratuva 2011: 102-106).

The first coup was against the government but the second one was more thorough and involved the crippling of the entire state machinery and total control of the state power by the military (Scarr 1988). The head of state in the form of the governor general was suspended, the constitution and the legal symbol of state sovereignty was abrogated. Rabuka declared himself as the military dictator and Fiji was declared as a republic and a new constitution which guaranteed indigenous Fijian political hegemony was promulgated. This guaranteed the creation of what Weiner referred to as an 'ethnocratic state', the control of state power and use of state institutions to serve the interests of an ethnic group (Weiner 1987). The second coup was meant to reinforce the first one when it appeared that achieving an ethnocratic state was being thwarted by a plan for the two relatively 'moderate' indigenous Fijian leaders (Mara and Bavadra) to share power (Lawson 1992).

Nevertheless, the military over the years, especially from the 1990s onwards, went through institutional and ideological transformation which drastically altered its

ethno-nationalist image and ideology, a dramatic change from the original pro-indigenous stance. The military redefined its role and in the process discarded its old ethno-nationalist image and embraced and exerted a new multiethnic one (Ratuva 2007). Loyalty to Fiji's multi-ethnic community rather than to indigenous institutions became the new norm and this caused a considerable amount of discomfort amongst the traditionalists within the Fijian political establishment, including the largely Fijian Methodist Church.

A final dilemma that needs to be mentioned here is the way in which the Fijian military interprets and applies its official guiding principles as a security institution. For instance, The Fiji Defence White Paper of 1997 broadly defines security as 'essentially a state in which a nation is free to pursue its policies with the reasonable expectation that it will remain free from international interference and domestic disturbance'. The six Key Defence Policy Objectives (KDPOs) are listed as protecting Fiji's sovereignty, independence and interest, overall security of the country, well-being of the people, contribution to international peace and security, credible integrated peace and security, maintaining strategic alliances (Government of Fiji 1997). The Republic of Fiji Military Forces Act provides for the role of the Fijian military as the 'defence of Fiji, the maintenance of order' and other duties, which may from time to time be determined by the minister and the ministerial power has been amended to deal primarily with essential services (Government of Fiji 1985).

However, the problem here is that instead of using them as guidelines for national security, the military has used these as an excuse for political interference and regime change. This has been one of the major problems which has haunted Fiji's political establishment over the years. That is, how to keep the military within the defined boundaries of its official responsibilities under control and supervision by a civilian state without overstepping its mark and becoming an autonomous power within itself.

The Coup of May 2000

In May 1999, Col. Rabuka's coalition government was defeated by an alliance of Indo-Fijian parties led by Mahendra Chaudhry, who became the first Indo-Fijian Prime Minister of Fiji. During his tenure a huge alarm was caused by his

government's hints or plans at land reforms. This led to a civilian coup, headed by George Speight, a businessman who was adversely affected following the cancellation of several major contracts by the government. On May 19, 2000, Speight entered the parliament building and took hostage of Prime Minister Mahendra Chaudhry and most of his cabinet, along with the parliamentarians for 56 days (Lal 2000). The standoff was dragged on around eight weeks, during which Mahendra Chaudhry had been removed from his office by the president Ratu Sir Kamisese Mara on the grounds of his inability to govern the nation. The Fijian military took over the control of the nation started negotiations with Speight. After weeks of negotiations, both the military and Speight reached an agreement but later arrested Speight as he had violated the terms of the agreement.

On May 29, 2000, President Ratu Sir Kamisese Mara resigned from the post of the President under unclear circumstances as it was reported that he was being pressurised to abrogate the 1997 constitution by a delegation comprising of Commodore Bainimarama, the Police Commissioner, the chairman of the Great Council of Chiefs and the former Prime Minister Sitiveni Rabuka. Ratu Sir Kamisese Mara refused to accept the demands of the delegation and thus immediately resigned from the post of the President.

After the military takeover of Fiji, Commodore Josaia Voreqe (Frank) Bainimarama declared the martial law in the country and formed an interim government headed by Bainimarama himself. On July 13, 2000, he transferred the powers to an interim administration headed by Ratu Joseph Iloilo as the President of Fiji. Laisenia Qarase, a former banker, was appointed as the interim Prime Minister and the head of the interim civilian government by the military and the Great Council of Chiefs. After several appeals in the court against the coup and the interim civilian government, in early 2000, the 1997 constitution was restored by court orders and this led to the general elections of 2001, which ironically was won by Laisenia Qarase and thus he became the official Prime Minister of Fiji (Emde 2005)

Reasons for the success of the Coup

Fiji's coup of 2000 was a perplexed affair which involved a civilian revolt by hard-line Fijian nationalists against the elected government of Prime Minister Mahendra Chaudhry on May 19, 2000, an attempt by President Ratu Sir Kamisese Mara to assert his executive authority on 27 May, followed by his surprising resignation (possibly forced) on 29 May (Finin and Smith 2001). It was supported by a very multifarious group of individuals, all having diverse reasons of their own. According to Ratu Sir Kamisese Mara, who was the President of Fiji during the coup of 2000 and later resigned to the mounting pressure on him to abrogate the 1997 constitution, former Prime Minister Sitiveni Rabuka, the Police Chief and the Counter Revolutionary Warfare Unit of the Army were behind the coup. It has also been alleged that the Methodist Church too had a huge support towards the 2000 coup.

Mahendra Chaudhry has always supported the view that the ethnic nationalism was only a mask to gain the support of the nationalistic Fijians and that the true purpose was to loot the treasury. He has alleged in court papers and on his party website that some of those who helped to finance and support certain aspects of the coup, like the mutiny that took place at the Sukunaivalu Barracks at Labasa on July 7, 2000, were in fact Indo-Fijians (Kaul 2000).

George Speight's claim to be a Fijian nationalist and a champion of indigenous rights attracted the support from the hardliners of the ethnic Fijians who had been angered by the results of the 1999 general elections, which made Mahendra Chaudhry the first Indo-Fijian Prime minister of the country. Despite the constitutional guarantees of ethnic Fijian land ownership, hints that the Chaudhry government might institute some form of land reform also generated a huge amount of disgust among the large sections of the indigenous population,. Speight thus found a sizeable number of sympathizers and seized the moment by launching his revolt on May 19, 2000.

A close inspection of Speight and his supporters' activities shows that the call for ethnic nationalism was a political ploy to attract the supporters for a personal hold of money and power. During the 1990's, Speight had build up a modestly successful marketing business. The new government had revoked many contracts under the

charges of corruption and two of such marketing firms involving the country's lucrative timber trade were chaired by Speight. By the time of the coup, this act of the government had led Speight and many of his co-conspirators to bankruptcy. Many argue that the main reason behind the coup was to loot the treasury. After the rebellion was over, Ratu Isireli Vuibau, the deposed Assistant Minister for Fijian Affairs, declared on August 31, 2000 that many of those involved with Speight were Fijian politicians who were investor's in Speight's Timber Resource Management Limited Company, which had interests in pine, mahogany and hardwood. According to him, these politicians had joined Speight's revolt against the government when all their proposals were rejected. He also added that the indigenous Fijians were used but little did they know that the coup was for a little group here and abroad (Kaur 2000).

On April 29, 2001 former President Ratu Sir Kamisese Mara, who had resigned following the coup, publically accused the Police Commissioner and former Prime Minister Sitiveni Rabuka of instigating the coup. In an interview with the Fijian Television, he claimed that Speight was only a pawn in the game and that within half an hour of Speight's forcible occupation of the Parliament, Col. Rabuka had telephoned him to offer him to form the government (Singh 2001). He also mentioned that the Counter Revolutionary Warfare Unit of the Army was also involved in the coup as they took George Speight to the Parliament and supplied them with weapons, blankets and food. Sir Kamisese Mara also added that the Counter Revolutionary Warfare officers who joined Speight's coup had been training on a farm owned by former Prime Minister Col. Sitiveni Rabuka.

The Coup of December 2006

The democratically elected new government led by Prime Minister Laisenia Qarase began to take actions which provoked the displeasure of the military. He wanted to assert his supremacy and keep the military limited to the barracks, and made several attempts to promote and equip the Police force as opposed to the military as an institution for maintenance of peace and security. The mellifluous relationship between the military and the government post the coup of 2000 had a short life till 2003, after which it became worse and reached a point of impasse by December 2005 (Lal 2007). Throughout 2005, Commodore Bainimarama and other military officers

had made critical remarks on certain government policies, such as the early release of persons implicated in the coup of 2000 and the government's promotion of controversial legislation to establish a Commission with the power to grant amnesty to the transgressors of the coup.

Three contentious bills remained the centre of dispute, namely were the Reconciliation, Tolerance and Unity (RTU) Bill, the Qoliqoli Bill and the Land Tribunal Bill (Davis 2005). The military's condemnation of the government was built around two of these controversial bills, which it had sought to bring before parliament. The first was the promotion of the Reconciliation, Tolerance and Unity Bill, which according to the government was intended to heal the wounds of the past resulting from the events of 2000. Its aim was to promote "tolerance and genuine unity" among the people. The bill had promised that those who had suffered "gross violations of human rights and civil dignity" would receive reparations but the provision of the Bill that the military as well as the civil society opposed was "the granting of amnesty to persons who made full disclosures of all facts relevant to acts associated with a political, as opposed to purely criminal, objective during the crisis" (Lal 2007).

The amnesty provision came to be viewed as a device to pardon the coup perpetrators. The hasty release from jail of those convicted of various coup related crimes increased the public's suspicion about the government's real intentions. It was also argued that the bill's amnesty provision was in fact intended to avoid the judiciary. Sustained pressure on the government made it withdraw the bill, promising to take account of the concerns that had been raised. It finally dropped the provision and Qarase briefly reclaimed some of the ground he had lost to Commodore Bainimarama. However the concession came too late as by then the military had already decided to overthrow the government.

The other piece of legislation that the military opposed was the Qoliqoli Bill (2005) designed to transfer "all proprietary rights to and interests in qoliqoli (foreshore) areas within Fiji fisheries waters and vest them in the qoliqoli owners" (Lal 2007), as a consequence the marine area from the foreshore to the high water mark would be declared 'native reserves', for the unfettered use and enjoyment of the resource

owners. The tourism industry reacted predictably with outrage, and the others argued that the state was hastily divesting itself of a major resource, which it should develop for the benefit of the entire nation, including the resource owners.

A public debate on these two controversial bills secured wide opposition support for Commodore Bainimarama, who was perceived as an honest man taking on a corrupt and self-serving government playing to the basest sentiments of people in a blatant effort to remain in power. The Commodore's strictures became harsher, less compromising. Early in 2006 relations between the government and the military reached breaking point. The army staged a show of strength on the day parliament was dissolved in March, with 500 soldiers in full battle gear marching through the streets of Suva. The army's point was blunt: those who contemplated orchestrating violence to oppose a change of government would bear the full brunt of its force. Bainimarama said publicly a few months before the election that a change of government would be good for Fiji. In the public eye he was aligned with the opposition parties. As the campaign began in early 2006 the army sent teams of officers to Fijian villages to 'educate' the people about what it deemed to be the 'real' intentions behind the government's legislative agenda—to secure Fijian votes by plundering the public purse. A nebulous truce between the army and the government was negotiated by Vice President Ratu Joni Madraiwiwi in mid-January 2006, according to which both men agreed to put 'the national interest' above everything else and to have regular consultation and dialogue, but the impression remained of simmering tension. A few months later the deal collapsed (Ratava 2011: 112-116).

For its part the government insisted that the army was simply an "instrument of the state", not an institution outside or above it. Qarase alleged further that Bainimarama had breached the understanding brokered by Vice President Madraiwiwi on 16 January 2006. Under that agreement Bainimarama "would not make public statements without clearing them first with the Prime Minister" (Lal 2007). Qarase claimed that the military was "being used or influenced by unscrupulous people opposed to certain items of legislation introduced by the Government", and suggested that the Commodore was "being manipulated by those with a certain political agenda" (Lal 2007). There is no doubt that Qarase had in mind the tourism industry, which was vehemently opposed to the Qoliqoli Bill.

On September 22, 2006, Commodore Bainimarama attacked the government policies claiming that the government leniency towards the perpetrators of the 2000 coup had created a culture of disrespect for the law (Ratuva 2011: 112-116). He attributed the increasing incidents of rape, homicide and desecration of Hindu temples to this culture and criticized the Methodist Church of Fiji and Rotuma for supporting the government.

Prime Minister Qarase challenged these accusations and announced his intentions to refer the matter to the Supreme Court for a judgement on the proper role of the military. On September 25, 2006, Major Neumi Leweni, the military spokesman said that the government's proposed court action was a threat to the action, and that the military was united in its resolve to prosecute persons implicated in the 2000 coup and in its opposition to legislation proposing amnesty for such offenders. He also reiterated the opposition of the military to the 'Qoliqoli Bill', which proposed to hand control of seabed resources to ethnic Fijians. He called on the Qarase government to resign on October 6, 2006, on the grounds that the government had lost all semblances of credibility, integrity and honesty and that the country was sinking into an economic and financial abyss (Lal 2008).

On October 16, 2006, Bainimarama issued a three week ultimatum for the government to meet nine demands or resign. These nine demands mainly centred around the proponents of the 2000 coup who were being brought to justice; withdrawal of any political machinations which would potentially further the economic inequality on the grounds of race; denial of intervention by foreign authority; dropping of the court proceedings regarding the military's statements from earlier in the year and the formal addressing of the concerns about the government spending and the internal governance (Lal and Pretes 2008). On October 31, 2006, the military staged exercises around Suva.

Meanwhile, Prime Minister Qarase and President Iloilo attempted to fire Bainimarama, who was in Iraq inspecting Fijian peacekeeping troops, but their nominee for his replacement declined the position. ABC News in Australia reported that Prime Minister Qarase told President Iloilo that the government would step down if Bainimarama was not removed from his post (ABC News 2006). Bainimarama

responded to this by repeating his call for the government to meet his demands or step down. On November 4, Qarase accepted to one demand of the military and suspended the amnesty provision for the leaders of the 2000 coup from the RTU Bill and further stated that they would investigate further whether the provisions were unconstitutional. This was the only concession made to the military's demands.

The crisis came to a head when, on November 26, 2006, during a private trip to New Zealand, Bainimarama called up 1,000 reserve troops to the Fijian army and reiterated his intention to topple the Fijian government. This came shortly after the police had revealed that he would soon be charged with sedition. Assessing the situation, Prime Minister Qarase flew to New Zealand on November 28 for a meeting with Bainimarama which lasted for two hours but ended without a resolution being reached. However on November 30, Qarase partially conceded to some of the demands by agreeing to suspend the three bills mentioned amongst the demands and would drop them completely if a review found them unconstitutional; he recognised that the 2000 coup had been illegal; he agreed to accept the decision by the Director of Public Prosecutions to not lay sedition charges against military leaders and also agreed to review the position of the Police Commissioner Huges (Lal 2008). Bainimarama rejected this compromise and reiterated his ultimatum that Qarase must accept all demands by December 1, 2006, which was then deferred to December 4, 2006 or be overthrown by the military.

On December 4, the military had set up strategic road blocks, made public demonstrations of their presence and seized weapons from the opposite factions which included the police. The following day, many key government ministers and chief executives were placed under house arrest. After meeting with Commodore Bainimarama on the same morning, President Iloilo signed a legal order which dissolved the Parliament by citing the doctrine of necessity and paved the way for the formation of an interim administration. However in a subsequent press release, President Iloilo said that he had not endorsed the coup and that its perpetrators were acting against his orders.

On December 6, Commodore Bainimarama assumed the post of the President and announced that the military had taken over the control of the government as the

executive authority in the running of the country. In a speech to the media, he explained the rationale for the coup by accusing Qarase of corruption and of having inflamed tensions between the ethnic communities through diverse and controversial policies (Lal and Pretes 2008). He dismissed a number of high officials and public servants including President Ratu Josefa Iloilo, Vice President Ratu Joni Madraiwiwi and the Police Commissioner Hughes.

The new Interim Government

On December 5, Jona Senilagakali, a 77 year old military doctor was sworn in as the caretaker Prime Minister and he promised that the next general elections would take place within the next couple of years. Commodore Bainimarama said that he would remain the President for a few days till the Great Council of Chiefs would reappoint President Iloilo who would then have the authority to form the interim government. The Great Council of Chiefs responded to this by cancelling their planned meeting. On December 14, Bainimarama declared that his interim government could rule for the next 50 years if the GCC continued to hold off the appointment of a new President. The Great council of Chiefs met in the third week of December and proposed the formation of an interim government representing all the major political and social factions on Fiji, but this was rejected by the military and on December 27 that the Great Council of Chiefs would be banned from holding any meeting without the approval of the military, until further notice (Chandrasekharan 2007).

On January 4, 2007, Bainimarama restored Ratu Josefa Iloilo as the President who in turn endorsed the actions of the military. The following day, Iloilo formally appointed Bainimarama as the interim Prime Minister and indicated that the military was still effectively in control of the country. Over the next few weeks, Bainimarama formed an interim government which included the likes of former Prime Minister Mahendra Chaudhry and the former Republic of Fiji Military heads Epeli Ganilau and Epeli Nailatikau. On January 15, 2007, President Iloilo decreed amnesty Bainimarama, the Republic of Fiji Military Forces and to all those involved in the coup from December 5, 2006 to January 5, 2007, and also claimed to ratify all the actions of Bainimarama and the Military (Fiji Government Information 2009).

Abrogation of the 1997 Constitution

The 1997 Constitution was a product of widespread consultation among the people of Fiji, but despite a number of indigenous Fijians expressing their objections to the proposed constitution, the Joint Parliamentary Select Committee on Constitution established by former Prime Minister Sitiveni Rabuka achieved a historic consensus, and on 28 July 1998 the new 1997 Constitution came into effect (Lal, 1998). The constitution was a fairly bold one for Fiji, which does not have a history of interethnic collaboration. Among other things the constitution required parties with 10% or more of the total seats in parliament to be included in a multiparty cabinet. The electoral system was changed from the 'first past the post' system to alternative vote, which was to 'promote majority victors and to encourage interethnic accommodation' (Reilly 2007: 62). However, evidence from the 1999, 2000 and 2006 Fiji elections showed that 'the majority of transfers of preference votes in Fiji flowed from the more moderate or centrist parties towards the more extremist organisations' (Fraenkel 2004: 126) as interethnic moderation, envisaged by the Constitution Review Commission, did not materialise, leading to the failure of the multiparty cabinet and the collapse of the mid-1990s 'constitutional engineering project' (Fraenkel 2007: 441).

This resulted in the military intervention once again in the Fijian politics in December 2006 and ousted the democratically elected government of Laisenia Qarase from power. The military justified its action on grounds that it had acted to stop corruption and wanted to end the ongoing divisive 'ethnic politics' that posed a threat to the national security, and similar to the 1987 and 2000 coups, on 19 January 2007 the President of Fiji 'granted immunity to all those who participated in the Bainimarama coup' (Robie 2008: 220). However, unlike the previous coups, the military remained rhetorically committed to the 1997 Constitution, despite suspending fundamental rights of political dissidents, including those of the deposed Prime Minister Laisenia Qarase, who challenged the military takeover in the Fiji High Court.

On 9 October 2008, the Fiji Court upheld the unconstitutional actions of the military and the President in a judgment that attracted widespread commentary from constitutional experts. George Williams (2008) argued that the authority of power validated by the judgment was inconsistent with the constitution and as a consequence

could not be applied. Furthermore, Williams stated that the judgment promoted a cycle of coups, defied the political reality of the nation and above all undermined the rule of law (Williams 2008). Similarly, Anthony Regan observed that ‘the judgment in *Qarase v Bainimarama* vested the President of Fiji with almost unlimited powers to take over government at his discretion, and to then take whatever action he or she believed was needed, with no form of review or accountability possible’ (Regan 2008: 17).

Qarase and his legal team appealed the judgment in the Fiji Court of Appeal, and on April 9, 2009 Justices Randall Powell, Ian Lloyd and Francis Douglas declared the assumption of executive authority and the declaration of state of emergency. They also viewed the dismissal of Prime Minister Laisenia Qarase, the dissolution of the Parliament, the appointment of the interim government on 5 January 2007, and the Fiji Military Government Decree of 16 January 2007 as unlawful under the 1997 Constitution. According to Anne Towmey, the judges returned to the 1997 Constitution and interpreted that the constitution excluded any additional reserve power to the President to dismiss a Prime Minister and was silent on the existence of any other circumstances in which dismissal could occur (Towmey 2009: 319). As a compromise, the court decided that the only course of action was to hold general elections.

Immediately after the ruling, the state lawyers notified the court that they would appeal the decision but the pending hearing wanted a stay on the judgment. This request was refused by the court to the disappointment of the Fiji government, which met to consider the details of the judgment and were of the view that the country was left without an ‘effective government’, and that there was a lack of clarity by the court on the powers of the President under the 1997 Constitution and those involved in the 2006 coup could be tried and convicted for treason. In a televised address to the nation on 10 April 2009, the President of Fiji abrogated the 1997 Constitution (Craddock 2009).

A Coup different from the Fijian Coup Culture

As earlier mentioned, on December 5, 2006, the Fijian army under the leadership of Commodore Bainimarama staged the third coup of the nation. In contrast to the previous two coups of 1987 and 2000, the 2006 coup was the result of a political conflict between two ethnic Fijian leaders, Bainimarama and Qarase over the issues of corruption, bad governance and three potentially disruptive pieces of legislation.

The fault line between the indigenous and the Indo-Fijians, which has defined the politics of Fiji for the last generation, was much less evident in the 2006 coup. The major players on both sides were ethnic Fijians. The Indo-Fijian led parties appeared divided in their response towards the coup, as on one hand the Fiji Labour Party came close to endorsing the military coup and its chief for the Indo-Fijian vote, and on the other the National Federation Party condemned it. Unlike the 2000 coup, which was marked by looting, burning of business and violent conduct all around, the coup of 2006 was its opposite with no significant protests or violent behaviour being reported. The Great Council of Chiefs which had supported the 1987 and the 2000 coups did not support the coup of 2006 and termed it illegal with the support of several key Fijian bodies, and on December 7 called upon the soldiers to “leave the barracks and return to their home” (Fraenkel 2009). The Methodist Church of Fiji and Rotuma also did not support the coup and were very harsh in their views regarding the situation.

The previous coups of 1987 and 2000 overthrew the multi-racial governments which were dominated by the Indo-Fijians and reinstated the power of the ethnic Fijians, while promoting chauvinism against the Indo-Fijian population to get the support of the non-aristocratic Fijians. However, the coup of 2006 overthrew Qarase’s right wing SDL party and formed an interim government which included members of the Fijian Labour Party, including Mahendra Chaudhry. On October 9, 2008, the High Court ruled the appointment of Bainimarama as the Prime Minister of Fiji to be lawful. Commodore Frank Bainimarama received unexpected support from the Fiji Human Rights Commission (FHRC) and its chairwoman Dr. Shaista Shameen, as they both agreed on the views regarding Prime Minister Qarase’s allegedly racist and divisive policies (Ratuva 2011).

Reasons for the 2006 Coup

The Coup of December 2007 occurred as a continuation of the pressure which had been building since the military unrest of the 2000 Fijian coup and the Fijian political crisis of 2005-06. From 2001 to 2004, Prime Minister Iloilo Qarase, whose coalition dominated by his Soqosoqo Duavata ni Lewenivanua (SDL) had narrowly won the 2001 elections, refused to include any member of the Fijian Labour Party in his cabinet. He also avoided the implementation several subsequent Supreme Court verdicts which had ordered him to do so by appealing against each successive verdict, until the Labour Party itself announced in late 2004 that it was no longer interested in joining the cabinet.

Bainimarama's stated reasons for the coup were his fight against the corruption and bureaucracy. He also repeated the cause of bridging and widening the racial gap between the ethnic Fijians and the Indo-Fijians which had been created by the discriminatory policies of the Qarase government against the Indo-Fijians. He stressed for the common national belonging of Fiji's citizens to be above any other form ethnic self identification. In a report in the Fiji Times in September 2007, which writes about Bainimarama addressing the UN General Assembly in September 2007, he stated that, "In 1970, Fiji started its journey as a young nation on a rather shaky foundation, with a race based Constitution, one which rigidly compartmentalised our communities. The democracy which came to be practiced in Fiji was marked by divisive, adversarial, inward looking and race based politics. Of the two major communities, indigenous Fijians were installed with the fear of dominance and dispossession by the Indo-Fijians, and they desired protection of their status as the indigenous people. Indo-Fijians on the other hand felt alienated and marginalised as second class citizens in their own country, the country of their birth" (Fiji Times 29 September 2007).

Commodore Bainimarama also stated that necessary legal changes and electoral reforms would be ensured on a "one citizen, one vote" system with no ethnic differentiation. This was to be achieved through the People's Charter for Change, Peace and Progress, the aim of which would be to rebuild Fiji into a non racial, culturally vibrant and united, well governed and a truly democratic nation that seeks

progress and prosperity through merit based equality of opportunity and peace (BBC News 5 December 2007).

The coup of 2006 has also been described as a coup of the radicals amongst the westernised elite, who sought to superimpose a national consensus upon a divided social order; a coup of utopians seeking to transcend, rather than mould the social forces that they deemed responsible for long run ethnic disquiet and poor governance (Fraenkel and Firth 2009). Hamish McDonald, interviewing Commodore Bainimarama for the Sydney Morning Herald, described the coup as “a revolution against the country’s chiefly and church establishment. He quoted Bainimarama’s criticism of the chiefly provincial councils, for allegedly dictating to indigenous citizens whom they should vote for and of the Methodist Church for encouraging indigenous hatred against the Indo-Fijians (Sydney Morning Herald, October 2007).

Impact and Implications

After the Coup of 2006 and the abrogation of the 1997 constitution on April 10, 2009 many chief executive officers and political appointees of statutory bodies were sacked, and the senior military officers were appointed to the police and prison services. Civil liberties remain precariously intact under the ever-vigilant eye of the military, although the abuse of human rights had begun to surface in the country (Fraenkel 2011). Travel bans on those involved in the coup were imposed by Australia, New Zealand and the European Union, and sanctions and cancellation of defence and sporting events were also enforced, while the Commonwealth of Nations suspended Fiji’s membership from its foreign ministers meeting (Rahman and Singh 2011). The economy has suffered from a decline in the tourist sector and the country’s sugar industry which was already under considerable pressure from the projected cessation of preferential access to the European Union has also deteriorate further.

On the political front the frantic relationship between the army and the Great Council of Chiefs is not something that would have been predicted. In the past the GCC, as the umbrella body of the ethnic Fijians, exercised great moral and legal authority over the affairs of the indigenous community. It had endorsed the coups of 1987 and, less overtly, of 2000. Now, fractured and hobbled and ineffectively led, it has become a

frustrated observer in a saga involving the ethnic Fijians. The ethnic Fijians are divided and the GCC is unable to provide its orthodox leadership. There is discontent in the vanua, the land, about the military and its dismissive attitude towards the chiefly body (Fraenkel 2011).

The rift and division along provincial and regional lines in the indigenous community, which has surfaced openly since the coup of 2000 and was highlighted by the departure of the supreme chiefs of 'mana' and authority who were able to provide overarching leadership to their people, are a cause for serious concern. Compared with the other coups, there is currently a great danger of the crumbling of the moral authority of the basic ethnic Fijian institutions. There were many Fijians who thought that the military, the Great Council of Chiefs and other elected leaders did not act in their best interests (Alley 2010). The question then arises is that which institution can now claim to represent all ethnic Fijians? The military for one is not the answer as Bainimarama has talked about his desire of bridging the gap between the ethnic Fijians and the Indo-Fijians.

Unlike the coups of 1987 and 2000, neither race nor the protection of indigenous rights was an issue in 2006. This coup was widely looked at as a tussle for power between the Fijian military and the Fijian government. As a result, the kind of intense international agitation that accompanied the earlier crises largely at the command of the Indo-Fijian communities abroad had not happened after 2006 coup and there was a lesser sign of active or effective local protest as well. The reason behind this was that the issues were not starkly defined into racial or ethnic terms (Lal 2007). Many had supported Commodore Bainimarama's stated reasons for staging the coup of disencumbering the country of bad governance and corruption but disagreed with his method. More puzzling was the dormant reaction of the indigenous Fijians, the overwhelming majority of whom had supported Laisenia Qarase's party just a few months before the coup. One reason may be that their traditional institutions, the Great Council of Chiefs and the Methodist Church, had changed sides and now supported the coup, even if out of necessity rather than choice (Alley 2010).

Australia, New Zealand, the Pacific Islands Forum, the Commonwealth Secretariats and the United Nations Security Council had all given unequivocal support for the Qarase government. In their resolute commitment to the right of the democratically

elected government, they have allowed no understanding or sympathy for Bainimarama and others(Ramesh 2010: 495-500). The sharpness of New Zealand's reaction was probably because of its failed attempt to broker a peace between Qarase and Bainimarama, and to the feeling that Bainimarama acted in bad faith from the outset, having had no intention of engaging in a meaningful negotiation. Australia's displeasure probably arose from seeing its foreign policy initiatives in the region falter. Despite decades of benevolent engagement with the region through a series of bilateral and multilateral initiatives, Australia's reputation has been at its lowest in decades. However, there was no denying the genuine disappointment in both Wellington and Canberra at the overthrow of the democratically elected government in Fiji (Ramesh 2010: 495-500).

The reaction of the Melanesian Spearhead Group (MSG), comprising Papua New Guinea, Solomon Islands and Vanuatu, was opposite to the response of its bigger neighbours. At the meeting of its foreign ministers in Honiara on 12 January 2007 the Group declared that "the political situation in Fiji was an internal matter that can only be resolved by the people of Fiji using constitutional and democratic processes". The ministers were content with the assurance that "rule of law and human rights would be observed, and that a democratic government through the holding of a general election would be held within a reasonable time frame" (Lal 2011). The MSG's lack of sympathy for Qarase's government was surprising as, on October 30, 2005, the government of Papua New Guinea had awarded the then Fijian Prime Minister the 'Star of Melanesia' for bringing political stability to Fiji and for promoting business and commerce in the region. This reaction by the MSG's had put the Melanesian states at odds with the views of its larger neighbours Australia and New Zealand, and with international organizations such as the European Union, the Commonwealth Secretariat and the United Nations (Alley 2010).

In the Indo-Fijian community there had always been a significant lack of sympathy for the Qarase government, which came upon the back of George Speight's coup in 2000. Indo-Fijians were the victims of the Qarase government's many racially based ethnic Fijian policies in education, the civil service and in the public sector (Lal 2011). The government did not give the impression of being at all interested in the welfare of the non-Fijian community. What was on offer, was a dismal public

management record, a race-based resource allocation regime, continuing tolerance of public racial abuse of a community by colleagues, and a range of exclusionary policies (Fiji Times 22 December 2006). Many in the Qarase government supported the 2000 coup and even benefited from it. Their sudden conversion to democracy is therefore politically expedient and unconvincing.

For these reasons many Indo-Fijians, silently supported Bainimarama's so-called 'clean-up campaign'. But it would be wrong to suggest that Indo-Fijians, as a community, had rallied behind Commodore Bainimarama, though some nationalist Fijians had accused Indo-Fijians of providing the military with moral and even financial support (Alley 2010).

The effects of the 2006 coup was visible in Suva, whereas in the sugar cane belt of Western Viti Levu and in Vanua Levu, the impact was barely noticeable, beyond a few stray military checkpoints on the periphery of urban centres. In 1987 and, to a lesser extent in 2000, life in the Indo-Fijian areas was severely disrupted. In 1987 boycotts against the coup in the sugar industry affected the cane belt severely (Lal 1989), and in 2000 the Indo-Fijian areas on the Rewa delta were terrorized for food, forcing many to flee to refugee camps in Lautoka (Pangerl 2007). The 2006 coup has left a completely different impression. Incidents of violent crime and burglary in urban areas are noticeably down and people feel safer on the streets and in their homes. The military's determination to prevent a breakdown in law and order has had its impact, and is an important reason for gathering public support for it, although its concerted efforts to quell dissent had raised concern among the human rights activists. It had been asked whether removing Laisenia Qarase and Commodore Bainimarama from their respective offices would have helped resolve the impasse. Personality did play a part and Qarase was more accommodating and moderate in public, as he had to be, although his critics argued that he was dangerously deceptive, a reassuring face of Fijian nationalism, the very soul of sweet reasonableness (Lal 2007). Qarase was a self-professed Fijian nationalist who was not necessarily hostile to the other communities. Bainimarama, heading an almost exclusively Fijian institution, the military, is an avowed multi-racialist, although in television interviews he appears awkwardly assertive and authoritarian. His multi-racialism may be a legacy of his education at the elite multiracial Marist Brothers High School in Suva. But this crisis

goes beyond personalities. It is clear that the military now plays a more enlarged, permanent public role in Fiji. Its wish to not just remain simply an institution of the state but seek to play an important role in the affairs of the state has come true. Along with the parliament and (until recently) the Great Council of Chiefs, the military has become a major centre of power in Fiji and it is there to remain.

Could the crisis have been avoided? Bainimarama was adamant that he would proceed with his 'clean up' campaign whatever the cost, but he had stated his intention to take on the government almost three years ago before the coup. His intention to execute the coup was probably the longest to be announced in recent history. His methods differed from those employed by Sitiveni Rabuka in 1987. In 2006 Bainimarama deposed the government through 'death by haemorrhage' over a long period (Lal 2007). His demands were clear and his intentions were definite. He hoped that the unrelenting pressure would crack the government and force it to bow down to his demands. But the SDL government, encouraged by the overwhelming Fijian support in the May 2006 elections, and riding high on the wave of enthusiastic public support for the multiparty government concept, did not take the military's threat as seriously and as early as it could and should have. Indeed, for the most part, it was determined to stop Commodore Bainimarama, but clumsy efforts to have him sacked when he was out of the country and to reduce the military's budget fuelled the tensions. The government's attempt to foster dissent among the officer corps against Bainimarama also failed. To the contrary, its actions only strengthened the support for Bainimarama (Alley 2010). By the time the government realized the resoluteness of the military's position it was too late.

Since the 2006 Coup, Commodore Bainimarama has been trying to project himself as a charismatic messiah who will guide Fiji away from the path of corruption and bad governance, away from the era of racially polarised politics and towards a better future for all its citizens. However, without democracy it is likely that the country will suffer from an impasse of despair and disillusionment. The military has had a far greater and a far more visible public role in Fiji, thus it would be difficult to visualise that the fundamental principles of parliamentary democracy would be allowed to prevail. The growing external pressure has a great chance of pushing Commodore Bainimarama to restore parliamentary democracy of West-minister type, with all its

faults and flaws to return to Fiji, but now with corruption charges against both Laisenia Qarase and Mahendra Chaudhry, one wonders who will contest the elections when they take place. Bainimarama has claimed to bring back democracy to Fiji by 2014 and has started on the right path by lifting the martial law in Jan of 2012 (The International Herald Tribune, 2 July 2012). .

CHAPTER 4
ROLE OF REGIONAL POWERS TOWARDS
FIJI'S CRISIS

ROLE OF REGIONAL POWERS TOWARDS FIJI'S CRISIS

Politics and the economy of Fiji has always been greatly influenced by the regional powers. After the British left in 1970, Fiji has been highly integrated with the outside world. Australia and New Zealand , being the big brothers of the region , have a natural influence on Fiji due to their high trade relations. Many Australians ti recenterly have enjoyed high positions in police, judiciary and business in fiji. Australia accounts for nearly 35-40 percent of Fiji's trade, while New Zealand, the United States, the United Kingdom and Japan vary every year between 5 and 15 percent each (Sharma 1999).

Since independence, Fiji has been a leader in the South Pacific region by being hosts to the Secretariat of the Pacific Island Forum (PIF), as well as to a number of other regional organisations (Alley 2010). In 2002, Fiji hosted the African, Caribbean and Pacific (ACP) Summit where more than 80 countries were represented. In July of 2003, Fiji hosted the South Pacific Games, and event that went far beyond the athletics and symoblised the country's return to normalcy. Fiji also hosted the 51st Commonwealth Parliamentary Association Conference in the September of 2005 (Ramesh 2010).

On the other hand, Fiji has had its share of political problems aswell and has witnessed four major coups in a span of 20 years. The first two coups were held in 1987, followed by one in 2000 and the latest being the coup of 2006. All the coups have left an impression of political instability in Fiji to the outside world and has caused a great change in the relationship of Fiji with its regional powers and organisations. Australia and New Zealand are the two nations with maximum political influence in the region. Post the 1987 Coup, they took no action to intervene but established a policy of non recognition regarding the new government, suspending foreign aid in concert with the United States and the United Kingdom (Elek, Hill and Tabor 1993). However, after the coup of 2006, both the nations condemned the military takeover and imposed travel bans on members of the interim administration and their families and to all those who accepted appointments from it or were

identified as its supporters. The United Nations too, immediately denounced the coup and demanded the former government to be restored.

International Response to 2006 Coup and the Abrogation of the 1997 Constitution

There has been considerable international concern about the situation in Fiji and the active involvement by other governments to try and prevent a coup. Fiji has traditionally had a close relation with its major trading partners Australia and New Zealand. Currently, a number of countries including Australia, New Zealand and the United States had placed a targeted sanction on the government of Fiji (Lal 2007). The Australian and New Zealand government and media in particular had strongly condemned the coup. The United Kingdom, the United States and the United Nations had all expressed concern to the situation with Kofi Anan having made a public statement and personally speaking to both President Iloilo and Prime Minister Qarase. The United States suspended \$2.5 million in aid money pending a review of the situation. The Commonwealth suspended Fiji's membership on December 8, 2006 and the Secretary General Don McKinnon also stated that Bainimarama should resign and that the coup was a total violation of Commonwealth principles (Fraenkel 2007).

On December 10, the International Federation of Netball Associations announced that Fiji, which had been scheduled to host the 2007 World Netball Championships, had been stripped of its hosting rights as a direct result of the coup. This act led to the further deterioration of Fiji's image in the region and the world (Fraenkel 2007). The European Union had suspended about \$256 million in aid for economic restructuring and would not release it until Fiji returned to constitutional rule via a democratic election. The Asian Development Bank had identified substantial funds for urgently needed capital projects in Fiji but had to put the funds on hold because of the coup (Lal 2011).

Unlike Australia, New Zealand, the United Kingdom and the United States which declined to recognise the new government and imposed economic and political sanctions against Fiji, China had maintained a normal relation and the European Union chose to remain engaged with the administration to encourage a return of

democracy (Alley 2010). India on the other hand had been taking calculated steps of not interfering in a direct manner (Fogleman 2008).

Commodore Bainimarama had appealed to the international community to come to Fiji's aid by saying that by denying promised financial aid, the major western governments are inadvertently empowering the opposition without any assurance if achieving fundamental changes that will propel the nation of Fiji to peace and prosperity. He added that in the long run, it would be cheaper to assist the people of Fiji during this difficult period of transition rather than to see it descend into anarchy and conflagration. He also added that, "What is needed at this time is the economic support and a positive engagement of all the various parties involved to arrive at a national plebiscite on the future of Fiji" (Lal and Pretes 2008).

The military did not expect the kind of uproar it provoked among Fiji's neighbours and international trading partners when it executed the coup. After all, the rationale behind the coup for the military was good governance and the promotion of a corrupt free society. According to the military, they had not conducted a coup but had just started the cleaning up project, something that the aid agencies and the neighbouring countries had precisely wanted from the island governments all along (Alley 2010). The reaction, particularly from Australia and New Zealand but also from the United States and the European Union was sharp and palpable. Whether or not Australia and New Zealand could have done more to prevent the crisis remains an open question, though it is unlikely given Bainimarama's disposition. Nonetheless, an observer remarked that 'Canberra appeared more intent on stopping a military intervention than addressing the causes of the deepening volatility', with John Howard's repeated support for his Fijian counterpart giving no incentive for Qarase to modify his domestic agenda (Alley 2010). New Zealand's reaction was probably coloured by Bainimarama's renegeing on a truce it had broken between him and Laisenia Qarase in late November 2006 (Lal 2011).

Australia

As a response to the coup of 1987, Australia instituted an embargo of shipments to Fiji. As the deposed government in Fiji was a Labor government, it drew certain extra

solidarity from the Labor government in Australia (Kaul 1993). As Australia was Fiji's largest foreign trading partner, this resulted in a large diminution in Fiji's international trade (Elek, Hill and Tabor 1993).

During the political crisis preceding the 2006 coup, Australia moved three warships to waters near Fiji in case evacuation of foreign nationals becomes necessary after the December 2006 coup. Assessing the situation, Australia's Foreign Minister, Alexander Downer said that the military were "slowly trying to take control" in Fiji (Radio New Zealand International 20 May 2008). Commenting upon the Commodore Bainimarama's opposition to certain legislations he reiterated earlier warnings to Commodore Bainimarama on February 24, 2006, saying that the passage of legislation was not up to the Military. Supported by his New Zealand counterpart, Winston Peters, he warned that another coup would be devastating, not only for the Fijian economy but also for its international relationships. The Military responded by asking Downer to stay out of Fijian politics, saying that Australians could not know what it was like to live through a coup (Radio New Zealand International 20 May 2008).

Giving reasons for his Coup of 2006 and assuming the executive powers, Commodore Bainimarama cited the threat of an Australian invasion as a reason. He referred to the provoking and hostile remarks by Alex Downer, Australian Foreign Minister, as an unexplained presence of the Australian Defence Force helicopter near Fiji's EEZ and the frequent reference to the BIKATAWA agreement (Chanderasekharan 2007). He told that the consideration of foreign intervention was viewed to be a serious threat to sovereignty and independence it will always resist.

Australia's relations with Fiji have been strained due to Australia's condemnation of the military coup which overthrew the government of Prime Minister Laisenia Qarase in December 2006. Military leader and "interim Prime Minister" Voreqe Bainimarama had accused Australia of bullying Fiji by applying sanctions and insisting on a swift return to a democratic government. In March of 2008, the Fiji Human Rights Commission published a report which alleged that Australia might have been planning an armed intervention in Fiji in late 2006. Australian Foreign Minister Stephen Smith in an interview with ABC Radio Australia dismissed the allegations and stated; "The best thing that can happen to Fiji is not spurious

suggestions about Australian activity but having an election, returning Fiji to democracy, respecting human rights (ABC Radio Australia March 2008).

In response to the 2006 coup, travel restrictions were imposed by Australia on Bainimarama, his supporters and his families. These restrictions also applied to the members of the Interim Government, military officers and their families. The ban also included the rank and file members of the Fijian military forces but not their families (Alley 2010). The Defence cooperation and ministerial level contact with the Interim Government had been suspended. However, contact at official level continued to take place in order to pursue key interests (Ramesh 2010).

Australia has not withdrawn a significant portion of its aid programme in response to either the 2006 coup or the abrogation of the Constitution in April 2009. Although some existing and planned programs were suspended with immediate effect following the coup of December 2006, assistance has not been removed where removal would harm the people of Fiji. However, Australia's aid programme has been reoriented to help mitigate the impact of global economic crisis and the ongoing political instability. The aid programmes have aimed to ensure that essential services are maintained, particularly in health and education, enterprise development and financial inclusion programmes, and to assist the vulnerable groups. Australia continues to provide scholarships for study in Australia and the region.

On 4 November 2009, Australia and New Zealand responded to Fiji expelling diplomats from both those countries. Stephen Smith, Australian Foreign Minister, rejected any accusations of meddling in Fiji's affairs and said that he was "deeply disappointed" by Fiji's actions (BBC News, 4 November 2009). The then Prime Minister Kevin Rudd said that he would maintain his tough stance against Fiji in order to prevent a "coup culture" spreading around the Pacific.

New Zealand

On November 28, 2006, few days before the coup of December 2006, the New Zealand government had brought Prime Minister Qarase to New Zealand in order to negotiate with Commodore Bainimarama, at a meeting hosted by Winston Peters,

New Zealand's Minister of Foreign Affairs. After the meeting, no agreement could be reached and Commodore Bainimarama warned the New Zealand and Australian governments that any military intervention from them would be strongly repelled. In an article in the Fiji Sun on December 12, 2006, the New Zealand Minister of Foreign Affairs, Winston Peters described the crisis as a coup and a "creeping siege on democratic institutions" (Fiji Sun 12 December 2006).

New Zealand banned all ministerial level talks with Fiji and tightened the travel restrictions on military personnel and civil servants appointed by the interim administration. New Zealand also froze the new Recognised Seasonal Employer Scheme which would have provided Fiji workers with temporary visas to work in New Zealand. Along with these actions, New Zealand also cancelled the training of Fijian soldiers, stopped the new development assistance schemes and suspended the training programs for Fiji's public sector under the regional governance programs.

New Zealand's Prime Minister Helen Clark claimed the coup as unconstitutional and thus her government put a ban on the entry of those who took part in the coup and also cut the military ties, aid and sporting contracts with Fiji. New Zealand announced a comprehensive range of sanctions which included the restrictions on contact with the interim government and the military, travel bans, a reduction in sporting contracts and a refocusing of development assistance links. All these sanctions were reinforced following the expulsion of the New Zealand High Commissioner from Fiji in June of 2007 (Alley 2010). However, New Zealand did not impose any restrictions on trade, investment, tourism or business relations. They have continued the development assistance but with a focus on delivering through the non- governmental channels.

These two Pacific countries have always shared a cordial relation with each other as New Zealand has been a significant development aid and economic partner if Fiji. The relations soured following the December 2006 military coup as Helen Clark's government was one of the leading voices in condemning the coup. New Zealand has placed many sanctions on Fiji, reduced its aid and has continuously demanded that Bainimarama should allow the return of democracy in Fiji. Bainimarama on the other hand, has constantly accused the New Zealand government of bullying and ignoring his efforts in reforming his country and preparing it for democratic elections. He has asked the New Zealand government to be more sensitive about the issue and

understand the fundamentals and dynamics of Fiji's situation by being patient and not jumping into quick conclusions.

The expulsion of New Zealand's High Commissioner Michael Green in June of 2007, for allegedly interfering in Fiji's domestic affairs, led to the downfall in the bilateral relations between New Zealand and Fiji (Alley 2010). An article in *The Fiji Times* on June 15, 2007, talked about the New Zealand government's denial to the claims of interference in Fiji's domestic affairs by Michael Green (*The Fiji Times* 15 June 2007). In July of 2007, Mahendra Chaudhry, the new Finance Minister of Fiji accused New Zealand of being excessive in its hostility towards Bainimarama's government and also hinted at a shift in Fiji's new foreign policies towards Asia.

In June of 2008, Bainimarama accused the New Zealand and Australian governments of not genuinely trying to move Fiji forward. Prime Minister Helen Clark replied to this accusation of Bainimarama by saying that New Zealand will ease the sanctions on Fiji when the progress towards democracy in Fiji is apparent. In July of 2008, Winston Peters met with Commodore Bainimarama in Fiji for the first time after the December 2006 coup, in a meeting where Bainimarama raised the issue of New Zealand's sanctions to which Peters reaffirmed that the sanctions would remain until the New Zealand government saw clear signs of an election being prepared (Alley 2010). In September of 2008, Prime Minister Helen Clark said that the normalisation of New Zealand's relations with Fiji would not take place until a democratically elected government was not back in power in Fiji (Lal 2011).

On December 15, 2008 the New Zealand Government now under the leadership of John Key defied an ultimatum by Bainimarama threatening to expel New Zealand's acting High Commissioner unless a visa is granted to the son of Rupeni Nacewa, a secretary in the office of Fiji's president in Suva (*The New Zealand Herald*, 15 December 2008). On the same day, a TVNZ journalist was detained at Nadi International Airport and taken to a Fiji detention centre overnight before she was deported back to New Zealand on the morning of the 16th (*The New Zealand Herald*, 16 December 2008). Prime Minister John Key said that the treatment of the journalist was "unacceptable".

On December 23, 2008 Fiji followed through on its threat to expel New Zealand's high commissioner to the island nation, the expulsion came a day after Bainimarama

announced that he would not expel New Zealand's top diplomat because he wanted to improve his relationship with New Zealand. In retaliation to the expulsion John Key stated that there would be retaliatory action if its commissioner was expelled (The New Zealand Herald, 23 December 2008).

In January 2010, New Zealand Foreign Minister Murray McCully met Fiji's Foreign Minister Ratu Inoke Kubuabla in Nadi, and indicated that the two countries wished to improve their relations. The New Zealand government issued a press release stating that the two governments "agreed to an additional Counsellor position being established for Fiji in Wellington, and for New Zealand in Suva, with approval in principle for Deputy Head of Mission appointments in each capital to follow soon". New Zealand also specified that "the dialogue did not signal a change in Wellington's strong opposition to Fiji's military led administration nor would sanctions be eased as a result" (BBC, 12 January 2010).

Pacific Islands Forum

On 2 May 2009, Fiji was formally suspended from the Pacific Islands Forum. The suspension came following two years of tensions between Fiji and the Forum caused by the military coup of December 2006. Initially, the interim Prime Minister of Fiji, Commodore Frank Bainimarama, agreed to hold elections by March 2009, but changed his mind following pressure from Australia and New Zealand. At the Pacific Islands Forum Meeting in Tonga on 18 October 2007, Fiji's military commander and interim Prime Minister promised Forum leaders that he would hold free and fair elections in less than 18 months and clarified that he would not himself stand for elections. In response, Australia, New Zealand and the EU pledged to assist Fiji to draw up new electoral rolls (The Sydney Morning Herald, 18 October 2007). Despite this initial agreement, Commodore Bainimarama subsequently insisted on first implementing the Peoples' Charter for Change, which identified that 'Fiji had suffered from deep-rooted structural problems, a governance environment severely warped by the dominance of parochial ethnic politics with increasing incidence of corruption and lawlessness', and recommended as a result a non-ethnic political model. Fiji's regional neighbours, in particular Australia and New Zealand (McGraw 2009: 267–286), were concerned about Bainimarama's intentions and deeply worried

that the Fiji military wanted to implement extra-constitutional measures, which would allow continued military intervention in Fiji politics.

On 21 August 2008, a statement from the Pacific Islands Forum expressed serious concern at the failure by Fiji's interim government to attend the 2008 annual Pacific Islands Forum meeting and considered non-attendance as unacceptable; and further stated that the 'interim government should have attended to account to Forum leaders for the undertaking given at the 2007 Forum in Tonga to hold an election by March 2009, in accordance with Fiji's existing Constitution and electoral laws (39th Pacific Islands Forum Statement, 21 August 2008: 1) . In addition, the Forum condemned the statements by the interim government of Fiji in support of its nonattendance, acknowledged the importance of maintaining and encouraging continued pressure from the Forum and other members of the international community to meet the March 2009 deadline, and urged Fiji to demonstrate its good faith in maintaining a constructive relationship with the Forum by resuming participation in the Forum-led Working Group, which was established following the coup to facilitate a quick return to democracy with support from the Fiji government.

In January 2009, the interim Prime Minister of Fiji Commodore Frank Bainimarama once again did not attend the Pacific Islands Forum meeting in Papua New Guinea, and on 27 January the Pacific Islands Heads of State 'reaffirmed that there were long-term issues that needed to be addressed in Fiji through independent and inclusive political dialogue, but that such dialogues primarily had to be focused on the holding of elections. The Forum agreed to the collective commitment to the fundamental principles enshrined in the Biketawa Declaration of 2000 and to the imposition of 'targeted measures' of the Declaration in relation to Fiji to take effect unless the Fiji government nominated an election date by 1 May 2009 and agreed to general elections without condition by the end of December 2009 (Forum Communique, 27 January 2009).

On 28 January 2009, Bainimarama responded to the Pacific Island Forum ultimatum, warning the Pacific Island leaders not to 'hold their breath on elections this year'. In addition, Bainimarama insisted that there was a possibility of no election for five to

10 years, as he laid out his vision for the implementation of the Peoples' Charter. As a result, the Pacific Islands Forum suspended Fiji from the body on 2 May 2009 (ABC, 28 January 2009).

The Commonwealth of Nations

Fiji has a long and established relationship with the Commonwealth, but this relationship was fractured following the military coup in 1987 and the implementation of a racially weighted constitution in 1990 (Alley 1997: 247). However, with the successful implementation of the multiracial 1997 Constitution, Fiji was readmitted, and since then the Commonwealth has played a decisive role in the political affairs of the country, especially during the 2000 coup by actively participating in dialogue with the George Speight group in securing the release of the members of the Peoples' Coalition government. In December 2006, the Commonwealth again was forced to address the growing political instability in Fiji after the commander of the Fiji Military Forces ousted the Qarase government. In response, Fiji was suspended from the Commonwealth on 8 December 2006 for violating the Harare Principles set out in the Millbrook Action Plan.

In December 2008, the Commonwealth Ministerial Action Group (CMAG), comprising Ghana, Malaysia, Namibia, New Zealand, Papua New Guinea, Sri Lanka, St Lucia, Uganda and the United Kingdom, decided to review their stand on Fiji in 2009 and following increasing frustration with the lack of action on the part of the Fiji Government, the CMAG in July 2009 called on Fiji authorities to hold elections by October 2010, in line with the decision taken by the Pacific Islands Forum (PACNEWS 22 July 2009).

On 5 August 2009, the Fiji government agreed to engage with the Commonwealth. However, the Commonwealth envoy to Fiji, former Constitution Review Commissioner Sir Paul Reeves, said that there had been some confusion over who Commodore Frank Bainimarama expected on the mission and that any engagement with Fiji was too close to the 1 September 2009 deadline drawn up by the CMAG. Fiji academic Brij Lal commented that 'there was not a drop of hope that the country will go to the polls in 2010'. Steven Ratuva, an indigenous Fijian Political Sociologist,

opined that ‘Fiji was not scared of a repeat of the experience following the 1987 coup’. These sentiments clearly demonstrated that the Fiji government was not responsive to the concerns of either the Commonwealth or the Pacific Islands Forum (Australian Associated Press 26 August 2009).

In September 2009, despite Fiji’s formal suspension from the Commonwealth, a three-member Commonwealth delegation came to Fiji for a two-day meeting with the members of the Fiji government and the opposition, but the Commonwealth representative, Sir Paul Reeves, was barred from meeting with opponents of the government. The Commonwealth was clearly displeased with the behaviour of the Fiji government, and stated that ‘any future meaningful engagement with Fiji will only continue if it was inclusive of all sectors of Fiji’s political leadership’ (PACNEWS 20 September 2009).

In response to the suspension from the Commonwealth, Commodore Bainimarama argued that the suspension was the price the people of Fiji must pay for its reform of the country’s political system. However, Fiji is at a critical cross-road and political developments since 2006 indicate that the military is deeply entrenched at all levels of governance, while civil society and political parties, despite limited engagement via the Peoples’ Charter processes, remain effectively marginalised.

The European Union

On 11 December 2006 the EU condemned the military takeover in Fiji and argued that the military takeover that took place on 5 December 2006 constituted a violation of the essential elements listed in Article 9 of the Agreement. In response, the EU invited Fiji to consultations in order to examine the situation. The formal consultations between Fiji and the EU began in Brussels on 18 April 2007. The Fiji government made a submission dated 18 April 2007 on the reasons for the 2006 military takeover.

Following consultations with Fiji, the EU formed the view that general elections could be held within the agreed deadline of 28 February 2009. However, the EU was concerned about the lack of progress by the Fiji government on the process and the

substance of the commitments it had agreed to and adopted the following measures under Article 96(2)(c) of the revised Cotonou Agreement and Article 37 of the Development Cooperation Instrument, humanitarian aid as well as direct support to civil society would continue; cooperation activities, which would help the return to democracy and improve governance, may be pursued; implementation of the sugar reform accompanying measures for 2006 may proceed; the 2007 sugar allocation will be zero; the 2008 sugar allocation will become available, subject to evidence of credible and timely preparation of elections in accordance with the agreed commitments; and notably regarding census, redrafting of boundaries and electoral reform in accordance with the 1997 Constitution (Mahadevan 2010: 52–64). The EU expected Fiji to cooperate fully with the Pacific Islands Forum regarding the implementation of the recommendations by the Eminent Persons' Group, as endorsed by the Forum Foreign Ministers at their meeting in Vanuatu on 16 March 2007.

After the abrogation of the constitution, Louis Michel, the European Union Commissioner, criticised the actions of the Fiji government as unacceptable and warned that EU subsidies for Fiji's ailing sugar industry were in jeopardy (EU business 15 April 2009). Fiji had by April 2009 already lost out on 32m euro's allocated for the reforms of the sugar industry for 2008 and 2009 due to the 2006 coup and further commitment was contingent on Fiji showing progress on the revised Cotonou Agreement of 2007 (Asia Pulse 5 February 2010). Unfortunately, Fiji reneged on its 2007 promise to the EU by abrogating the constitution and imposing the controls on freedom of expression. In November 2009, the EU reiterated its concerns about continuing military rule and called on the Fiji government to restore democracy, human rights and the rule of law (Targeted News Service 10 November 2009).

The EU freeze on aid to the sugar sector has had a considerable impact on an industry that contributes 6% of the total gross domestic product and 25% of all export earnings (Reddy, 2007). The Fiji 2010 Supplementary Budget document showed that earnings in the sugar industry would decline from \$249m in 2009 to \$248m in 2010. According to Manasa Vaniqi, Fiji's Permanent Secretary to the Department of Provincial Development and Multiethnic Affairs, 'without EU subsidies the sugar

industry would collapse' (The Fiji Times 2 December 2009; The Sydney Morning Herald 2 December 2009).

The United States of America

Relations between the Qarase government and the United States were cordial until the coup of December 2006. Although the United States provides little direct bilateral development assistance, it contributes as a major member of a number of multilateral agencies such as the Asian Development Bank and the Secretariat of the Pacific Community. On March 2, 2005, Prime Minister Laisenia Qarase reacted strongly to the US State Department report criticizing Fiji for practicing racial discrimination and for the racial divide between Fiji's two main political parties, the SDL and the Fiji Labour Party. In an interview with the Fiji Times, America's outgoing Ambassador David Lyons renewed his country's criticism for amnesty for persons convicted of involvement in the 2000 coup. He concurred with statements made by a number of Fijian politicians, including the deposed Prime Minister Mahendra Chaudhry and Senator Adi Koila Nailatikau, that a coup culture had taken root in Fiji (Fiji Times 29 May 2005).

After the coup of 2006, the United States suspended \$2.5 million in aid money pending a review of the situation and has not recognised the interim government established post the coup. In May 2008, the United States embassy in Suva issued a statement which said that the United States continues to condemn the military coup and the Interim Government's actions to suppress the freedom of speech of those in the media. The US had reiterated that the suspension of certain US assistance to the Fiji government under section 508 of the Foreign Operations Appropriations Act will remain in place until the President or Secretary of State determines that Fiji has made a measurable progress towards the restoration of a democratic rule. Fiji has since then responded to its deteriorating relations with the United States and the Western countries by turning towards Asia as new political and economic partners.

India

Relations between Fiji and India date back to 1879 when Indian indentured labourers were sent to Fiji to work on sugarcane plantations and play a crucial role in the country's development. India's presence in Fiji commenced even before Fiji attained independence on 10 October, 1970. India had a Commissioner stationed in Fiji to look after the interests of the indentured migrants.

Even in the early stages, the importance of relations between Fiji and India was underscored with the High Level visits by Fiji's then Prime Minister and late President, Ratu Sir Kamisese Mara's visit to India in 1971 which was reciprocated by India's Prime Minister, the late Smt. Indira Gandhi, who visited Fiji in 1981. India was also a crucial ally for Fiji in its independence struggle and the two countries have been side-by-side in championing developing country issues. Fiji has greatly valued India's leadership and guidance in for such as G77 & NAM and more recently the WTO, where with India's help concerns of the developing countries were brought to the mainstream.

In 2002, as part of India's 'Look East' policy and further to India's dialogue partnership of the ASEAN, India successfully applied to become a dialogue partner of the Pacific Islands Forum (PIF), with the support of the Fiji Government. The dialogue partnership of PIF provides India and the Pacific Region a structured mechanism of interaction on issues of mutual importance.

Fiji's relationship with India is often seen against the backdrop of the tense relations between the ethnic Fijians and the Indo-Fijians. India has used its influence in the international forums such as the Commonwealth of Nations and the United Nations on behalf of the Indo-Fijians by Lobbying for sanctions against Fiji during the coups of 1987 and 2000 which saw the removal of the governments either dominated or led by the Indo-Fijians.

On August 15, 2005, Prime Minister Laisenia Qarase said that the Government of India had loaned F\$86 million for the upgrading of the Fijian sugar mills, which would be completed in time for the 2007-08 crushing season. This was done to enable

Fiji to diversify its sugar industry in bio fuels. India had also offered the technical expertise with the restructuring of the sugar industry.

Prime Minister Qarase, along with the Foreign Minister Kaliopate Tavola and 50 other businessmen, visited India for a one week state visit on October 8, 2005. During their visit, four agreements were signed of which the three year cooperation agreement was the most important. Agreement on health cooperation and tourism were also signed. Indian Prime Minister, Manmohan Singh urged Fiji to embrace multiculturalism as a permanent part of its identity. This visit was the first by any Fijian Prime Minister since Ratu Sir Kamisese Mara in 1971 (Chandrasekharan 2005).

India's first official statement concerning the 2006 coup, given by their spokesman for the Ministry of External Affairs, Navtej Sarna, succinctly expressed its sympathies in the time of instability for the citizens of Fiji by stating that, "We are saddened to learn about the turn of events in Fiji and hope that the rule of law will prevail and power will be returned to the people at the earliest... India greatly values its relations with Republic of Fiji Islands, a country with which we share historical and cultural links."

The Indian did not impose sanctions or take any other restrictive action against Fiji, a markedly different response than it had had to the past three coups. As this was the first coup not targeting the Indo-Fijian community, India had no reason to strongly condemn the military takeover. India's reaction would prove to be a blessing for the Fijian people because of the reaction of Fiji's most crucial neighbours, Australia and New Zealand. Both nations were quite displeased by the political upheaval and suspension of democracy yet again in Fiji, and their respective relationships with Fiji took a turn for the worse, leaving the Fijian economy and government in an even more precarious state of affairs. Soon after the coup Fiji began its "Look North" policy and began concentrating much of its foreign affairs on China and ironically India, instead of continuing to rely on Australia, New Zealand, and other Pacific Island nations. This was only partly by choice, faced with a failing economy and hostility from Australia and New Zealand, Commodore Bainimarama was forced to call upon other nations as trade partners.

Fiji is the most advanced of the Pacific Islands and desires to be on the forefront of world issues and trends; this includes turning to India and China for economic exchanges and other foreign affairs. Many people in Fiji are aware that their

government has implemented a “Look North” policy and can recognize the confidence in government and national financial security that this international strategy creates. The most recent coup provided an unlikely an opportunity for India to stick by the small country and show its allegiance to all the people of Fiji. India may have been condemned internationally for continuing to engage with the new regime, in 2006 and 2007, but Fiji responded by cogging up Indo-Fijian relations and making their interactions public, a milestone in Fijian governmental proceedings.

The four main areas of relations between the governments of Fiji and India are diplomatic and defence, trade relations, services agreements, and development assistance. Apart from that, the countries also interact quite a bit through the tourism industry and the world of academia. The Fijian government has worked with airlines serving Nadi International Airport, such as Qantas and Air New Zealand to expand their destinations and transport hubs in Southeast Asia in an attempt to lure more Indian tourists to Fiji as a popular location for holidays and vacations. The improvement in air connectivity from India to Fiji with better connections, reduced costs, and more travel packages being offered by travel agents such as SOTC has markedly increased Indian tourism in Fiji, improving both the Fijian economy and their foreign relations. The Indian Cultural Centre has arranged several scholarship programs for Fijian citizens of all ethnicities to study and travel in India, and there are a number of other independent programs that have similar goals of breaching the cultural divide through academia.

Today, approximately 37% of Fiji’s population is of Indian descent, while ethnic Fijians comprise around 57% of the population. For this reason, India is very sentimental toward its overseas descendants in Fiji. India continues to have relations with Fiji, the Pacific Island with which it has the strongest ties and, incidentally, the Pacific Island that has the largest number of inhabitants of Indian ethnicity. Recently, the establishment of a formal dialogue mechanism called the Fiji India Foreign Office Consultations (FOC), held annually, increased communication between the two countries and cemented their formal relationship for years to come. Ajay Singh, the former Indian High Commissioner to Fiji, said in May 2007 that after the 2006 coup, the Indian government had decided to pursue a policy of engagement with the military interim regime instead of isolating it. He explained that India would continue to pledge assistance and respect Fiji, regardless of the fact that it is a small and

vulnerable country. This is the logical response from India to ensure that the interim government remembers to respect the rights of its Indo-Fijian citizens if Fiji wants to continue receiving aid, military assistance, and IT developments from India.

China

The bilateral relations in the political and economic front between China and Fiji have significantly increased in the last decade. The coups have had little impact in the relation between the two countries. In May 2009, Commodore Bainimarama described Fiji's relationship with China as 'wonderful', while the Vice President Ratu Epeli Nailatikau it as one of its most important.

Under the governance of Prime Minister Laisenia Qarase, Fiji had come up with a new foreign policy of "look north", which meant strengthening its relations with Asia and China in particular. Qarase stated that Fiji should now look for new markets where there is flexibility of entry and a readiness to meet the export need of small and isolated island countries. This was the reason why Fiji wanted to engage with China as it was increasingly looking north for the answers to their trade and investment aspirations. The post 2006 coup government of Commodore Frank Bainimarama also continued on Qarase's look north policy, and in July 2007, Finance Minister Mahendra Chaudhry responded to the contrast between the Western criticism and the Chinese support for Bainimarama's government by saying that "Fiji has friends in China, it has a friend in Korea and it has friends in other Asian countries. Fiji is no longer relying on Australia and New Zealand, and in any event, the United States was not doing much for Fiji anyway" (Fiji Government 2007).

Following the military coup in Fiji in December 2006, China distanced itself from the Western nations which had condemned the Coup. A Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs statement stated, "China has always respected Fiji's status as an independent nation and have called on the other countries to do the same and reconsider their attitudes towards Fiji and the current situation in the country". In 2007, a China-Fiji Trade and Economic Commission was set up to enhance the economic relations between the two countries. An article in the Sydney Morning Herald, in May of 2008, stated that "China's aid to Fiji has skyrocketed since the coup in December 2006",

from 650,000 euro's to over 100 million euro's. The author of the article also commented that, "Just as Australia and other Western donors are trying to squeeze Fiji's rebel Government, China has dramatically stepped up its aid and effectively dissipated any pressure that the Western donors might have been generating". The author also suggested that China did not wish to risk antagonising Fiji and thus unwittingly push the Bainimarama government towards seeking aid from Taiwan.

In March 2008, following the unrest in Tibet, Fiji expressed its support for Chinese highhandedness in dealing with the rioting in Lhasa. In August, later that year, Commodore Bainimarama, while on a visit to China praised them for Showing better understanding and sensitive approach to events in Fiji. In February of 2009, at a time when Fiji faced pressure from the Pacific Islands Forum over its apparent lack of progress towards the restoration of democracy, the Chinese Vice President Xi Jinping paid a state visit to Fiji and met Prime Minister Bainimarama. During his visit, Xi stated that he wished to further enhance the Sino-Fiji exchanges and cooperation in various fields such as culture, education, public health and tourism. Xinhua reported that during Xi's visit, China and Fiji had signed a number of cooperative deals under which China would provide Fiji with economic and technical assistance. In May 2009, Prime Minister Bainimarama told Australian reported Graham Davis that unlike Australia and New Zealand, the Chinese authorities were very sympathetic in understanding the situation in Fiji and that, things from now on were to be done their way.

CHAPTER 5
CONCLUSION

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While assessing the conflicts that Fiji has witnessed in recent decades several substantive contributory conditions stand out. These are, the economic disparity between the native Fijians and the Indo-Fijians, particularly the underrepresentation of the native Fijians in business, higher education and the professions; the desire of the native Fijians for Fiji to remain a Fijian country; the fact that Fijian society and culture is small, weak and lacks the mass media resources the Indian and Western diasporas deploy to service the cultural and political needs of their settler communities in Fiji; the desire of Indians to be in every way equal and second to none; the desire of Indians to fit in and become an accepted part of Fiji.

The major reason behind these issues is the ethnic polarization created by British colonialism. For the native Fijians the importation of indentured labour caused their country to be transformed into a foreign land. And with two unassimilated cultures engaging in a cold war for the soul of the country, each pursuing their own communal interests, the concept of a nation and a national identity became meaningless. The result for the native Fijians was confusion, a lack of direction, relative economic stagnation and a profound sense of loss. For the Indo-Fijians the response has been their desire to overcome the subaltern status by investing in education, human and physical capital accumulation, political and legal activism, and maintaining their cultural identity (Davis 2005).

After the coups the sense of loss and resignation which for generations had weighed silently but heavily on the native Fijians became experienced by the Indo-Fijians too, who sought comfort in emigration. Further, ethnic diversity coupled with simmering resentment has led to a decline in community standards as social capital formation predictably declined (Costa and Khan 2003) and racism on both sides flourished. Of course other fault lines are also present in the Fijian society, as the concentration of decision making power is in the hands of people with ascribed rank and have thus alienated the commoners. Among the Indo-Fijians the degree, nature and the very necessity of any adaptation to Fiji and the Fijians is becoming an increasing issue. Yet when assessing solutions to these problems one must remember that the degree of

violence is remarkably low, less than the level expected given the country's degree of ethnic division (Vanhanen 1999).

At the same time several potential flashpoints are also evident or emerging. First is the strong reluctance of a large majority of native Fijians to accept an Indian Prime Minister, as for them the thought of being ruled by an Indian settler, unable to speak their language, with little understanding of Fijian society, as was the case with Mahendra Chaudhry, is virtually equal to an act of surrender. Unless an Indian leader emerges who can speak Fijian, who understands and relates to Fijians, it probably will never happen again.

Second is the virtual impossible task of legally altering the 1997 Constitution. The widespread opposition by the native Fijians to this constitution is the reality that change requires the consent of two-thirds of both houses of parliament and the Indo-Fijian politicians will never vote to change the document that gave them more than many even asked for. Thus with no alternatives left, extralegal means for change become all that is available.

The third flashpoint is that the ethnic competition and the fears can obstruct the implementation of policies that may benefit the nation as a whole. The inability of successive governments to reform the slowly dying sugar industry or solve the country's land problems, are great examples of this.

The fourth flashpoint is the increasing and inevitable dependence on free market capitalism, which will shift the engine of growth and the distribution of income towards those with the capital and skills required to take advantage of its opportunities. By virtue of the first mover advantages and better educational levels, it will likely be the Indo-Fijian community that benefits the most out of the two communities, thus further increasing relative economic inequalities. Yet, as the population distribution shifts further in favour of the native Fijians, the ordinary voters, and the politicians who mobilize them, have more power to express resentment at such inequalities. And, as has been the case in many developing countries with market dominant minorities, globalization and democracy have proved an explosive mixture (Chua 2003).

The main solution offered by Western and Indian commentators to both these never-ending problems and the more acute flashpoints, is for the native Fijians to appreciate the values of freedom, dignity, individual human rights, democracy and pluralism; all noble ideals that exceeds any group rights and the unsavoury nationalism they promote (Ravuvu 1991). This conflict brings in front of us the observation of that the political constitutions and political cultures of many countries, tragically, may not be flexible enough to easily accommodate the values of both liberty and belonging (Galipeau 1994). However, the desire to belong is common to both the native Fijians and the Indo-Fijians. Indeed, the expatriate Indo-Fijians in the West often greatly miss the Fijian culture and way of life, often organizing Fijian events, and frequently regret that they had not participated more in Fijian society when they had the chance. Perhaps here, then, we have the seeds of a solution. For the native Fijians, a less aggressive promotion of ethnic entitlements and greater commitment to, and support for, education and application is certainly needed. Among Indians, a less insistent demand for absolute 'equality' at all levels and a more welcoming embrace of the culture and values of the country their great grandparents freely chose to make their home are long overdue.

It is appreciated that many in the West will justly restraint at any suggestion that absolute equality should not be pursued at all costs. However, it should also be remembered that having a country whose values, icons, language, anthems, institutions, common law and culture are an affirmation of their own identity as a people, and within whose borders they are able to exercise self-determination, is not simply taken for granted in Western countries, it really is synonymous with their own conception of sovereignty, of independence. But the West has made this an impossible dream for Fijians. The colonial transplantation of an Indian society effectively robbed Fijians of the capacity to exercise the rights of nationhood to the degree that is so casually enjoyed in the West.

Finally, on a more positive note, securing a balance in which the political, social and 'national' environment are perceived by Fijians to be fully reflective and protective of their interests need not be incompatible with the progressive liberal values of pluralism and diversity. The historic generosity of the native Fijian people, both in

spirit and in their willingness to share their physical resources, is thus much more likely to be restored in a secure Fijian state than in the presence of the continuing ethnic competition that galvanizes the country's current 'cold war' environment.

As far as the military is concerned, the rapid involvement of the military in Fijian politics is a result of various factors. Many believe that the appeal for a Fijian nationalism is nothing but a political ploy to attract the supporters for their personal reasons of grabbing the control over money and power. If democracy is to be maintained, the political parties will have to broaden their perspectives both in membership and appeal. The judiciary has to be more proactive and similarly the regional powers and the international community will have to exert more pressure on the military government.

The military government has been in power since the coup of December 2006. In April 2009, Commodore Bainimarama abrogated the constitution and said that a better and more equitable constitution would be made for Fiji. On July 1, 2009, Bainimarama introduced the roadmap for Fiji where he said that the work on the new constitution would not start until 2012 and would be finished within a year ahead of the 2014 general elections. He has also promised revolutionary changes in the new constitution like common and equal citizenship, no ethnic based voting, a more accountable government with check and balance, reduction in the voting age from 21 to 18 and most importantly a review of the land ownership issue which can only be owned by the ethnic Fijians at the moment.. Contrary to this roadmap for a better Fiji, the military government continues to suppress the freedom of the media, civil organisations, church, etc. During the military regime, Fiji has become an international outcast. It has been suspended from the Commonwealth of Nations and also became the first country ever to be suspended from the Pacific Islands Forum.

While the military government has its flaws, one wonders that why have the democratically elected governments been unable to draw mass support from all the sections of the society. Why are the political establishments so divided amongst themselves that the opposition parties are ready to welcome a military coup as a price for toppling the elected government every time the coup has received support from some important ethnic political quarters.

The role of the Church is also an important area of observation. The Methodist Church has always been a major player in the Fijian politics, and its support in the coups of 1987 and 2000 was very crucial for the success of the coups. However the 2006 coup led by Commodore Bainimarama was opposed by the Church. Bainimarama challenged the role of the Methodist Church in his open condemnation for the Church statements against the Hindus and the Indo-Fijians. In a democratic society, the Church is expected to play an apolitical role by help reducing the racial gap in the country and promote secular and inter-religious harmony. The Methodist Church has done exactly the opposite of this by supporting the ethnic Fijians in all their acts. Similar to the Methodist Church, the Great Council of Chiefs also played a divisive role in the Fijian politics. It too supported the coups of 1987 and 2000 as they were for the benefit of the ethnic Fijians. The 2006 coup did not get the approval of the Great Council of Chiefs as it was against an ethnic Fijian led government. Col. Rabuka who was a permanent member of the 55 member GCC was accused by former President Mara for allowing the perpetrators of the 2000 coup to train in his farm.

The National Police Force and the Military are the two most important organs to have played a crucial role during the coups and its aftermath. The membership of the two forces is heavily in favour of the ethnic Fijians. The lack of Indo-Fijians in these forces is partially due to the low pay structure in them and partially due to the discrimination against the Indo-Fijians while getting promotions and key posts. However the racial composition of the armed forces has played an instrumental role in the success of the 1987 and 2006 coups. For future stability and for a neutral role by the military and the police, they should be heterogeneous in terms of racial composition and achieving this is not that difficult a proposition.

The National political parties also need to have a broad membership from all sections of the society and not just be racial based. The Alliance party or now the SLD represented the ethnic Fijian interest, the Fiji Labour Party (FLP) mostly represented the Indo-Fijians. While the consolidation of the vote bank is based upon racial lines, the political parties have encouraged and tried to bring in legislations to further strengthen their racial interest, while in power. The Qarase government brought in several legislations to further the interest of the ethnic Fijians, similarly the Mahendra

Chaudhry government hinted at land reforms and reviewing the land lease issue. The parties further showed their narrow mindedness by not accommodating members of the opposition party in their cabinet, which by the constitution is mandatory.

While Australia and New Zealand have condemned the military takeover on all occasions in Fiji, their role has been too little and untimely. They could have engaged more with the elected governments and made their policies less controversial and more broad-based to at least evade the military intervention of December 2006. India on the other hand has never played a very vocal or proactive role in supporting and protecting the Indo-Fijians. Some argue that India should have long back played a more aggressive and supportive role for the Indo-Fijians like the Chinese played for its Diaspora in South East Asia. This could have stopped the governments in Fiji from bringing in discriminatory policies against the Indo-Fijians. The role of China has been huge for the military government of Bainimarama. While most regional powerhouses have put sanctions on Fiji, China has shown great support by increasing its aid to Fiji. China is also insulating Fiji from the international criticisms and economic sanctions.

The year 2012 has shown a forward looking approach in the Fijian politics. On January 6, 2012 Bainimarama showed that Fiji is progressing in the correct way by removing the martial law. Commodore Bainimarama announced that the emergency laws, which were enacted after a decision to abrogate the Constitution led the courts to declare his government illegitimate, would end. He said that the emergency powers had given his government time to stabilize the country, which has been troubled by political and ethnic tensions for decades (New York Times, 2012). The governments of both Australia and New Zealand have cautiously welcomed the decision to lift the emergency regulations, although they said that any discussion of an end to sanctions or to the country's regional isolation would be contingent on measurable progress on human rights issues and the development of democracy (New York Times, 2012).

This study proves that Democracy in Fiji will succeed only if Fijian culture, custom and tradition are willing to reflect social change. Without this change it will be difficult for democracy to succeed in Fiji because the ethnic divide will always be an

issue and will be constantly mobilization by the politicians. To put an end to this and become a strong democratic nation, the Fijian culture, the Methodist Church and the tradition of an ethnic divide will all have to change.

This study also proves that the Military will play a significant role till there is a genuine reconciliation between the Indo-Fijians and the native Fijians. Commodore Bainimarama has a plan to make Fiji a democratic government and his plans include the closing of the gap between the native Fijians and the Indo-Fijians, as he also knows that without this happening, Fiji cannot become a fully democratic country as the ethnic politics will again take place in Fiji. If these two communities cannot reconcile with each other, it is likely that current military government will continue to run the country for as long as they want too.

Thus it would not be wrong to say that the qualities of democracy in Fiji are strongly influenced by ethnic divisions and indigenous sources of power and legitimacy in society. Periods of constitutional democracy interrupted by successive coups garnering conflicting support suggest that a more stable Fijian democracy requires a delicate balance of tribal, religious, ethnic and military interests. Successful democratic and governance reform requires the inclusive deliberation of all major groups in civil and political society and not merely one that purports to represent all. Only by improving these qualities of democracy in Fiji will Fijian politics emerge from its cycle of coups and offer a more stable form of government.

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