

The ethnic Conflict in Fiji : Domestic and International dimensions.

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DECLARATION

This is to certify that the dissertation entitled "THE ETHNIC CONFLICT IN FIJI: DOMESTIC AND INTERNATIONAL DIMENSIONS" submitted by Anoop Kumar in fulfilment of nine credits out of total requirements of twenty-four credits for the Degree of Master of Philosophy (M.Phil.) of the University is his original work according to the best of my knowledge and may be placed before the examiners for evaluation.

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PREFACE

PREFACE

The archipelago of Fiji, earlier known as 'pearl of the Pacific', had undergone a traumatic period of cataclysmic upheavals and strife since May 1987. The Fiji islands are part of the cluster of micro-states in the South - West Pacific. More famous for its idyllic tourist resorts and sea beaches, suddenly Fiji was thrown to international news headlines because of unprecedented political instability and racial conflict. The crisis in Fiji was precipitated by a bloodless military coup led by Lt. Col. Sitiveni Rabuka, a third ranking officer of 2600 strong Royal Fijian Military Force (RAFMF). This coup executed by Rabuka with the help of 10 masked men on May 14, 1987, deposed one month old coalition government of Fiji Labour Party and National Federation Party, headed by Dr. Timoci Bavadra. This coalition was voted to power on 12th April 1987 in the general elections, thus challenging the 17-year of power hegemony by a single party - the Alliance Party.

The military coup in Fiji was first military overthrow of a democratically elected popular government in whole South Pacific region. It added a new dimension of political vulnerability to South Pacific island micro-states, till now non-existent. Traditionally, the

(South Pacific region was regarded as relatively stable zone of Western influence having very less political - strategic significance. However, the South Pacific in early 1980s was emerging from political backwaters of international politics. Growing great power rivalries were threatening to convert the region into a new zone of conflict. The coup shocked the South Pacific region as well as democratic world, as political cultures of Pacific micro states were based on "Pacific way of life" giving very thin space to violent political turmoils. Fiji was supposed to be a model island micro-state in Third World - a developing, prospering, stable and go-ahead country. It was considered as a key to the preservation of stability in the region.

(The military coups and later developments had greatly jolted India, as these developments directly affected the ethnic Indian population, constituting 48.6% of total 7,15,000 population of Fiji. The avowed purpose of the coup was to deprive Indo-Fijians from a legitimate share in power and reduce them to second class citizens. Though bulk of the Indians are citizens of Fiji from generations, mostly being the descendants of indentured labours, a bogey of racial contempt and harassment had been launched against them. The Indians, brought into Fiji, by British imperial masters in later 19th and early

20th century for sugarcane plantations, had toiled to build up a strong Fiji, now are threatened to be thrust into dark uncertainties of future.

The military coup in Fiji had highlighted once again the fragile nature of small state security, both internal and external. How easily the democratic edifice in Fiji was dismantled, government and parliament was hijacked by handful of mercenaries led by not much senior officer of RFMF, is an eloquent testimony of vulnerable nature of political institutions and security apparatus of small states. The Fiji crisis also revealed the bitter truth that internal dissensions and conflicts could be cleverly manipulated by metropolitan powers and neo-imperialists, having vested interests and military-strategic stakes in given geo-political region. Fiji, thus joined some other third world countries, like Surinam, Guyana and Malaysia where ethnic tensions accompanied with external entanglements had led to military takeover.

The coup and hostilities created in post-coup period, had been a dangerous harbinger of violent and acrimonious ethnic conflicts. Ethnic divide in Fiji is not anything new, it is institutionalised by constitution and perpetuated in national politics. However, violent racial conflicts in Fiji were controlled by a paradoxical

mutual understanding for accommodation, conciliation and non-violent resolution of discords. Mutual fears of further conflagration and outside intervention also checked violent expressions of ethnic dissension,

Nevertheless, ethnicity is not the only important factor in Fiji crisis. The present Fijian quagmire can not be holistically explained in racial ethnic categories. By the simplistic variables of indigenous rights of natives, right to control political affairs of their own country, the Western analysts and journalists had exposed their bias and prejudice against Indians, giving a partial and lopsided picture of the problem. This is because perhaps race is most comfortable explanatory tool, it neither challenges nor questions the ideological foundations of such problem; and starts giving a rationale to statesquo.

The fact is that whole problem in Fiji started when a kind of multiracialism began to take roots in Fiji. It requires a serious investigative analysis that how in the name of paramountcy of Fijian interests, the feudal hierarchies in Fiji had maintained their hegemonic preponderance over power structures. When challenged by emerging new multiracial social classes in the form of defeat in April general elections, these elements had striken back. The military coup cut short

the genuine experience of multiracialism in Fiji and shattered the emerging new plural polity.

However, this is not to deny or reduce the importance of ethnic factor in Fiji, as an undercurrent of racial tension had been the fact of life in Fiji. This racial problem in Fiji was no doubt a legacy of British Colonialism, which has cleverly spunned and accentuated the ethnic problems in Fiji's national life. Only thing to be emphasized that the race can not be taken as singular explanatory tool. Other socio-economic complexities have to be analysed to avoid deliberate distortions of Western kind.

The Fiji crisis has intrinsic and generic linkages with the South Pacific geo-politics, that had played very important role in shaping the problem. The neocolonial policies of metropolitan and regional powers, clandestine destabilisation games by intelligents agencies, the nuclear geopolitics, scramble for fisheries and other ocean resources, all these factors had contributed directly or indirectly to recent developments in Fiji. This dimension needs a thorough empirical thrust.

The first chapter of this dissertation gives a general geographical and historical account of the Fiji archipelago.

The Second chapter gives an analytical detail of

background of military coups and throw light on post-coup developments in Fiji.

The third chapter is an attempt to analyse domestic factors of present Fijian dilemma. An essentially holistic framework of analysis has been adopted as any understanding of problem requires thorough study at multiple levels of enquiry.

The fourth chapter is a detailed study of geopolitical context of South Pacific region. The recent chain of developments which led to intensification of geopolitical rivalries in the region have been extensively discussed.

The fifth chapter is a search for linkage between South Pacific geopolitics and Fiji crisis. The international responses and role of non-domestic actors has also been discussed.

And lastly in the conclusion, the consequences of the coups have been discussed. Remedial measures and effective alternatives have been suggested so that Fiji may be helped to come out from the present dilemma.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

Writing an acknowledgement is a difficult exercise, mostly because of dearth of space and inadequacy of words. However, it is the only way in which I can record my sense of gratitude to numerous people, who in so many ways have helped me in the course of writing this dissertation.

Firstly, I would like to express sincere thanks to my supervisor Dr. K.S. Jawatkar, who has taken keen interest in my work and given me full liberties to come up with an analytical understanding of the problem. Prof. S.C. Gangal, the Centre Chairman of CIPOD, SIS, JNU, was also a perennial source of inspiration. He has been forthright and ever ready for frank and lively discussions on the topic. I am also deeply indebted to Prof. M.L. Sondhi, who has motivated me to study problem of this nature and has provided new methodological insights. The lectures and writings of Prof. K.P. Mishra, Prof. Anirudha Gupta and Prof. P.K. Das on this still not much explored area has been a constant source of information for my research work.

I owe a lot to my Indo-Fijian friend, Mr. Kamlesh Prakash, an ex-student of JNU whose first hand account along with profound appraisal of the problem has given me great support for writing this dissertation. His providing

of primary materials on this topic, otherwise not easily available in India has made a valuable contribution to my analysis.

My friends do not require any formal acknowledgment of thanks, as they have been always too selfless and spontaneous. Nevertheless I cannot resist to express cordial gratitudes to my friends e.g. Abhayankar, Binod, Samir, Sanjay Pandey, Naveen Babu, Titu, Indira, Sanjay Jain, Sahdevan, Rajat, Tridib, Rizwan, Ravindra, Raghuram and Samarjeet.

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CHAPTER-I

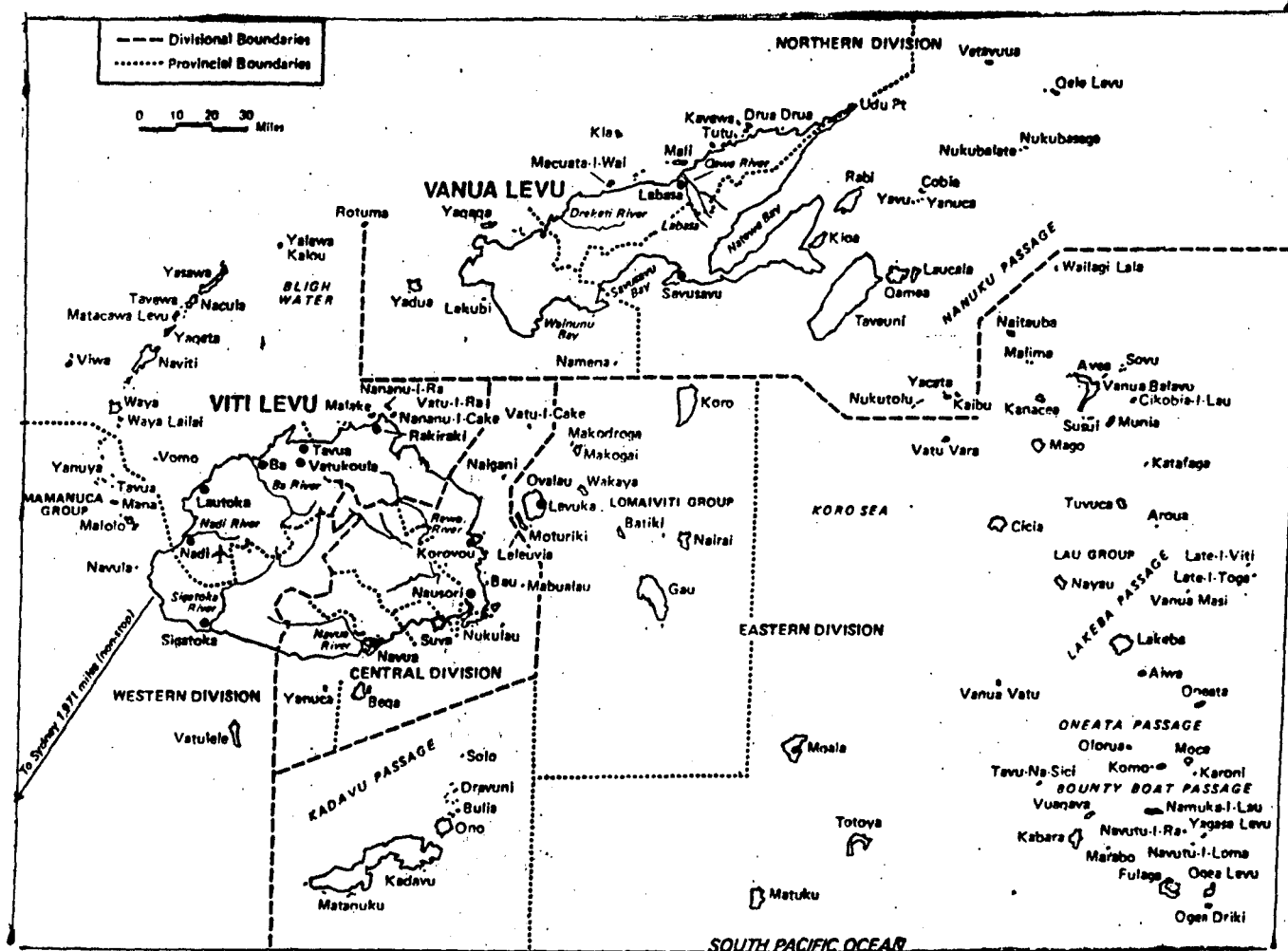
INTRODUCTION : A PROFILE AND HISTORICAL
OVERVIEW OF FIJI.

CHAPTER-I

INTRODUCTION : A PROFILE AND HISTORICAL OVERVIEW OF FIJI.

The Fiji archipelago consists of 322 islands, including volcanic islands, atolls, coral reefs and small islets, among which just about 100 are inhabited. The island group of Fiji is situated between 150° to 330° South latitude and 177° West to 175° East longitude in the South-West Pacific ocean and is surrounded by the Koro sea. It comprises four main islands, Viti Levu, Vanua Levu, Taveuni and Kodavu. Viti Levu is biggest island and together with Vanua Levu, account for 87% of the total 18,376 sq.kms of land area. Islands of Fiji vary largely in size ranging from 10,388 sq.kms of Viti Levu to small rocky atolls of only few sq.kms. The topograpny of Fiji islands also differs vastly as they comprise almost every type of oceanic islands; high mountains, towering volcanic platforms and low lying tiny coral islets.

For its geo-strategic significance in the South Pacific region, Fiji owes much to its geographical location. It's capital Suva is located 3160 kms north east from Sydney (Australia) and 2120 kms north of Auckland (New Zealand). The main islands of Fiji lie quite centrally amongst the relatively insular territories



Map I

Fiji : A Political map

of the South-West Pacific thus giving it a crossroad position in one of the most important trade routes of the world between two continents of North America and Oceania. The vitality of Fijian parts increased after the opening of Panama canal, after which ships from US and Canada as well as from Australia and New Zealand started using Fijian ports as ports of call, most important of them being Suva, Lautoka, Nadi and Nausori. As K.B. Cumberland put it :

"Since early in the period of European exploitation of Pacific island territories, Fiji has remained an important calling point for shipping, and a place at which goods were collected and transhipped. Its ports have been used as important ports of Shipcalls." (1)

The idyllic sceneries of islands, their palm-fringed tropical reefs and strands, and colour and life of Fiji's rural interiors has driven Fiji prominently into international tourist map. It is known as "little paradise of the Pacific." ^{of Fiji}

Traditional western geographers had divided Oceania into three regions :

- (i) Micronesia - the segment mostly north of the equator and west of international date line was described as Micronesia because it comprised mainly of tiny islands.

①

K.B. Cumberland, South West Pacific (London : 1968) pp. 335-336.

- (ii) Melanesia - the area south of the equator was designated Melanesia (originally Lemanesia) that means 'land of the black people'.
- (iii) Polynesia + Superimposed on these two regions was Polynesia with apex in Hawaii at the tropic of Cancer Extending in the South West to Maoris of New Zealand below the tropic of Capricorn.

However, this trifurcation of Oceania and Australasia does not hold much rationale now. According to Norman Meller :

"In the lack of distinctly distinguishing geographical characteristics, the many basic commonalities of all their inhabitants and corresponding disparities within each region erode the rationale for this threefold division. Nevertheless, this division has historically persisted." (2)

Fiji, Papua New Guinea, the Solomon islands and still colonised New Caledonia are Melanesian states among Pacific island groups.

The physical diversity of Fiji is reinforced by the ethno-cultural variety which characterise the plural nature of this island county. Melanesia and Polynesia come together and merge in the outlying Eastern Lau group of islands and island of Rotuma.

2. Norman Meller, "The Pacific island micro-states", The Journal of International Affairs, Summer 1987 Vol. 41 No.1, pp.110-111.

There had been a continuous diffusion and exchange of Polynesian and Melanesian cultures and customs, giving Fijian people racially mixed identity. To this heterogeneous culture, was added in 19th century, the indentured Indian labour coming from varied cultural streams of India. A distinctive small group of Chinese and influential minority of part-Europeans have also contributed in the multiracial composition of Fiji. This diversity is reflected, with a complexed history, in the peculiar demographic composition of Fiji. In 1986, Indians (or Indo-Fijians) constituted 48.6% and indigenous Fijians (sometimes called Melanesians) 46.2% - rest 5.2% being part Europeans, Chinese and Australians, in total population of 7,15,000.³

India, China, Europe, etc.
Multi-racial in Fiji

FIJI : A HISTORICAL OVERVIEW : Discovered by a Dutch captain Abel Tasman in 1643, Fiji was a rare case of colonialism by invitation; rather than colonialism by conquest. Fiji was proclaimed a possession and dependency of the British crown as a result of historical "Deed of Cession" on October 10, 1874. The ruler of Fiji, the paramount chief Cokabau sought to protect Fiji from internal warfares and external invasions and received the guarantee of protection of customary

-
3. Although Indians normally predominate, their actual number has declined due to emigration and lower birth rates. Increases in Fijian birth rates further contributed to Indian proportion declining from 50.8% (1981) to 48.6% (1986).

indigenous land rights and economic interests through the preservation of customary tribal 'Fijian way of life' from the colonial masters. Thus emerged the benevolent paternalism of British colonial rule in Fiji which would be analysed later on.

The history of modern Fiji started with the introduction of sugarcane plantation economy. European planters had already arrived in Fiji in the 1860s with the intensification of cashing in on the cotton boom which followed the American Civil War. By the time, Fiji officially became a British colony, cotton suffered a slump in international market and it became a nonviable commodity for export. As a result cotton plantation economy collapsed. Therefore the settler planters moved to sugar cane plantation, as it was realized that sugar industry would be most export intensive industry. The plantation economies introduced in various other British colonies like Mauritius, Surinam and Guyana, established the "indentured labour system." According to Jay Narayan :

"The problem for settlers was one of labour supply. They hoped that with the formal colonization of Fiji, labour would be plentiful and cheap and, therefore, they would be able to meet all the necessary costs of production and would still be left with a comfortable margin of profit for themselves. The cane planters expected an abundant and assured supply of cheap labour, which they could use as and when their need arose. Fijians were neither able nor willing to meet the renewed demand for labour. The shortage

of Fijian and Pacific island led to the introduction of indentured Indian labour. (4)

The plantations established in the British colonies of West Indies and the Pacific also needed a docile labour force. With the slavery and the black-birding systems already banned, some other form of labour transfer from regions of relative labour abundance, in terms of capitalist rationale had to be found. In the face of worsening socio-economic conditions, Indians were relatively easy prey for the labour recruiters.

The first Governor-General of Fiji, Sir Arthur Gordon was the first person to propose the introduction of Indian labour. The request of colonial government received the approval of colonial office in 1877. Under the indentured system, Indian labourers had to serve a five-year term, but they were free to extend it for another five years. At the end of 10 years they were allowed either to return to India or to remain in Fiji.

The first shipload of Indian indentured labourers arrived in a ship "Leonidas" on 14th May 1879 and thereafter about 2000 labourers were brought in every year till 1900. Between 1879 and 1916 when indentured systems

4. Jay Narayan, The Political economy of Fiji, (Suva 1986) p. 31.

was abolished, a total of 60,533 Indians were brought in Fiji. The present Fijian citizens of Indian origin (more than 80%) are substantially the descendants of indentured labourers. The second wave of voluntary migration from India was of traders, professional, and skilled labourers, who now control to a great extent, the wholesale and retail business of the island. With such an inflow of Indians, the problems of multiracial polity started gaining roots.

The Fijian colonial system had been interpreted differently by historians. A distinguished Fijian Chief, Ratu Sir Lala Sakuna had described the Fijian society as a "three-legged stool", According to him the three ethnic components of the Fijian society, the Fijians, Indo-Fijians and part Europeans occupied and accepted a designated place in the hierarchically organized colonial system and made their separate contribution. Fijians owned and provided the lands, Indian contributed in providing cheap labour and Europeans, the skilled manpower and capital⁽⁵⁾. To some extent the statement may be right, but nevertheless this metaphor describes only an idealised static reality. In practice, says Brij V. Lal

"the colonial Fijian life was perpetually in turmoil. The three ethnic groups did not enjoy

5. Quoted in David Scarr., ed., The Three legged stool: Selected writing of Ratu Sir Lal Sakuna; (London: 1983) p.4

equal status, privileges or access to power. Not balance, but rather a calculated preservation of imbalance was a hallmark of Fijian colonial society and politics"(6)

This unequal colonial order was maintained through the interplay of three factors— the paramountcy of Fijian interests, the protection of European privileges and refusal to Indian demand for parity in political representation.

The paramountcy of Fijian interests was itself enshrined in the "Deed of cession," demanded by the chiefs and granted by the colonial regime. The Europeans fought successfully to maintain their privileged position because of their close kinship with colonial masters and preponderant contribution to economy. The Ethnic Indians (or Indo-Fijians) used to justify just share in power and equal representation in terms of Salisbury's despatch. Fiji had experienced a turbulent colonial rule, which had been instrumental in shaping its political system. The complicated details of colonial roots of present crisis will be discussed in the next chapter.

Fiji became independent on 10th October 1970, ✓96 years after the "Deed of cession." The British parliament passed the Fiji Independence Act providing dominion status to Fiji with the Queen as the Head, functioning through

6. Brij V. Lal: ed., Politics in Fiji: Studies in contemporary History; (London 1986) pp.31-32.

the Governor General. Fiji also joined the Commonwealth maintaining close links with Great-Britain. In 1965, a constitutional conference in London was called to chalk out a constitutional scheme for Fiji, that finally led to adoption of Constitution in 1966. However, the 1966 constitution was shortlived. A ministerial system of government was introduced in Fiji in 1967, with Ratu Sir Kamisese Mara as the Chief Minister and members of the Executive Council as members of Council of Ministers. Meanwhile, further discussions to schedule a constitutional conference in Britain continued. After prolonged discussions in London Conference, a constitution was finally adopted in April 1970 providing Fiji a democratic system of constitutional government based on westminster model. Because of several reasons, the constitution was called unique and unparalleled.

Though apparently constitution seemed to be democratic, it was developed with a special reference to explicit population situation in which, proportion was tilted to Indo-Fijians, giving them numerical majority. According to Dr.Vidhya Sagar "the constitution went out of the way to safeguard the interests of Fijians⁽⁷⁾. The general features of constitution of 1970 constitution were:

7. Dr.Vidhya Sagar, "Fiji: An overview:" Mother India Children Abroad. Vol.1, No.2, July 1987 (New Delhi) p.17.

- (i) It provided fundamental rights to all citizens guaranteed by an independent judiciary, having power of the judicial review. Some of the judges are drawn from the Commonwealth.
- (ii) The executive authority of Fiji was vested in Her Majesty Queen of Britain with Governor General acting as Queen's representative, who is required to act in accordance with her advice.
- (iii) Fiji adopted a bicameral legislature, consisting of an elected House of Representatives and a nominated Senate.

However, the 1970 constitution contained several entrenched provisions which helped to preserve the racial colonial legacy of paramountcy of Fijian interests.

- (i) The bicameral legislature was envisaged to give ethnic Fijians a preponderant position in legislation. The "Great Council of Fijian chiefs" was recognised in the constitution and empowered to nominate 8 out of the 22 members of the Senate. An effective veto power to vital amendments was ensured to them, so the constitution requires a 3/4th majority of all the members of each house on any major amendment.

(ii) A complicated pattern of racial representation was maintained for House of Representatives to perpetuate the preponderance of ethnic Fijians.

27 out of 52 seats in House of Representatives are communal seats reserved for ethnic candidates to be elected by voters registered in the communal rolls. The remaining 25 seats are national cross-voting seats with ethnic allocation the major ethnic groups being Indians. Fijians and General electors. In this complex system of representation, each voter has four votes - one for his ethnic constituency and one each for the three national seats. Brij V. Lal thus comments.

"As vote splitting is not supposed to take place on a significant scale; in fact, electorally thus far, ethnic loyalties appear to supersede all other considerations.(8)

a(iii) Another important feature of constitution that resulted in segregation of two ethnic groups was the provisions safeguarding the whole machinery of separate administration for Fijians. There are 9 statutes specifically mentioning the preservation of rights of land holdings, settlements and other customary rights of

native Fijians

In other words, major parts of statutes governing separate administration of Fijians were entrenched in the constitution. No change in these provisions could be made without the consent of 6 out of 8 Great Council of Fijian Chief's representatives in the Senate .

So when Fiji emerged from 96 years of Colonial rule, the nation had undergone a radical change, but the racial ideologies nurtured and cultivated shrewdly by Colonial overlords did not. the Colonial experience ensured that political parties should reflect separate communal racial interests. Fijians dominated the Alliance Party, and Indians the National Federation Party. As Harvey Stockwin observes. "

"As in post-independent Malaysia, so in Fiji, what preserved the stability for 17 years, apart from one brief spell of disruption in 1977, was the sustained monopoly of power by a Fijian dominated multiracial Alliance party which effectively articulated Fijian political dominance" (9)

Thus the racial divisions, as a legacy of Colonial rule, was sustained in post-independent Fiji, by the political parties. Nevertheless changing aspirations within both the communities broke down old educational, residential, and occupational segregations, particularly

9. Harvey Stockwin: "Racial Strife in Fiji" ; Times of India, 4th June, 1987.

in the cities and towns, and a new multinational consciousness began to grow steadily. Although both mainstream political parties paid lip-service to multiracialism, with each election racialism became the main game-plan pushing Fiji into hardening communalism. The political parties resisted change and refused to give 'dangerous' concessions to new political forces. This was particularly true of the Alliance Party which as the successor of colonial authority, endeavoured to maintain the basic racial thrust of Fijian Politics.

Robert T. Robertson has rightly illuminated this point: "

"The Alliance Government (from 1970 to 1987) did not totally replicate the colonial administration, but it inherited many of its strategies including that of "divide and rule" which it employed for a different purpose. It used the state to maintain a Fijian class of capitalists as well as chiefly bureaucratic class" (10)

The colonial legacies presented no difficulty to Alliance Party as long as it faced a polarised Indian opposition by National Federation Party. Believing that its own base was guaranteed, the Alliance Party fostered multiracialism to divide opposition factions. It cultivated the later Indian immigrants - particularly the wealthy affluent Gujarati and Muslim minorities. Their allegiance helped the Alliance purpose to develop a Fijian capitalist

class. Multiracial rhetoric had another advantage for Alliance, as it enabled the party to utilize the constitution in their favour.

The racial balance in the Lower House of parliament was not equal. The balance of power was held by General Electors - the group of Europeans, part Europeans and Chinese. It was in itself an anomalous colonial legacy. British colonial policy was to bring the General Electors and the Alliance together, and the Alliance's post-colonial policies had pursued this relationship.

This whole political dynamics in Fiji underwent a drastic transformation due to a variety of complexed factors, that led to April, 1987 election results and then the military coup.

CHAPTER - II

MILITARY COUP IN FIJI : THE BACKGROUND
AND AFTERMATH

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The military coup in Fiji, which occurred on May 14 1987 was not a sudden and isolated development. It was the result of a complexed process, a climax of various political developments taking place in Fiji in the later half of 1980s. It is important to go back to the background of Fiji to understand the real nature of Fiji problem.

The most important political developments, which finally led to turmoil and political instability in Fiji can be summed up as :

- i) Growth and consolidation of a multiracial political force - Fiji Labour Party.
 - ii) Formation of the Coalition with renewed National Federation Party.
 - iii) The crucial campaign for elections and drastic changes after election.
- i) GROWTH OF FIJI LABOUR PARTY - Post-1982 election period in Fiji had witnessed several important and far-reaching developments. Most significant among them had been the emergence and growth of the Fiji Labour Party. It had the capacity to emerge as a formidable political organisation having a

potent class-based political force cutting across ethnic loyalties.

A veteran Fijian observer, Satendra Nandan, in an article in "Fiji Times", has said that the trade union backed political party was hailed in general among Fijians, as historically inevitable development and most significant political event since independence.¹

At an executive meeting of the Fiji Trade Union Congress (FTUC) on 15th December 1984, Mahendra Sukhdeo, General Secretary of the National Union of Municipal Workers, moved a resolution that a Fiji labour party should be launched. Six months later on 6th July 1985 the successful motion became a reality, and as Akosita Tamanisau comments :

"The Alliance Government found itself face-to-face with a political party where it was vulnerable but had never seriously been challenged earlier."(2)

Fiji Labour Party was founded to provide an effective political alternative to the Fiji's electorates, who were fed up with the politics of race and ethnicity as conducted by chosen elites. The general Fijian masses were disenchanted with Alliance polities and tactics, and also equally dis-

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1. Satendra Nandan, Fiji Times (Suva) 17th July, 1985.
 2. Robert T. Robertson & Akosita Tamanisau, Fiji : the shattered coups, (Canberra, 1988) p.24.

-illusioned by NFP's debacles and its discontent at the top. The internal squabbles and discords in NFP, mostly the disagreements emerging not from substantive issues of policies or ideology, but on personality and styles had led to a sharply divided ineffective opposition, that had disenchanted many of its Indo-Fijian supporters.

On the other hand, apathetic and confrontationist attitude of Alliance Government on a number of vital social and economic issues also led to formation of Fiji Labour Party. The disaffection from Alliance Government of Ratu Mara was sharpened due to corruption at high places and promulgation of anti-people and pro-feudal policies. Wider criticism of Government was sparked off from these controversies stimulating radicalisation of trade union movement. Foreign policy issues also became focal, as the unilateral reversal of Government's earlier anti-nuclear policy of banning the entry of nuclear powered nuclear armed vessels into Fijian waters and was vehemently opposed by most of the Fijian intelligentsia. Brij V. Lal has observed that the close military ties with US, failure to debate foreign policy and abandonment of any pretence of neutrality - all these factors helped to create a grand swell of disquiet among people and encouraged the prospects of Fiji Labour Party.³

However, most important backdrop was adverse economic atmosphere in Fiji. On this front, Government's

3. Brij V. Lal ed. Politics in Fiji : Studies in contemporary history, (London, 1986) p.135.

policies and actions were greeted with much vehement protests. Years 1983 and 1985 had been particularly bad years for Fijian economy. A series of tropical hurricanes and droughts devastated the economic edifice. Sugar production in 1983 declined by a sharp 46% and this was accompanied by alarming drop in World Sugar prices upto 25% since 1980. Funds earmarked for public expenditure were diverted for relief and rehabilitation works. K.S. Ramchandran points out :

"Decline of sugar production coupled with fall of its international prices was a severe setback for Fijian economy. Growth rate in 1985 had dropped to meagre 1% from earlier growth rate of 7.8% in 1984." (4)

To cope up with grim economic situation and partly to protect the interests of Multi National corporation and influential business groups of Fiji, the government imposed a wage freeze from November 1, 1984 for one year. The rationale for this draconian measure was given as an essential step to discipline economy. This wage freeze was vehemently opposed by FTUC. It criticized government for the unilateral manner in which it had acted, effectively abrogating the consultative requirement with the tripartite forum (composed of FTUC, Fiji Employees association and government) for reaching common understanding on vital economic issues.

4. K.S. Ramchandran; An overview of Fijian economy; Financial Express; (New Delhi), 15th June 1987.

The trade union movement saw the wage freeze as yet another sign of concerted effort to suppress their movement by government. It was widely seen as a collusion between the political elite and the business class to keep the wages down. FTUC threatened a nationwide strike to protest the wage freeze but the government's adamant stand and threat to declare emergency and use troops to man essential services, forced them to seek other avenues to air their grievances. FTUC held an economic summit in May 1985 to explain the people its opposition to wage freeze. The idea of launching a political party, backed by labour unions was already mooted by trade union leader James Raman in an anti-wage freeze rally in Lautoka on November 4, 1984. So finally, Fiji Labour Party was launched on 6th July 1985, capitalizing on the grand swell of discontent with economic policies and deteriorating economic conditions of the country. ⁵

Within a short period of time, the new Fiji Labour Party proved outstandingly popular. Its success in local body elections and popular support in December 1985 parliamentary by-election established it as a party with great future. Dr. Timoci Bavadra, leader of FLP had defined

5. Brij V. Lal, ed. n.3 p.146.

the goals of his party as to reeducate people of Fiji to think in terms of issues, rather than the misguided appeal of racial sentiments and prejudices as practised by main political parties.

ii) FORMATION OF FLP AND NFP COALITION : After 1985, political equations in Fiji underwent a great transition, most outstanding of them being the finalization of the FLP-NFP coalition. This unforeseen alliance came into existence after the realization of commonality of political strategies and issues. The secret talks were held by FLP leaders like Mahendra Chaudhary and Dutt with NFP and a coalition was finally formalized in December 1986.

Until 1986, most of the political analysts were sceptical to any such equation. Vijay Naidu, in a paper presented to FTUC meeting had observed, "Any deal with the NFP smacks of opportunism and is not ideologically sound. It would compromise many parts of the Labour platform."⁶ The question arises why did the FLP joined with a party which Dr. Bavadra once claimed, represented the interests of a handful of self serving people?

The answer lies in the emergence of new political consciousness among younger and better educated urbanized Indians and Fijians. This compelled both the parties to

6. Vijay Naidu, Fiji Labour Party : A Report (Paper presented in FTUC workshop on political options for Labour movement), 1986.

join hands to defeat corrupt and unpopular regime of Alliance Party. Labour Party's focus was on a number of specific issues - wage freeze, poverty, crimes, and increasing marginalization of common Fijians. Never before these issues had been debated so frankly and with such preference by any opposition party. However, soon the Alliance Government counterattacked and suddenly it became very apparent to Fiji Labour Party that if the Alliance stayed in the power after 1987 there might be a total suppression of labour movement in Fiji. To survive, a coalition with the NFP was imperative.

"Both the parties realized that the emerging urban cross sectional middle class may be rapidly disinclined to vote automatically for a party (Alliance party) geared to preserve power, privileges and opportunities as natural inheritance for the sons and daughters of traditional chiefs.", said Robert Keith Reid.⁷

Leaders of NFP, Harish Sharma and Jai Ram Reddy found the formation of coalition an irresistible solution to the wearisome divisions which plagued their party. Leaders of Fiji Labour Party were equally sure that they had ingredients, capable of guaranteeing their political future and enabling them to be victorious in elections.

7. Robert Keith Reid, "Fiji under the Gun", Island business (Suva), June 1987.

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iii) CRUCIAL CAMPAIGN FOR APRIL 81 ELECTIONS : Interesting political developments took place after the announcement of holding elections in April 1987 was made. NFP suffered from internal dissensions and disputes, and at a time it seemed that coalition was heading for a disaster. Some dissenting NFP leaders like Siddique Koya, Nand and Gadavi formed a splinter group and announced to fight the elctions seperately. However, NFP workers were fed up with the incessant leadership divisions and decided to align with coalition. Labour Party also refused to compromise. Thus, Alliance's efforts to use the coalition's divisions could not bring fruits and the Koya euphoria and seperate NFP bubble burst very soon.

The election campaign got underway in March 1987. The Labour Party had committed itself for burying the politics of race, ethnicity, fear and hatred. It rejected the racial explanation of developmental problems like poverty, unemployment and declining standards of life. Labour party and afterwards, the coalition came out with a brilliant programme and policy framework, that had quite radical potential.

The coalition launched a very systmatic, well-organized and consistent campaign. It promised a "clean and responsible Government", to ask to all political leaders to declare their assets. It also pledged to extend the powers of the Ombudsman to deal with corruption

amongst politicians and public office holders, to introduce a leadership code, abolish the Official Secrets Act and to give freedom of information to people. The coalition also advocated an equal paybill and anti-sex determination bill. On the foreign policy issues, Dr. Bavadara voiced Fijians' concern over nuclear geopolitics and reiterated the ban call to nuclear powered or nuclear weapon carrying ships. He emphasised on a non-aligned foreign policy for Fiji. Robert T. Robertson had observed that banning of nuclear ships would have been a more concrete way to express Fiji's displeasure at US actions in the South Pacific, in particular its refusal to sign the Rarotonga Treaty, its disregard of sovereign marine resources, and its attempts to undermine democratic principles in New Zealand.⁸

Alliance party first tried to cash in substantive improvement in Fiji's economy, particularly the record 1986 production of over 500,000 tonnes of sugar. However, there was no guarantee that such growth can be sustained. The Alliance election manifesto promised new jobs over five years, selective privatization, and introduction of Export processing zones. But very soon Alliance Party found itself on the defensive as anti-coalition tactics stumbled and economic premises were bogged down with its

8. Robert T. Robertson, Akosita Taminsau; n.2 p.11.

with its own legacy of wage freeze. In utter desperation, it turned to one card that had worked well in the past - the racial card. Fearful of young urban Fijians drifting to coalition, Alliance recklessly played the racial card to its fullest in whole of its campaign. The Alliance's use of racial card took the following steps :

- i) Its strategies concentrated on the propaganda that without an Alliance government, Fijian land rights would be jeopardized.
- ii) Some of the Alliance leaders started propagating that FLP wished to destroy the chiefly system.
- iii) Alliance Party emphasised on its capacity to provide stable and durable government.

However, allegations of corruption and mis-management dogged the Alliance during its election campaign. As the governing party, the Alliance drew upon greater resources and facilities even then the coalition plugged its message at every opportunity and stuck to campaign based on issues and not race.

Once a swing to the coalition became discernible within the Indians and General elections communities, the Alliance started adopting communal and racial tactics more and more. Even opinion polls fueled their nervousness and they started accusing FLP-NFP as Pro-Soviet and Pro-Libyan communisst nexus, bound to deprive

Fijians from their land rights by nationalization. Meanwhile, coalition was boosting into confidence, and announced its decision to appoint a commission of inquiry to look into the Alliance's past actions and corruptions by highly placed persons.

THE ELECTIONS AND EMERGENCE OF TAUKEI MOVEMENT : On 11th of April, general elections were held and results were announced on 12th April. The FLP-NFP combination emerged victorious, winning total of 28 seats, 19 of which were represented by Indians, 7 by Fijians and 2 by general electors. Alliance had secured 24 seats.

The coalition's victory reflected widespread multiracial consciousness, particularly in urbanized south-east of Viti Levu. Later on 12th April, Dr. Timoti Bavadra received the invitation from the Governor General Ratu Sir Penaia Ganilau, to form a government. On 14th April, Dr. Bavadra announced a 14 member cabinet composed of 7 Indians (including Jai Ram Reddy), 6 Fijians and 1 general elector. Another Fijian was appointed in the following weeks to bring the cabinet to 15 and complete the balance.

Much has been said on the racial composition of Bavadra's new cabinet. While he could do little to alter the racial mix of those elected, he earnestly attempted a balanced cabinet. In fact, says Mathew K. George,

the cabinet had never been so balanced. The previous Alliance cabinet possessed only two Indians, three general electors and an overwhelming eleven Fijians.⁹ Dr. Bavadra, the first Commoner Fijian from Western Fiji to accede to prime ministership was confident that the election marked a dramatic change in Fiji's fortune. Lots of progressive measures were introduced in the first two weeks of Bavadra Government.

However, within one week of its coming into power, the coalition government had to face most serious challenge from violent demonstrations organised by Alliance party or its proxy-the Taukei movement. The series of disturbances, designed to destabilize the new government led to April 24 demonstrators, in which more than 5,500 people gathered in Suva to participate in largest protest demonstration ever held in Fiji. During the course of demonstration, a petition was presented to Governor General, demanding constitutional changes to protect Melanesian majority in the Government.

Meanwhile the new chauvinist Fijian movement, known as Taukei¹⁰ started emerging under the leadership of Apisai Tora and Taviela Veilata (an Alliance MP), both former ministers in Ratu Mara's cabinet. They initiated evil campaigns expressing apprehensions that Fijians

9. Mathew K. George, "Class War in Fiji", The South, July 1987.

10. Taukei is a Fijian word that means 'Landowner'.

would be rendered landless by the coalition government. Tora was very articulate and violent when he addressed a rally of Fijians at Viseisei. "Upon us is imposed a new colonialism not from outside, but from within our own country by those who arrived here with no rights and were given rights by us, the Taukeis." ¹¹

The fact was that after 17 years in power, Alliance members were angered by their defeat and focussed their rage over Indian community. Meanwhile, Mara's conspicuous silence provided necessary vacuum in which the Fijian association and the Taukei movement could operate. Some Taukie leaders like Tora, Qio and Tuiveda declared a new campaign of civil disobedience to end with the opening of parliament on 8th May 1987. Their strategy was to project the image of total spontaneity of protest movement.

The coalition government believed that it could control everything, it tried to curb the funding of the Taukei movement. Later on, Dr. Bavadra tried to turn to parliamentary matters, and conciliate and demonstrate goodwill to opposition, by appointing an alliance MP, Toganivalu as the Speaker of the House. The Alliance put pressure on him to refuse the post. An Alliance spokesman, Ahmad Ali, himself accepted that Alliance was unofficially backing the Taukei movement.

11. Quoted in a report published in 'The Sun' (Suva) 21st April 1987.

THE 14TH MAY MILITARY COUP : At 10 a.m., Thursday, May 14th, Lt. Col. Sitveni Rabuka, 38, a third ranking military officer, stormed into the chamber of the House of Representatives where the members were beginning their fourth day of debate on the contents of the address of Governor General Ratu Sir Penaia Ganilau delivered on Monday. Lt. Col. Rabuka was dressed in civilian clothes, but behind him were 10 soldiers in battledress and sinisterly adorned with gas masks. They were carrying M-16 automatic rifles and outside the Government buildings two lorries carrying armed troops stood waiting.

"This is a military takeover, stay down and remain calm" declared Rabuka. Then his men led away the four week old government of Dr. Tomico Bavadra outside the parliament making them captives in the barracks of Nabua. Within four hours, all telephones, telex and Fax services were suspended. FM 96 reporter Sam Thompson was first to broadcast the news of the coup. Rabuka gave in Radio Fiji a statement in which he claimed that he had overthrown the government to prevent further disturbances and bloodshed. He justified his coup as a pre-emptive act to thwart the anarchy and disorder.

Rabuka declared that constitution hence forth is suspended. A council (interim council) was formed, most of the members of which were the ex-minister's in Alliance Cabinet including Ratu Mara, and which as chairman of council had Lt. Col. Rabuka, the only military representative.

Ratu Sir Ganilau, the Governor General refused to recognise the unlawful military government and declared a state of emergency, urging civil servants and military to show the allegiance to Head of the state. However, this declaration had little effect and Governor General remained confined in the Government house.

Brigadier Ratu Epeli Nailatikau, Commander-in-Chief of RFMF, since 1980, who was in Australia at the time of coup, stated his continuous support for the constitution, his abhorrence the coup and disregard to claim that he had been dismissed from the post. Eleven of the country's supreme court judges issued a statement, holding the military coup as illegal, and asked for the restoration of Dr. Bavadra's government. Rabuka had also to face some resistance and opposition from the Indo-Fijian community. A civil disobedience movement was also launched. Trade unions and employees association also demanded restoration of Bavadra's government.

POST-COUP DEVELOPMENT : The queen had advised Governor General to continue his refusal to recognise the military government. She had asked Ganilau to stand firm against the rebels who had seized the power. On 19th May, Rabuka again met the Governor General to persuade him, but he refused to bow down.¹²

12. The Governor General's position was endorsed by the Commonwealth Secretary General Mr. S. Ramphal, and by the governments of India, Australia and New Zealand.

The important post-coup developments were :

i) Great Council of Fijian Chiefs meeting : The Great council of Fijian chiefs was Rabuka's main hope. It met on 19th May in the civic centre and focused on the Taukei movement's proposed constitutional changes. No consensus of opinion was discernible, although the majority of chiefs and their representatives clearly favoured the coup. Now the self styled Brigadier Rabuka hoped that the council of chiefs would continue to back his position.

ii) Ganilau's about-turn : Meanwhile under pressure from several different forces the Governor General of Fiji Ratu Sir Ganilau finally announced a compromise. He declared that he had assumed executive power which was earlier usurped by the leaders of the coup. He agreed to instal an army backed interim council as caretaker government.

On the advice of the chief justice, Ganilau promised to pardon those who took part in the coup. Strangely enough, he also decided to dissolve the recently elected parliament and directed to hold fresh elections. He stated that a high priority of the council of advisors will be to enquire into the efficacy and general acceptance of 1970 constitution, and to suggest such modifications as may meet the expectations and

very soon the high power council of advisors was set up with the name of Constitutional review and advisory committee.

The deposed Prime Minister Dr. Bavadra was offered a birth in the Council, presumably to assuage the ruffled feelings of Indo-Fijians. Instant international outrage and initial internal oppositions gave rise to hope that the armed forces could be cajoled into returning to the barracks, but these disquieting developments shared that impasse and reluctance to legitimize the military government, was over, and military junta had come to stay in political arena.

iii) ANTI-INDIAN VIOLENCE : While the manoeuvring of constitutional provisions to legitimize the usurped regime was going on, several incidents of violence against Indian ethnic community had taken place. In Suva, Melanesian youths, mostly belonging to Taukei movement rampaged all through Suva, attacking members of the Indian community and destroying their properties. In worst racial violence to have occurred in Fiji after the coup, over 50 people were injured, which continued sporadically unchecked despite appeals for the restoration of calm and tolerance.

Soldiers had raided the houses of the members of the deposed Bavadra government. Close surveillance was maintained on even members of Indian High Commission.

There had been several incidents of soldiers carrying away goods from shops by producing so-called order papers from their commanding officers from the shops owned by Indians. Thus military coup destroyed the sense of security among Indians. Several members of Indian community started disposing of their property and migrating to Australia, New Zealand and US.

iv) PROTESTS AND MILITARY SUPPRESSION : The impression created by the Governor General's appointment of an advisory council was, according to Robert Keith Reid : That the country had stepped back from the brink of the abyss of racial strife and ruin.¹³ It was disclosed by Ratu Ganilau that an 8-member subcommittee of the advisory council would review the constitution and make recommendations to the Governor General. So that required changes in constitution could be made before next general elections.

However, soon after the release from detention along with rest of his colleagues, Dr. Bavadra began to protest. He categorically stated that Governor General's actions were 'treason.' He pointed out at the composition of advisory council, most of the members of which maintained close links with the Alliance party. He referred to join the council; along with Dr. Harish Sharma.

13. Robert Keith Reid, n.7 p.14.

He declared to undertake a programme of civil disobedience including mass rallies, strikes and non-cooperation to government. The Advisory Council announced that under the terms of the emergency, which was to remain in force until constitution had been reviewed and fresh general elections had been called, all strikes and demonstrations were prohibited. It ordered all business premises and shops to trade normally. Notwithstanding these prohibitions, strikes brought much of the Western areas of Viti Levu to a standstill. The Western region, main power base of the Coalition, contained the bulk of country's sugar crop which had been due for harvesting at the time of coup. The strike was supported by almost all the cane growers of region, and they refused to cut the canes. These cane cutters were attacked, it was estimated that atleast 3,000 tonnes of uncut sugarcane was burnt in a series of arson attacks.

On June 25th, the emergency regulations were extended to empower the government to order the seizure of property, crops and vehicles in accordance with the nation's economic interests. However, industrial action by cane cutters and sugar mill owners continued. On June 31st the state owned Fiji's Sugar Corporation announced that it had closed all the country's sugar refineries in retaliation to the supply disruptions.

Many of mill workers were suspended until the end of July when it was suggested that the corporations would assess the viability of assumption of sugarcane processing activities in the light of changing attitude of the labour

Apart from flexing their economic muscles, Fiji Indians had sought to protect their rights by mobilizing international support for an early return of the civilian rule. However, the outcome of their efforts was meagre.¹³

Brigadier Rabuka had vowed not to rest until the Fiji's 1970 constitution was altered to guarantee Fijians a preponderant political majority over Indians. His acts of suppressions were designed to pressurize the Indian population to accept the *fait accompli* without demur. That is why he started taking resort to militarisation with only 2600 soldiers (half of whom were posted in UNPKF at Sinai and Lebanon).

v) Militarisation : Soon Rabuka realised that his military grip was quite slender. More soldiers were needed to achieve total military control. Soon a recruitment campaign was launched, and the unemployed youths seeking to escape from the monotony of village life, volunteered themselves for military training. Rabuka had plans to expand armed forces to 6000, which would maintain internal security, particularly in the areas

13. Quoted in B. Crosette; the fortune of Fiji Indians; Times of India (New Delhi), 4th November 1987.

which were vulnerable to industrial unrest. No doubt, the primary objective of massive expansion drive was to crush any possible direct action of Indo-Fijians in sugar provinces.

EVENTS THAT LED TO SECOND MILITARY COUP

i) ECONOMIC CRISIS : Fiji was passing through tough pressures. The military expansion - which mounted to 20 million dollars defence spending as against 6 million dollars budget for it, put Fijian economy into great pressures. Briefly, the factors hitting Fijian economy can be discussed as below :

a) The collapse of Tourism was most serious setback to the country's economy. Over 60% of the country's export earning was dependent on Tourism, which was most adversely affected by the military coup. It was reported that 80% of advance bookings were cancelled after the coup. Rate of tourist arrivals dropped very fastly, mostly after Suva riots and attempted hijacking of New Zealand's plane at Nadi airport. Hotel turnovers were down to 25.5%.

b) In the sugar sector, Indo-Fijian cane growers, uncertain of the future and supportive of the austed Bavadra were boycotting the harvest of cane crops, that was already affected by drought. It was apprehended that sugarcane production will decline upto 30%.

c) The flight of financial and human capital also created very serious challenge to economic well-being of Fiji. With investors confidence evaporating, and expectation of devaluation of Fijian dollar, resident businessmen (mostly Australians) shifted funds offshore and adopted a wait-and-see policy.

The Number of skilled Indo-Fijians, either leaving or planning to leave increased. As Bruce Knapman has illuminated this point in an article :

"The balance of payments crisis revealed in falling foreign exchange reserves necessitated draconian economic measures, which added to the vulnerable but unequal hardships. Given the role and multiple effects of tourism and sugar the general level of economic activity fell, raising the level of unemployment and standard of living. With steady fall in revenue and military expenditure to unknown extent, government came under heavy deficit." (14)

ii) POLITICAL REPERCUSSIONS OF ECONOMIC CRUNCH : Deteriorating economic circumstances had evident political repercussions. The prospects of restoration of civilian government because of economic imperatives spurred more moderate political and social forces into action. The most significant among them was "Back to early May movement" (BTEMM) originated by moderate leaders such as Sulina, Mastapha and Yabaki. They called on the Governor General and requested to return troops to barracks, place security in the hands of police, restore the

14. Bruce Knapman; The Economic Consequences of the coup. The Australian Outlook (Canberra) Feb. 1988.

autonomy of courts and form a government of national unity. Their demands were backed by a large number of moderate intelligentsia and two Fijian Newspapers "Fiji Sun" and "Fiji Times" which had virtually launched a campaign against military dictatorship, and provided a lot of stimulus to demands of restoration of Fijian democracy. They highlighted the injustices resulting from the coup and started questioning the credibility of backers of Rabuka's coup.

The differing voices of opposition promoted mutual self-awareness and courage to protest. Military intimidation became more difficult to sustain. A genuine harmony of both the communities was emerging in the Western districts of Viti Levu.

Rabuka was uneasy with all the political developments, and mostly with Taukei movement's activities. The Taukei movement which had been for a long time Rabuka's extra-legal muscle was now turned into a liability.

The Taukei leaders were getting desperate when they failed to get Fiji's Republic status. During the meeting of Great Council of Fijian chiefs, in Suva, on 20th July, the Taukeis threatened to begin fourth phase of their struggle that meant sabotage and arson against the Indian settlements, if the chiefs did not pursue the declaration of the republic. The chiefs rejected the idea and put forward their demand of 8 additional Fijian seats in parliament.

Rabuka sided with the chiefs in accepting the suggestions, a move which Taukies did not expect. Further the dropping of Taukei hardlineers from the caretaker government headed by Ratu Mara, who held key portfolios, put the split in the movement into open. David Robie observed that these feuds had totally fragmented the indigenous Fijian political groups and the radical Taukeis joined forces with Fiji Nationalist Party's leader Sakesai Butadroka under the banner of Fiji United Front. Butadroka had remained a popular anti-Indian demagogue and cashed in his popularity among chauvinists.¹⁵ The volatile situation was complicated further when the militants approached Dr. Bavadra's Labour Party to join them in an attempt to oust Mara. However, Dr. Bavadra rejected the sinister proposals having dubious motives.

iii) THE DEUBA ACCORDS : Meanwhile, the coalition had emerged from shock and demoralization and was determined to fight for democratic restoration. It persisted in believing that a deal with Rabuka was possible and the rapidly changing political climate made it inevitable.

As the moderates, disgusted at the coup's consequences sought to gain the initiative, hardliners among caretaker governments had to swing their position. Mara had to join the talks arranged by Sir Ganilau between

15. David Robie, Fiji's continuing flux, New Straight Times (Kuala Lumpur), 9th Feb. 1987.

him and Dr. Bavadra on 21st August. With different disruptions, talks continued, and finally resulted in "Deuba Settlement" (Deuba is a place near Navua city). In Deuba accords both the parties agreed to participate equally in a caretaker government to be headed by Ratu Sir Panaia Ganilau.

THE SECOND COUP: On Friday, 25th September, the Governor General prepared an address to nation in which he was to announce the new caretaker government. This was going to be a far-reaching development. Stephen Taylor had described Ganilau's action as a challenge to Rabuka that indicated a tense stand-off between the coup leaders and official representative of the queen.¹⁶

Ganilau's painstaking efforts to find a political solution certainly seemed to be brave. He proclaimed that this will herald a new era of power sharing and consensus. According to the plan accepted, he was to be the head of a 22-member council of state in which six councillors would be attached to constitutional inquiry committee under an independent foreign chairman, the terms being quite different from that of C.R.C. As part of the deal, the coalition had to withdraw its writ challenging the dissolution of parliament. At 4 p.m. on the same day, (25th September) Rabuka staged his second military coup.

16. Report by Stephen Taylor ; The Times, (London) 30th September.

Rabuka's second coup was more efficient in operation. The newspaper offices of "The Sun" and "Fiji Times" were immediately closed. Radio FM 96 was shut down, and curfew was imposed.

The Governor General was isolated and virtually house-arrested. Bavadra and other coalition leaders were imprisoned and Justice Rooney of Supreme Court was placed under house arrest. Journalists, academics, lawyers trade unionists and organizers of BTEMM were sent to jails.

IMPLICATIONS OF THE SECOND COUP : The reimposition of military rule in Fiji just hours before a compromise bipartisan civilian government was to be installed was a tragic blow, wrote George Smith in 'Telegraph'¹⁷ By usurping power through second coup d'etat in Suva in less than 5 months, Rabuka arrogantly sought to scuttle the efforts of Governor General for national reconciliations between native Fijians and ethnic Indians. It was also a step to neutralise British pressures, exercised through Ganilau, not to declare Fiji a Republic.

Ratu Ganilau refused to accept the offer of presidency under a new constitution. The chief justice of Fiji indicated that the judiciary would consider

17. George Smith, "Why Rabuka is courting disaster", Telegraph (London), 29th September 1987.

itself dismissed if Ratu Ganilau was forced out of office. Ultimately the declaration of Lt. Col. Rabuka to sweep aside the constitution, abolishing the post of Governor General and declaring Fiji a republic came as a bolt from the blue. This decision did not only sever the 113 year old links with the British monarchy, wrote Stephen Taylor, but opened the possibility of paradise island to be condemned to the kind of worse internecine communal conflicts , from which its was plucked more than a century ago. ¹⁸

Rabuka, who was running Fiji with military mechanisms as the head of a self-appointed military council, named a 19-member interim government on October 7. The so-called Civilian government dominated by Pro-Rabuka Melanesian leaders thus ensured the political supremacy of the military dictator. After two years of the first military coup, Fiji is reeling under the dictatorial authoritarian military rule of Col.Rabuka under the name of a Civilian Government.

18. Stephen Taylor, n.16.

CHAPTER III
INTERNAL AND DOMESTIC DIMENSIONS
OF FIJI CRISIS

CHAPTER-III
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OF FIJI CRISIS

Despite all types of excellent analysis and articles written about events in Fiji since the first military coup, most of the analysts, both Western and Indians, remained confined to the racial explanation which Taukei movement and Rabuka presented. These journalists and commentators seemed unwilling to question the ideological assumptions underpinning the racial perceptions. The paramountcy of Fijian interests, the objective of coup as declared by Rabuka, fell too comfortably within the paradigm of indigenous rights. Hence the coup was simplistically portrayed as the bid on the part of indigenous population to assert their right to run their own affairs. Thus the whole Fijian problem is viewed with a single dimensional perspective of ethnicity. However, an indepth study of Fiji problem reveals that a variety of factors, though predominantly domestic and internal, operate in present crisis. A Historical-sociological perspective may also help to link the longstanding issues with present quagmire. Race and ethnicity may be a major focus, but other factors should not be underassessed.

POLITICS OF RACE AND ETHNICITY IN FIJI: Fiji stood out amongst most of the colonial and post-colonial societies as something of a paradox: having been one of the most

ethnically divided yet least antagonistic society. Ethnic polarisation had been a central feature of political life and is rooted in divisions of cultures, social relations, and economic interests, but certain institutions and values used to encourage accommodation even amidst confrontation of the kind that elsewhere would have sparked catastrophic violence. However, ethnic and racial politics was institutionalized quite carefully in Fiji during the colonial period. For a deeper understanding of the nature of ethnicity in political system, one has essentially to go back to the colonial period.

Ever since the introduction of indentured Indian labour in 1889., Ethnic Indians and Melanesian fijians had been kept separate in different ways by the British colonial masters. Certainly they had interests in common, but colonial authorities deliberately pursued a policy to effectively prevent any mutual perception of the commonality. Physical separation was achieved by functional segregation. (Indians were made to work mostly in canefields in Western Viti Levu and Northern Vanua Levu. Native Fijians, no longer required to ensure the success of colonial sugar industry, had remained, for most of the part, tied to their villages.) Nevertheless, Fijians were not divorced from the colonial economy, as the very survival of colonial state depended upon the Fijian contribution of taxes and production of cheap foods and export commodities. Thus the sugar industry

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could operate without its surpluses being substantially drawn upon by the state. Fijian-produced foods enabled formal wages to be kept low.

(The study of colonial social organization and race relations give a general impression that the two communities were arranged as a dual-system and the component parts of colonial Fijian society were unrelated, with very less level of social intermixing. However, the surface appearance may not bear the whole historical truth. As elucidated by Jay Narayan; "

" While Fijians and Indians were often economically and socially separated, they were not divorced from each other. Their relationships were often indirect at some common level. both were exploited to serve the needs of colonial state. However, that commonality was rarely permitted expression."(1)

There is now a need to reassess the British colonial policy which perpetuated the ethnic racial politics in Fiji. The lofty benevolent, and humanitarian principles used by the British to justify the incorporation of Fiji within their extensive empire counted for little in final analysis, Its decision not to employ Fijians in the canefields had less to do with missionary concerns at the exploitation of indogenous labour than with the pressing need to establish a stable environment for the operation of

1. Jay Narayan; Political Economy of Fiji(Suva 1986) p.43.

colonial capital. The recruitment of Fijian labour could have led to destabilisation of Fijian society.

The hollowness of the strategy of benevolent paternalism, a strategy which according to Britishers, "saved" the Fijians and ensured the survival of Fijian way of life can be judged by a quotation of Sir Arthur Gardon, the architect of colonial policy in Fiji - " I have no sympathy with those whose philanthropy demanded that they should think little of their own race and colour. My sympathy for coloured race is strong; but my sympathy for my own race is stronger⁽²⁾ .

Thus, Fijian societal structures were very carefully manipulated to ensure their subordination. Thus by integrating Fijians separately into the colonial economy, the British colonialists had been successful in the classic "divide and rule" strategy. The main achievement of this policy in Fiji was that a small handful of British civil servants could exploit Fiji's peoples without risking any united opposition. This strategy further paid advantageous dividends - it thwarted the ambitions of European settlers, by restricting the sale of native land and by encouraging the Australian Colonial Sugar Refinery (CSR) to monopolize sugar productions. The colonial government was eventually able to steal a march over the independent minded settlers. With European settlers' activities restricted, Fijians locked firmly into their "traditional

2. Ibid.

affairs" under the guidance of a loyal and dependent chiefly class, and the growing Indian community isolated both by law and by the nature of their work, colonial rule was secured,

The separate institutional arrangement for governing the Fijians also ensured divergent paths for the two communities. Over the years these two racial groups existed side by side in small island country, generally at peace and without open discord, frequently apathetic and usually tolerant. This did not characterise good relations but also not acrimony.

The political ambitions of Indo-Fijians had found another source of difference. Indians, with growing political awareness, were demanding for more political opportunities, while Fijians remained satisfied with the statusquo and government control.

The colonial governments' decision to grant the franchise to Indians in 1929 and not to Fijians also added to Fijian suspicions. While this franchise contributed to politicisation of Indians, and increased their demand for more participation, Fijians deprived of these opportunities continued to be confined in their separate administration, in pursuit of customs and tradition. The arrival of the Franchise divided the Indian community; while without it Fijians, mostly elites, preserved their unity and channelised

their political energies to consolidate their position. As observed by Ahmed Ali, the two communities found the essence of their political life flowing in different directions. Thus the gulf between two was widened³.

The mistrust between two ethnic groups was manifested in the debates over the constitutional question in 1930s and 1940s. However, the constitutional question must be viewed in contexts of complexed demographic and economic changes.

The rapid Indian population growth played very important role in racial politics. The 1911 population census showed that they comprised 28.8% of the colony's population, by 1921 they had reached 38.5% which had risen to 42.85% by 1936. For the same years, the Fijian population had declined proportionally - 62.42%, 53.71% to 49.22%. Thus in 1940 Fijians lost the numerical majority. This increased the political anxiety of elites and led to their demands of security of Fijian paramountcy. The demand of Indians for common roll was actually counterproductive.

The 1931 constitution introduced the equal representation of each of three major ethnic groups, though this was hardly any step to do away racial politics. Another more significant step was the setting up of an improved separate Fijian administration - This broadened the support base of Melanesians and involved them in their responsibility. The Fijian Affairs Board; in fact a committee of the council of chief, was the lynchpin of the new organisation.

✓ 3. Ahmed Ali: Politics in Fiji: Studies in Contemporary History ed. Brij V. Lal (London, 1986) p.9

By the decade of 50s, the racial pluralism became crux of the national politics. Disparities among the communities were noted by each group. The 1956 census Report, which revealed the demographic fact that Indians constituted 49% of Fiji's population to 43% of Fijians multiplied the anxieties of Fijians. Fijian's fears of Indian domination was cleverly utilized by the colonial rulers to perpetuate their rule.]

‘On the other hand, Indian community's persistent demand for greater political role facilitated the strengthening of alliance of European and Fijian interests that began in the 1930s and consolidated by new bonds developed during IIInd World War time. By their persistent attacks on colonial regime, Indians antagonized the all powerful white bureaucracy.

Fijian reluctance to favour any political change away from the crown colony system can be understood in this background. In the wake of the decolonisation process in post war years, Fijians were not ready for regime change, as they did not want their patrimony and paramountcy to be shared or accommodated with other communities. There was also some important economic changes.

- (a) Indian population increase put pressure on the land. Between 1950s and 1960s, sugar production increased by more than 90% and better prices doubled the value of the output. This brought

prosperity to Indians and encouraged their clamour for more land and leases of longer duration.

(b) At the above time, economic growth of Fijians had not kept pace with the Indians. While Indians enjoyed the fruits of cash economy of sugar plantation, the native Fijians languished in the vagaries of subsistence agriculture.

(c) [The industrial disputes of 1943, 1959 and 1960 increased Fijian fear of political change as that could affect their already weakened status. The racial divide found expression in political party formation in Fiji. The Fijian dominated Alliance party, and exclusively Indianised National Federation Party (NFP) had originated with their different notions and expectation from colonial social order. Their direct opposition started during 1966 election. The NFP's campaign for abolition of communal voting and their criticism of chiefs as self-serving collaborators in European hegemony deepened Fijian anxieties. In the 1968 by-elections, continued demonstration of Indians solidarity with NFP, enraged Fijians, some of whom demanded withdrawal of concessions to Indians and deportation of NFP leaders. Thus the party conflicts contributed in aggravation of ethnic tensions.]

(Yet in the year 1968, these two parties united to demand for abolition of colonial rule and dominion status)

Robert Narton had commented in this context:

"Instead of producing the long feared violence, open confrontation had quickly given way to an elite conciliation in which they tried to detach themselves from the pressures of their followers. Thus ethnic confrontations, which are notorious for arousing acrimonious violence elsewhere, remarkably culminated in some form of communication in Fiji, thus contributing significantly to the achievement of accord between two parties⁽⁴⁾.

The decolonisation process in Fiji was relatively smoother, without the xenophobia and prolonged period of nationalist struggle that characterised decolonisation in Africa. [Independence came in Fiji in a low key atmosphere. The constitutional deliberations that led to independence were held in secrecy between late 69 and early 1970s in London conference. This was done to enable frank and free discussion among powersharing elites; and to avoid the public scrutiny. (The final constitution was neither subjected to a national referendum nor was it debated at length in parliament as was later in the case of other Pacific micro states. The leaders of NFP, and Alliance party accepted the constitution as fait accompli. Thus Brij V Lal observes - " The constitution was an instrument, so complex that its structure and full implications have barely been understood by people. The so called consensus constitution of independent Fiji thus did not mark any

4. Robert Narton; Race and Politics in Fiji; (Queensland 1977)pp.52-53.

radical departure from the colonial past; on the contrary it entrenched the same racial principles that had governed Fiji's colonial politics." 5

CONSTITUTION AND PERPETUATION OF RACIAL POLITICS: Fiji's constitutional development had taken place with explicit reference to the peculiar demographic situation prevailing in the 50s and 60s, with projections of these figures in the future. The Melanisiens were in numerical minority and so constitution was stretched out of the way from Westminster democracy to safeguard the privileged and interests of the indigenous population.

The 1970 constitution had provided bicameral legislature with one of the most complexed representation system. The main repercussions of this system are:

- (i) Parity of representation in Lower House in respect of Indians and Fijians - both having 42.3% of the seats.
- (ii) The European led General electors minority constituting more than 5% of the national population, enjoy 15% of the seats in House of Representatives.
- (iii) The 3 communal seats give the General electors the enviable position of holding the balance of power in the Fijian parliament (See Appendix)

However, the general electors have chosen not to exercise their privilege since independence. Instead they

✓ 5. Brij V Lal: ed.n.3 p 38.

have thrown their weight solidly behind the Fijian dominated Alliance giving it an automatic lead of 3 communal seats in general elections. (Thus a by-product of over representation to General Electors had been the establishment of an ethnic Fijian electoral advantage over its rivals.)

(The special representation of Great Council of Chief in the Senate is of most crucial significance in establishing the paramountcy of Fijian interests.) Without three quarters of both the House supporting the amendment act, changes can not be brought to Fijians Affairs ordinances, Fijian development Fund ordinances, the Native Land ordinances, and the Agricultural Landlords and Tenants Ordinances etc.

(According to Brij V.Lal -"The Constitution specifically provides that the legislation regarding 'Fijian lands, customs and customary rights' shall not^{be} passed by the senate unless it is supported in the final vote by not less than 6 of the Great Council of Chief nominees. Thus the claim to certain prior rights and privileges by the Taukei has been recognised and entrenched in the constitution"⁶).

These constitution provisions established state within the state, a privileged elite of chiefly class

6. ibid, p.38.

enjoying absolute power and control over land rights and land arrangements. None of the arrangements would have been more calculative to maintain for eternity the racial seperateness and ethnic tensions. ✓

THE LINKAGE OF ELECTORAL SYSTEM AND RACIAL POLITICS:

On electoral system, the constitutional arrangement was supposed to be temporary. In the final round of negotiations in the London conference between the Alliance Party and NFP, an agreement was reached that the method of election would be used only for the first House of Representatives elected after independence in 1972. It was like an interim solution of the deadlock on election system. The leaders of the two parties Ratu Mara of Alliance and Siddique Koya of N F P agreed to appoint a 'Royal Commission' which would work out a permanent electoral system for Fiji's multiracial system. ✓

The Royal Commission was appointed in 1975 with Professor Harry Street, Sir William Hart and Professor Sir Keith Lucas as its members.

(The Governing Alliance party in its plea to Royal Commission pleaded for no change precisely on the ground that ethnic considerations played a large part in determining the political affiliation of a person. ✓

"Race is a fact of life" was the catch word. It argued that any change in present system may generate extreme confrontation if any of the ethnic group feel that it is being deprived from just representation. Moreover, the Alliance Party pleaded that cross voting in national seats tended to foster political parties which cut across ethnic lines and the fact that balance of power lay with the general electors encouraged political parties to appeal to them, hence integration of part Europeans and partchinese is achieved in the national political mainstream.

On the other hand, the NFP said that communal seats perpetuated communal interests and the national seats failed to promote a sense of nationhood, because in most of them one race predominated and the candidates were judged by their racial categories. The NFP favoured elections based on a common roll for all seats and proportional representation to ensure a distribution of seats which rejects the interest of Fiji's tragmented society.

(Royal Commission recognised the wide spread communal fears among Fijians of Indian domination and unfair representation. It expressed the view that although fears of these kinds often had very little or no rational basis. The myths and prejudices were

planted and carefully cultivated in the minds of masses and too deeply embedded in their psychologies to be ignored. The Royal Commission emphasized on racial harmony which could be promoted by an avowed race relations policy supported by a positive and sustained education system. (It rejected the demands of increase in communal representation. Only for Rotumans, an additional seat was recommended.

However, the Royal Commission recommended radical changes in the election of national seats and the voting pattern. It rejected the present method of voting, called "Relative Majority System" or "first past the post". Though attractive in simplicity, this system had resulted in exaggerated representation of majority parties at the expense of minorities. The Commission suggested that the members for communal seats should be elected by "Alternative vote", that meant retention of single member constituency but requiring the voters to place the candidates in order of preferences.

The Commission supported the NFP view to a very great extent in its recommendation that all racial qualification for the national seats should be abolished and suggested voting by "Single transferable Vote System" the essential characteristic of which was that the share of seats won by any party would reflect the share of votes won.

However, there were sharp differences between Government and opposition about the status of the commission's recommendations. The opposition argued that the Government is committed to accept them on moral grounds since this was the basis of the joint agreement reached in 1970. On the contrary, the Alliance Party rejected the recommendations, on the ground that they were not binding and that in any event constitution was a permanent arrangement. It was constitutionally not an invalid position, but was in variance with the agreement reached by then Prime Minister Ratu Mara in 13th plenary session of the London constitutional conference.

Mara has shifted his stance mainly because the interim arrangement had preserved his party's advantage as the 1972 elections clearly demonstrated. The Alliance Government's altered position marked the end of the honeymoon period between the leaders of two parties.

The way electoral politics has actually worked under the constitutional arrangement of 1970 constitution is that one party - Alliance Party could retain office since independence, a situation which was changed partially for a brief spell in 1977 and ultimately transformed in 1987. [The analysis of structural power dynamics had showed that Alliance Party had been used to symbolise Fijian domination in political sphere through its three fold racial associations; the Fijian association, the general electors association and the Indian alliance.]

THE CHANGING NATURE OF PARTY POLITICS: Competitive party politics, with very sharp division of policies, programmes and support base has characterised the Fijian political system since independence and even before. The Alliance and the NFP remain the dominant political parties, though they have been joined by two splinter Fijian parties - The Fijian Nationalist party and the Western United Front, and finally by the Fiji Labour Party, which we have already discussed.

The Alliance Party, had been winning at the polls consistently since 1966 except for its first and temporary defeat in April 1977 elections and then the traumatic recent defeat in 1987. The Alliance party had been given some edge over its rivals due to following important factors:-

- a) The support of Chiefly system.
- b) Experience in governance and uninterrupted and stable leadership at the top.
- c) Crucial support of Indian and European business groups.
- d) Financial support from Multinationals and foreign concerns.
- e) The manipulation of electoral system.

However, the claim of Alliance Party to be a multiracial party had always been dubious - at the most it can be said to be only marginally multiethnic. The

fact that Fijian Association had been the backbone of the Alliance Party, and racial overtones of Fijian solidarity had been most important factor in electoral victories and its claim to Indian Voters had declined steadily, does not stand logical in that claim. The loyal support of the General Electors association had helped to consolidate the Alliance's dominance at the polls.

However, the Indian alliance had been the weakest spoke in the Alliance wheel, observes Brij V. Lal; the credibility of Indian Alliance had been seriously damaged by its failure to attract significant number of Indian voters to its rank. The desertions and resignations of leaders like Vijay Singh, M.T. Khan and James Shanker Singh on the grounds of "irreconcilable differences" with Ratu Mara damaged the image of Indian Alliance very greatly.

In contrast to consolidated one man leadership of Mara in the Alliance Party, the NFP had a turbulent and fragile leadership pattern. It has been plagued by a continuous history of internal struggle for leadership that had seriously eroded its creditibility as alternative government. The Indian constituency of NFP itself was a source of problem for NFP, as it was deeply divided along religious, cultural and regional lines. A more

7. Brij V. Lal; ed, n3 p 91.

important factor had been the party's largely self-seeking leadership which had rested almost exclusively in, what Ahmed Ali says, "a gaggle of squabbling lawyers, unwilling to devote more attention to party matter."⁸

The biparty politics dominated by Alliance and the NFP and dedicated at least at the declaratory level to the promotion of multiracialism and political co-existence was challenged in the April 1977 general elections by the Fiji Nationlist Party (FNP). Adopting Emerging Fijian ethnonationalism, the party rejected both multiracialism and political co-existence, and espoused the cause of "Fiji for Fijians". This was an anomie development in Fiji. The founder of this was former Alliance Deputy minister Sakisai Butadroka, who first came to prominence in October 1975, when he moved a motion in parliament demanding the repatriation of Fiji Indians, a sentiment that was widely shared by some racist elements in Fijian society. Butadroka launched the FNP with certain propogandist motives which included demands for the Fijian political economic paramountcy, reservation of most of the posts of political authority for Fijians, and more opportunities to Fijians to enter into business. A more sinister demand was that all lands sold to Indians should be returned to Fijians.

8. Quoted in Brij V. Lal, ed. *ibid*, p.13.

Butradroka's message, delivered in emotional tones attracted mostly rural, illiterate and underprivileged urban Fijian voters. In 1977 elections FNP played a crucial role in Alliance defeat as it made inroads in Alliance support base. However, Butradroka and his FNP had maintained a low profile and shifted its extremist stance. While maintaining a Fiji for Fijians ideology, the party adopted a less racially slanted position in 1982 elections. It was routed in 1982 election, obtaining only 7.7% of total Fijian communal votes. However, it did become a balancing factor in Fijian politics as far as Fijian votes were concerned.

A new trend of growth of regional party emerged and substantiated in the form of Western United Front which was founded on the grievances of the Western Fijians. Its main aim was to promote the particular interests of Western Fijians, who were alleged to have been neglected by Alliance government, WUF had come into an alliance with the National Federation Party in 1982 but it could not make much headway in that election. The WUF phenomenon would be discussed later on in context of regional politics of Fiji. The growth of Fiji Labour Party has already been discussed in Second Chapter which had most serious implications in transforming the basic nature of party politics in Fiji.

THE POLITICS OF LAND : Fiji is an island country with a rough topography. So land, naturally, is quite scarce resource and considered essential for human survival. However, land has also got certain peculiar connotations and meanings in traditional tribal ethos. (It was always more than just a means of subsistence, and more than often it became an all pervading aspect of the Fijian way of life.)

Jay Narayan in his profound analysis of the peculiar characteristics of land problem in Fiji has observed, "there was not much monetary value attached to the land, nor was in existence any idea that land could be owned privately, let alone the idea that it could be bought and sold for personal gains. Like other Pacific societies, in Fiji also, it was the right to the land rather than land ownership which was more relevant and important."⁹

(Land have been most emotive issue more than the distribution of political power. Enveloped in prejudice and misunderstanding, the question of land had given way to great communal and racial passions in Fiji.)

The distribution of land ownership however, was never an issue. It was permanently solved by the constitution; access to it and security of tenure had been well defined by different statutes (See Appendix

9. Jay Naryan, n.1 , p.5.

The Fijian native land is collectively owned and managed by the *Mataqali* (which is the name of basic landholding unit). The heads of "Mataqali" are the *Ratus* (the traditional chiefs)✓

Thus the data shown in Appendix clearly reveals that ~~the~~ the most important means of production, - land - has been distributed very unequally. The general argument, sometimes exaggerated by Western analysis, is often made with regard to land that Indo-Fijian farmers have leased most of land. Empirical evidences do not support such proposition. The total land areas owned by Melanesian Fijians is 83% of total land, of which 47.7% is native reserve and thus can not be leased. Rest 52.3% of total land owned by Fijians is non-reserve native land, of which 49% is leased for commercial purposes, like hotels and other business ventures and 51% is available for agricultural uses, of which 80% is leased by the Indo-Fijian farmers. Thus in all, the Indo-Fijian farmers have leased only 21% of the native land.¹⁰

[In agriculture, the Indo-Fijians control the vital sugarcane production sector. The balls of Indian population resides in the western and north-western sugarcane belt in Fiji, constituting 80% of sugarcane farmers and producing 90% of country's sugar. The Indo-Fijian

10. Narendra Prasad; Economic control in Fiji (Paper presented in international conference on political crisis in Fiji, 7-9 July 1987, Honolulu, Hawaii).

tenant community has a great problem of insecurity of land leases. They have been demanding more secure tenure that goes beyond the usual 10 to 20 year leases. Fijian landowners, the Taukeis, apprehensive of losing control over a vital resource and harbouring the desire to start commercial cultivation, resist. The resultant stalemate had been generating its own bitterness that has further fuelled ethnic tensions, thus completing a vicious circle.

The root of land politics goes back to 1920s when after the end of indenture system, an expanding and rapidly diversifying Indian community, most of them involved in cane cultivation, began to make increasing demands for land. By the 1930s land had already emerged as a contentious issue in Fijian-Indians relationship, the Indian tenants were getting sour over the vexations and expenses involved in negotiating terms with individual Fijian landowners, who were reluctant to part even temporarily with their land. Historian K.L. Gillian had described the reasons for the Fijian apprehensions,

"In the 1930s, the Fijians were becoming more aware of their economic weaknesses. Their numbers were on the rise just as the Indians, land was nudged for their children, they wanted to grow more cash crops. Sometimes they were refusing to renew leases, resulting in reversion of land into bushes." (11)

11. K.L. Gillian; The Fiji-Indians: Challenge to European dominance, (Canberra 1977), p.18.

The Native Land ordinance, giving power to Government to assume control of all native land not required for immediate use and to administer such land in best interests of Fijians was passed in 1940. Under the ordinance, an independent body, the Native Land Trust Board (NLTB) was set up to manage and administer all native lands. Its establishment brought a semblance of stability in land transaction between Fiji's landowners and Indian tenants. The length of leases was standardised to 10 years without any guarantee of renewal. Thus renewal remained contentious issue. In 1966, a new Agricultural Landlord and Tenants Ordinance (ALTO) once again attempted to settle the problems of lease renewals, following the complaints of harrassments and hardships from the tenants. The primary purpose of ALTO was to give tenants greater security of occupation than before. It provided that a first or second ten-year extension would be granted to tenants, if the landlord could not plead enough hardship to justify terminating the lease.

However, the new legislation left both the parties to the dispute, dissatisfied. The Indian tenants continued to complain about the insecurity of tenures while the Fijian lanowners (Taukeis) felt that they were being denied the justice as the Agricultural tribunals tend to favour tenants. Consequently, a working committee to review

the ordinance was set up, that presented its report to parliament in 1975. The essence of its recommendations to amend ALTO was the establishment of 30 years as the minimum period of tenure, with provisions for an automatic 20 year renewal of all leases. The new bill evoked two distinct responses from the Indian tenant community. One section accepted it as the best term they could obtain in the circumstances; the other saw it simply the extension of the existing uncertainties. The NFP, self proclaimed representative of the Indian tenant community, split on the issue. Opposition leader S.M. Koya, president of the Federation of cane growers, opposed the Bill, while moderate leaders like K.C. Ram Rakha and Irene Jai Narayan with 8 others crossed the floor to support it. The NFP rift, long in existence, thus came into open over the land issue and ultimately affected adversely party's fortunes in the 1977 elections.

Land was again in the centre of a major controversy in 1979, which drove a wedge between the Prime Minister Mara and opposition leader Jai Ram Reddy. Reddy vehemently attacked on the Alliance Government's land policies, specially of reserving large areas of Crown land. He asserted that this reservation would affect atleast 192 existing leases and some government's projects. Mara's response to his attacks typified the Fijian racial attitude on the subject of land. He described Fijian

magnanimity in granting leases and criticised the lack of Indian community as greedy acquisitive class forever seeking advantage. According to him, the Indians in Fiji like the tentacles of an octopus, already controlled business and industry, and the Fijian people had not asked for a share in these, despite Indian demand for secure land lease. In an Alliance convention in 1978. Mara uttered the venom of racial attitudes.

"If Reddy's contentions are to be accepted, then all Indian tenancies which cover much of the good land in Fiji, must be held by them in perpetuity. All the most valuable properties in urban areas must be their preserve and commerce, industry, transport and other professions must be completely controlled by them." (12)

Brian H. Farell has commented on this "instead of constructive dialogue on a vital national problem, racial stereotyping, distrust and misunderstanding once again became the order of the day, as they had been in Fiji's colonial history. As a result, the vital questions of arrangement of land were left unaddressed." ¹³

(The politicisation of the land issue had greatly plagued Fijian polity in 1970s and 1980s. The slogans, chanted by hardcore alliance leaders went up to the extent that "Blood will flow in the country if Indians do not understand the deep emotional feelings Fijians have for their land."¹⁴

12. Quoted in Ahmed Ali; Plantation to Politics : Studies of the Fiji Indians, (Suva 1980), p.180.

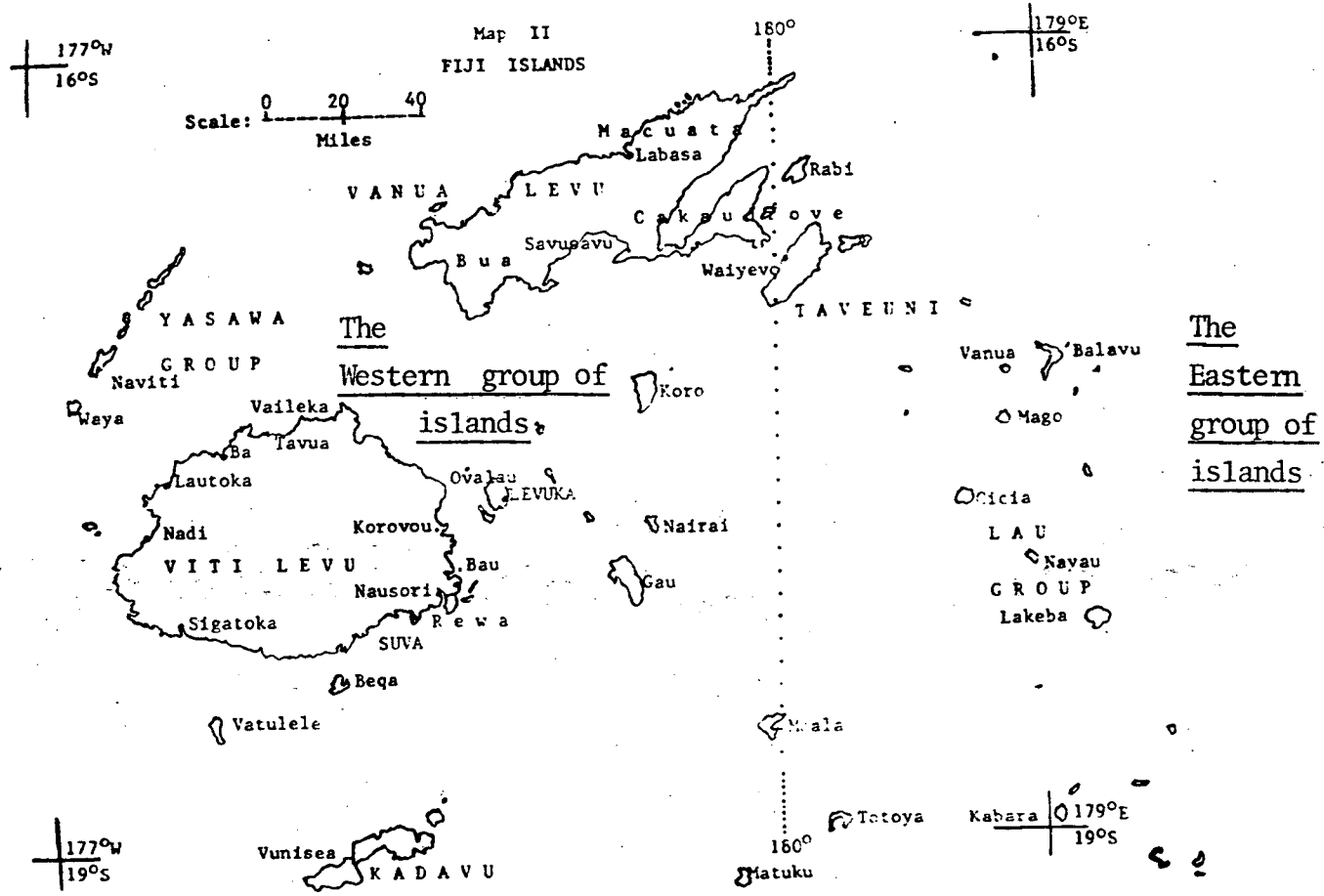
13. Brian H Farell and Peter E. Murphy, ed.; Ethnic attitudes to land in Fiji, (Suva 1979), pp.2-3.

14. Brij V. Lal, n.3, p.85.

Thus there had been a general lack of political will power to settle the land issue, and it has continued to aggravate mutual apprehension among major ethnic groups in Fiji. Propoganda over land was one of the important factors to justify the coup.✓

THE REGIONAL POLITICS : EAST-WEST DIVIDE IN FIJI : Fijian social structures, prior to colonization in 1879, were infinitely more complex and varied than those reconstructed by the British for administrative puposes. It was hierarchically structured society, most important organisation being the Mataqali or clan,✓ that provided the basis for organising families and demanding loyalties. (Land was held collectively by the Matqali chief though access to land was with the Matqali chief. Control over land formed the material base of chiefly authority,

However, considerable variance existed in the nature of social organisation in the relatively small island state of Fiji. The most important difference that existed was between Western Fiji (mainly the island of Viti Levu) and Eastern Fiji (the islands of Lau group and Belavu). This division reflected the greater Polynesian influence within the east and most favourable agricultural conditions there for sustaining larger populations. The smaller population of Western Viti Levu,



Map II

Fiji - The East-West Divide

accompanied with poor soils and unfavourable agricultural conditions resulted in more mobile communities with relatively egalitarian structures as contrary to highly centralised hierarchical social structure in Eastern Fiji. In east, the Tongan influence imposed the hierarchical and stratified social order that alienated Commoners from access to land and other means of production.

In both east and west, political institutions developed largely during 19th century. In eastern Fiji, different kingdoms of small islands like Bau, Rewa, Verata and Lau, tried to maintain their dominance over all rivals, However, Bau succeeded in establishing its hegemonic order, its dominance was basically a result of its links with colonial agents. The Deed of cession, concluded by Bauan chief Ratu Cokabau resulted in a colonial state, committed to uphold the Bauan supremacy in Fiji. As a result of eastern dominance, the process of uneven regional development started with neglect of west and major share of state assistance going to the eastern Fiji.

Western Fiji, during the last quarter of 19th century, rebelled against colonialism and Bauan supremacy. The eastern collaborators with colonial authorities suppressed the revolt ruthlessly and pursued a policy further to subjugate the western inhabitants.

(Economic activities in Fiji increased after the introduction of sugarcane plantation, thus bringing western Fijian major focus of agricultural industrial activity. These activities further escalated in 1950s and 1960s, with opening up of gold mines, the development of tourism and plantation of pine trees, With sugar industry, these economic activities form the backbone of economy. However, these enterprises were rarely owned or developed by Fiji's common people, including ethnic Indians - descendants of Indentured labourers. Although the CSR opted for small scale cane farming after the abolition of indenture system in 1917, its method of economic restructuring was not repeated in other sectors like tourism, pine planting, forestry and gold mining. Large scale methods of production and investment was pursued, that satisfied corporate desires for optimal profitability but did little to accommodate employment and social needs of local western Fijians. On the other hand mass-scale cane farming proved to be more beneficial to CSR, as the major cost of cane farming was borne by Indians, resulting in their relative impoverishment. No amount of opposition or protest could alter the predicament of western Fijians as long as the Fijian administration remained in the hands of chiefs belonging to eastern Fiji. Further with the economic growth unfolding itself in the national life, the West's inequalities became more and more marked.

The expression of discontent led to the foundation of several political organisations of Western Fijians such as western democratic party in 1962 (that was shortlived), Fijian National Party in 1964, and in 1971, the western Tui Association of western chiefs. Most of these organisations protested against the lack of western representation and their non-involvement in economic planning and decision making bodies. Alienation of common Fijians of West and the concentration of political and economic power in eastern Fiji.

The acceleration of pine development in the 1970s and 1980s provided another stimulus regional flare up, resulting in the formation of Western United Front in 1981 by Osea Govidi and Nadalo. In 1982 general elections it joined hands with the NFP. However, as a vehicle of western disaffections it could not fare very well. In 1982 it won only two seats.

However, the Fiji Labour Party inherited that role in coalition with NFP. FLP was a national organisation with network of trade union support. It had a multiracial character and wide appeal among Fijians residing in western Vanua Levu and Viti Levu. Its leaders Dr. Bavadra enjoyed high acclaim and support in western Fiji. Thus the Labour Party articulated the discontent of western Fijians and integrated it within a national political challenge to Alliance leadership coming from eastern chiefs and bureaucrats.

CHIEFLY ARISTOCRACY VERSUS NEW MIDDLE CLASS : This particular aspect of Fijian politics had played a very great role in shaping the events after and before 1987. It has a very interesting historical background.

We have already discussed that how the Deed of Cession in 1874 was primarily aimed at securing the interests of Fijian elites - the tribal chiefs. Colonial rulers generally encouraged chiefs to become petty colonial functionaries after getting western education. They kept on tolerating chiefly ambitions as it served to assist stability and prosperity.

In the short term, the alliance between European capitalists, and the chiefly bureaucratic class was eminently successful. The chiefly privileges were privileges were formalised within the colonial administrative structures when the separate Fijian administration was formed in 1944. By the 1960s British rulers realised the formidable nature of chiefly power. The various official reports on Fijian affairs, the Spate Report (1959), Burns Report (1960)* and Beldshaw Report (1964) made critical comments on chiefs' clout and suggested checks to their power. But the chiefly aristocracy consolidated itself and during the 1960s began to widen its base by incorporating educated commoners. W. Sutherland observed

"Such was the power of chiefs that by 1970s it had secured a monopoly of power in post-colonial Fiji."(15)?

15. W. Sutherland, "The State and Capitalist developments in Fiji, p.181.

The Fiji Labour Party in mid-1980s represented the most competent challenge to the power and position of the chiefly bureaucratic class. The Alliance party's failure to generate a sound support base forced it to depend more and more on the state and parastatal resources in order to finance the system of patronage. Access to state resources enabled the concentration of power and wealth in the hands of related Fijian families, and the establishment of informal networks which distributed spoils and benefits down to the villages. The sudden emergence and increasing grassroots popularity of FLP placed Alliance's network of cliental relationships in jeopardy.

As on earlier occasions, the chiefs responded by absconding multiracialism and reverting to parochial ethno-centrism and racial appeals. However, this time chiefs faced the toughest challenge from the appearance of a new political actor claiming to cut across racial boundaries on the basis of common class interests and a specifically enunciated ideology of "democratic socialism" under the leadership of Dr. Timoci Bavadra - that was the FLP. The Fiji Labour Party had its origin in a new phenomena, emergence of new middle class, plural in character, united with a variety of grievances that arose during the tenure of the Alliance government of Ratu Mara.

The most important factor which stimulated the growth of this new multiracial middle class was the increased

migration from rural to urban centres. Young Fijians seeking respite from the irksome authority of an order that would provide employment, used to drift to towns like Suva, Lautoka and Labasa. They used to find themselves in the same disadvantaged situation as the Indian drifters from their home towns. Thus there emerged a common consciousness of homogenous interests of commoners.

More serious of all was the discontents of the working class-employed in various private and public concerns and companies and paid quite poorly. The bulk of Fijian work force, comprising all the races, suffered a big setback with a wage freeze imposed in November 1984, without any corresponding freeze on prices. The impact of wage freeze on the growth of Labour Movement and Fiji Labour Party has been discussed earlier.

When Dr. Bavadra - an idealist and reformist leader issued a manifesto promising to redress social and economic injustice and regional inequalities, he was sure to get rallying support. The decision of somewhat truncated and disordered NFP to join the coalition made the prospect of a genuinely multiracial party quite credible and even attractive. Coalition promised a variety of programmes and recompenses to the dissatisfied of both the races. Thus the blandishment of coalition enabled it to win number of seats on the cross voting franchise. This greatly upset the chiefly monopoly so the chiefs were

major supporters of the military coup, and the events occurring after the coup also involved the chiefs.

The Great Council of Fijian chiefs is a traditional body with not much constitutional powers, but has become the final arbiter in the Fiji crisis. The council of chiefs was made up of chiefs from Fiji's 14 districts concerned to the issues of Melanesian Fijians - Fijian landrights and political supremacy, Precisely these issues were involved in May 14 military coup also. A clue to the chiefly involvement can be understood by the interlocking pattern of relationships among the major actors in the coup. Sir Ganilau happens to be the high chief of Col. Rabuka's clan. Another important leader of Fiji Lady Adi Mara, wife of Ratu Mara is also high chief in eastern island. Since independence in 1970, Ratu Ganilau and Ratu Mara's confederacy had dominated the power politics in Fiji. In a sense, the coups seek to restore power to that confederacy.

It is in this context, that Dr. Bavadra's contentions are to be paid higher attention. "It is foolish to portray the Fiji problem as a Fijian-Indian conflict. It is a conflict between peasants, workers and professionals on the one hand and the vested interest out to protect the feudal order on the other."(16).

16. Quoted in "Fiji Times", 15th Oct. 1987.

CHAPTER - IV

THE SOUTH PACIFIC REGION :
EMERGING GEOPOLITICS OF CONFLICT

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THE SOUTH PACIFIC REGION : EMERGING GEOPOLITICS OF CONFLICT

The South Pacific region has drawn world attention as a potential zone of super power conflict, only in early 1980s. The lesser known cluster of islands - 'The South Pacific microstates' were given highlight when the Grenada affair in the Caribbean late in 1983 generated new interest worldwide to study the political and economic vulnerability and strategic situations of these microstates. The problem of microstate vulnerability has been placed with a sense of urgency by the events of Grenada.

The South Pacific region includes three distinct geographical regions of Oceania - The Micronesia, Melanesia and Polynesia. According to Richard A. Herr, "tectonic plate movements across the Pacific basin over millions of years have spawned a richly diverse pattern of islands making the southern portion of this ocean, world's foremost breeding ground of insular microstates."¹

The South Pacific region comprises 9 independent island states, 4 with associated statehood and the 9 remaining dependent territories controlled by US, France, Britain and New Zealand. The South Pacific Forum

1. Richard A. Herr; Micro-state Sovereignty in the South Pacific ; Contemporary South-East Asia; Vol. 29, No.2, Sept. 1988, p.71.

a regional political association of independent and self governing countries, has 14 South Pacific island members in addition to Australia and New Zealand.

These island states can be categorised in this manner:

- (a) Independent island nations : Fiji, Kiribati, Nauru, Papua New Guinea (PNG), Solomon islands, Tonga, Tuvalu, Vanuatu, Western Samoa (9)
- (b) Nations with pre associations ; The Cook islands and Nieu, are in free associations with their former colonial master New Zealand. The Republic of Marshall islands, the Federated states of Micronesia (FSM) and Palau (Balau) are in free associations with the US. (5)
- (c) Dependent island territories :
 - US dependencies - American Samoa, Guam
 - French dependencies - French Polynesia, New Caledonia, Wallis and Fatuna islands.
 - Australian dependencies - Norfolk islands.
 - UK dependencies - Tokelau and Gilbert islands.
 - New Zealand's dependency - Tokelau. (8)

Of the 14 South Pacific Forum member countries, only Papua New Guinea has population of 3 million and Fiji with more than 7 lakhs has population just excess of half a million. Three smallest states, Tuvalu, Nauru and Nieu, have population less than 10 thousands. Thus nearly all of these countries fall into the "microstate"

category. The whole island region, with an area of 30 million sq.kms has a population of only 5 million - most of the island countries except PNG and Fiji have less than 2 lakh inhabitants.

(for details see Appendix

/ Such a plethora of insular microstates did not spring up unexpectedly or unannounced overnight. They were created by a process of decolonisation which began almost 3 decades ago and which is still incomplete./ This process started in 1962 with the independence of Western Samoa. Only Western Samoa (1962) and Nauru(1968) could achieve full independence before 1970. The South Pacific region has been generally regarded as a quiet backwater, isolated from the mainstream of international politics. This view has been formulated by the fact that until early 70s, most of the island territories in the area were under direct control of France, Britain, US, Australia and New Zealand. From the perspective of Western interest, the region required little further attention. But this situation was changed as a result of two spells of decolonizing activity which took place in between 1962 and 1970 and 1974 to 1980.

Though, decolonization began as early in 1962, half of these countries attained independence only in late 70s. Vanatu emerged only recently from Anglo-French tutelage and New Caledonia is languishing for freedom from French colonialism even now.

// The South Pacific is a part of Third World and shares with other developing countries the problems of achieving growth and minimising dependency. However, their common characteristics differ, to some extent, from other countries of the Third World, as they share specific features.

i) Their smallness is chief unifying factor as well as their major source of problems.

ii) Insularity is also particular feature of these countries as they might be easily cut off and isolated from the world in times of disasters.

iii) These islands are remote from the world centres of trade and production. Transportation and shipment costs are quite high. This aggravates their economic problems. Yet it is equally true that this remoteness has spared them in large measures from the rivalries of the great powers.!

W The South Pacific Island states lack natural resources. Only the Melanesian islands have nickel and gold, and Nauru has a substantial deposit of Phosphate. The vast ocean areas of the South Pacific Exclusive Economic Zones (EEZs) make them rich in marine resources. Tuna poaching and farming has been their principal means of income generation. But the management and exploitation of marine resources require technology

which they totally lack. The ocean bed is believed to be rich in the minerals. It is generally apprehended that the exploitation of these resources might turn the peaceful waters of South Pacific into a troubled "resource grab" scenario.

The economies of South Pacific microstates are quite weak and vulnerable. All of them are heavily dependent on foreign aid for their economic development and most of them have only one or very few crops or raw material and commodities to export. The terms of trade continue to move against the essentially agricultural countries, and external indebtedness and reliance on concessionary loans is increasing. Food imports, a crucial indicator of under-development is in some cases as high as 20% of the total value of imports.

(see Appendix

The defence capability in most of the South Pacific countries is very low to non-existent. Only PNG and Fiji, larger of PICs maintain a relatively substantial defence capability. Fiji which used to maintain 3 battalions, numbering 2500 men, mostly drawn from the indigenous Fijian population, has recently undergone a militarization drive. Two battalions of Fijian army, each having 600 men are still serving in UN Peace Keeping Force in the Middle-East. The lower defence and deterrence capabilities of these countries has a lot of

negative impacts. For example, none of the SPICs have the capacity to monitor and police their EEZs. Few of the states are well placed enough to counter domestic security problems which may arise from mischief makers or subversive foreign intelligence operations

Amena Mohsin has observed in this context,

"As in most other small states of the Third World, therefore, a combination of small size, limited ability to defend territory, open and new political systems plus a debilitating economic fragility produce a situation of inherent weakness and vulnerability. Geopolitics plays dominant role in shaping the environment of security of these small island countries." (2).

NATURE OF SOUTH PACIFIC GEOPOLITICS : Geopolitics has recently emerged as master science of geographical knowledge. It was associated primarily with the names of R.J. Kjellen and Karl Houshofer, and later developed by geographers like Mahan and Mackinder. It has been realised lately that world geography is far more complex and simplistic geographical divisions and scholars began to sense that it is important to take into account, spatial configurations in examining the relationships between forces and that some issues affecting political strategic environment of the region are inter-related. This explains the degree of attention that has been recently given to geo-political studies of international politics.

2. Amena Mohsin; "Small state security in the South Pacific" in "Security of small states" ed., M.A. Hafiz and A.R. Khan (Dacca 1984), p.143.

4Karl Marx, in a contribution to the 'New York Times' had stated that the Pacific would be the ocean of the future around which human life would concentrate, as was the case with the Mediterranean in the ancient times and the Atlantic during the industrial revolution.//

Prof. K.P. Mishra has commented,

"The assessment of Karl Marx is being unambiguously corroborated by the rapidly growing importance of the region. It can be said now with fair degree of justification that we are living in the age of Pacific." (3).

//As far as geopolitical significance of the region is concerned the region is important from practically all the points. The security and shipping lanes that are located here are considered vital by the US and most of the industrialized Western powers. Any threat to their trade connections with the North or South Pacific may have disturbing effect on their economic development. However, by the stark contrast with the caribbean islands of the South Pacific scarcely had enjoyed a status other than a minor marginalised profile in the horizon of global politics. According to Richard Herr, "the Pacific islands traditionally have been viewed as remote resource-poor sparsely populated and in an area where Western dominance was so entrusted as to seemingly preclude the prospects of great power confrontation."⁴

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3. K.P. Mishra; South Pacific: Emerging Trends, World Focus
 4. Richard A.Herr; n.1, p.73.

Political activity in the South Pacific, it was argued, was more stable and less volatile than Caribbean region.

// The political cultures of South Pacific, having strong conservative influence of the christian religion accompanied with the smooth decolonisation process has combined to produce more settled politics! There was little or no ideological competition within or between South Pacific states, regional solidarity was much stronger than in the Caribbean // David W. Hegardy, says that demonstratively the South Pacific was of less strategic importance. The superpowers had shown little interest in the region, there had been no great power rivalry since World War II in the region till the advent of 80s. The threat environment in general was benign. The island states were basically pro-Western in orientation and all appeared content to shelter under the regional security umbrella of the ANZUS Treaty.⁵ That is why in Western strategic literature this region has been repeatedly referred as the ANZUS lake or Western sphere of interest. ✓

// However, the customary geopolitical image of the South Pacific had begun to fluctuate very recently. Circumstances have altered in a direction which has heightened the vulnerabilities of microstates of the South Pacific regions. These changes have disconcerted

5. David W. Hegardy; "Small state security in the South Pacific" in Security of Small States", n.2 p.158.

paramount western powers in the region and added an element of uncertainty for the interested powers of the South Pacific region. Consequently the Pacific islands have had to cope not only with their own perceptions of changing international environment but also with the reactions of extra regional environment in terms of making their own separate adjustments.

In retrospect, the major factors working to modify the Pacific islands' comfortable political niche probably dated from the mid 1970s although the full impact of this altering geopolitical environment did not become apparent until nearly a decade later.

// The emergence of the newly industrialized economies in the Western littoral of the Pacific and the dramatic rise of economic superstrength of Japan had transformed the whole Pacific basin into an area of major engines of the global economy. //

// The change in South Pacific geopolitics was brought about by the following factors :

i) The vast marine expanses of the world's largest ocean - Pacific and resource-rich ocean beds of the South Pacific had begun to attract serious global attention during the 1970s. // The first signs of consensus on the UN Third Conference on Law of the Sea (UNCLOS III 1982) appeared in mid decade, and many coastal states seized the opportunity to declare their extended maritime zones.

ii) / US diplomatic debacle in Vietnam also played a great role in shaping the changed geopolitical framework of the region. Saigon fell in 1975 and the geostrategic balance in the Western Pacific changed fundamentally as American naval and air superiority could no longer be guaranteed across the increasingly important sea lanes of South-East Asia.

iii) // One major source of upcoming conflict was ironically a much needed global reform - spearheaded by UN and concluded in UNCLOS - III about the marine fisheries resources in EEZ. The concept of 200 nautical miles EEZ was accepted and seem to be compensation for their terrestrial poverty as very few of them have been blessed with any substantial land resources. The EEZ made them available the unexploited fruitful extended economic maritime zone.

iv) The fracturing of the ANZUS Treaty, as a result of New Zealand's decision in 1985, to prohibit into its ports the nuclear weapon carrying warships and the consequent withdrawal in August 1986 by the US from its defence obligations to New Zealand - has caused apprehensions about the shaky nature of regional security umbrella.

v) Anti-nuclear movement culminating in the South Pacific Nuclear Free Zone (SPNEZ) Treaty or Treaty of Rarotonga.

vi) The region's two troublesome security issues - border conflict between PNG and Indonesia, and decolonisation of French territory of New Caledonia had taken turn for worse and thus contributed to an increase in regional tension.

Let us now discuss these geopolitical and geo-strategic issues elaborately which have altered the security environment in the South Pacific region.

1. THE CONTROVERSY OVER FISHING AGREEMENTS : Most of the extraregional and superpowers appear to be motivated in the region primarily by the desire to facilitate, the continued operation of their large fishing fleets, in the area. This has to be considered in the context of the move by the newly independent South Pacific States to declare 200 miles zone, Under such arrangement EEZ, most of the independent island states, being archipelagic countries, have sovereignty over a very large areas of ocean - so large in fact that taken collectively they claim control over most of the South Pacific region. The declaration of these zones, the political changes within the countries of the region and the increasing attractiveness of the South Pacific as a fishing ground have made it advisable to distant water fishing nations, like Soviet Union and Japan to develop closer relations with the new states of the region. This has rendered the Pacific states more

importance than their small size would normally dictate and made developments in the South Pacific region of prime concern of the governments of countries bordering the Pacific.

The Soviet Union has been particularly concerned to establish a base for its fishing fleets in the region. For nearly two decades Soviet Union has been strengthening its Pacific fleet though its strength is far behind the Americans. Since mid-1970s, it has mooted the idea of having fishing facilities with several island countries. In 1979, it proposed to undertake a survey of fishing resources in the neighbourhood of Cook islands and Papua New Guinea. However, the negotiations did not bear fruit due to the events of Afghanistan. Soviet Union approached Tonga, and in 1980 Tonga allowed them to conduct researches on Tuna fishing but refused permission to survey the water in 1984. With Fiji also there were negotiations in 1982 without yielding results. In fact, the Fijian ports were closed for the Soviets in mid-1982 though cruise ships were given permission again in mid-1986. In 1985, there were Soviet negotiations with Soloman Islands and Tuvalu but they refused to grant Soviet Union fishing rights in their EEZ. Notwithstanding several rejections of the Soviet overtures by the island countries which were obviously done at the behest of Western powers, there was a degree of success with

/Kiribati and Vanuatu. The fishing agreements of Soviet Union with these two small island countries sparked off a great controversy in the fluid geopolitical environment of the region. In fact, the background of this situation was created by USA's illegal fishing and poaching activities in the region.

American poaching of Tuna fishes, had been a sensitive political issue in the region. As late in 1979, a few US Tunaboats visited the area on an experimental basis. By 1984, over 50 US flag vessels patrolled the area in each season. Coming to region for richer catches they needed to survive an industry with wide depression. The large American boats, many equipped with helicopters, dwarfed the other fishing vessels, and took an annual catch of nearly 2 lakh tons. Understandably, some South Pacific island countries saw such things as a threat to local Tuna resources.

Most intriguing thing which disturbed micro-states of region was American fishing without licences, in the region which were declared to be "EEZ". According to these countries' laws, coastal states have sovereignty over all fish in such zones, but US law exempted Tuna and other highly migratory fishes. As Paul F. Gardner says, "a situation was created in which the Tuna fishermen were committing an offence under local law, but not under US law. the law of the

sea convention to which the US was not a signatory, supported SPIC's view of sovereignty while asserting the need for regional management of the highly migratory species. The US did not recognise that law of sea convention (UNCLOS III) has made its previous law illegal, but supported the regional management of fishing resources."⁶

With the potential political costs of these measures in mind, the US proposed in 1977 that Pacific island states enter into regional fisheries agreement with it that would supercede the earlier US legislation. Negotiations to this end did not lead to agreement, however, in part because, many Pacific island countries felt under duress. They had deep rooted suspicion that the American Tunaboat Association will use American legislation to extract much more favourable tenure.

The Solomon island's confiscation of an American fishing boat, seized in its waters in June 1984 brought fishery differences to a climax. American law required an embargo on imports of Soloman Island's fish products which provided 20% of that country's foreign exchange earnings. Other Pacific Island's governments were enraged by this development and an island's boycott of regional fishery negotiations seemed inevitable. However, it was averted when US lifted the embargo when a newly elected Soloman Islands government agreed to resume

6. Paul F. Gardner ; Tuna Poaching and nuclear testing in South Pacific; Orbis Spring 1988, p.249

talks with the ATA on a licensing agreement. Two difficult years of negotiations produced a regional fisheries agreement signed on April 2, 1987.

Meanwhile, Mikhail Gorbachev in his Vladivostak speech on Asia-Pacific affairs in July 1986 clearly signalled the Soviet Union's intention to expand its interest and influence in the South Pacific. Since the mid-1970s, USSR had been trying to expand its fishing fleets in the South Pacific. After years of being quietly out-manoeuvred by Australia and New Zealand's diplomatic pressures, USSR met success when it negotiated a one year fishing access agreement in 1985, with the island nation of Kiribati and in 1987 with Vanuata. Soviet agreement with Vanuata lapsed after one year while contract with Kiribati was being negotiated for renewal. Soviet fishing fleets' 'massive' presence viewed with apprehensions and suspicions in Western circles. Heritage Foundation's Report on "Moscow's South Pacific fleets" can be quoted here to provide an example,

"The Soviet Union has made its fleet into an effective instrument of foreign policy by co-ordinating its peacetime maritime policy with its naval strategy. In this sense, the Soviet fishing fleet is a component of a long range plan to neutralize and weaken Western political influence. Fishing agreements had allowed the Soviets to enhance their political presence and expand the bilateral naval relationships." (7).

7. "Moscow's fishing fleet is much more than it seems"; Heritage foundation Report prepared by Byung Ki Kim Asian Studies Centre Backgrounder, Sept. 6, 1988.

Soviet proximity with these two small island nations raised the eyebrows of Western diplomats who interpreted them as a conspiracy to weaken Western political influence. It was feared that following the establishment of a permanent naval base in Vietnam's Cam Ranh Bay in 1980, USSR had now turned its attention to South Pacific and manipulating the emerging leadership of South Pacific islands and their frustration with US tuna boat associations, who were perceived by using their EEZs without paying adequate fees, For example, Soviet Union agreed to pay 1.7 million worth US dollars as compared to US\$ 2 lakhs paid by US tuna fishing industry. By this bargaining, Soviet Union allowed the Kremlin to control at least half of Kiribati's fish production and export. By establishing close diplomatic relations and fishing agreement with Vanuatu, Soviet Union succeeded in wooing this strategically important country which is located 900 miles north-east of Australia.

A very sensitive fact about Vanuatu which sparked off obnoxious speculations with Cuba and USSR and close informal relations with Libya. Vanuatu's prime minister Father Walter Lini took keen interest in negotiations for an agreement with Soviet Union which allowed Soviet access to Vanuatu's main ports and held open the possibility of future agreements. However, the fishing agreement with Vanuatu was not reviewed and lapsed.

Meanwhile, US also realised the crucial significance of a regional fishing agreement and was involved in serious negotiations. The final agreement projected that US was no less generous than other countries. But the agreement could not resolve all the problems. While the signed agreements awaited ratification by US Senate, the governments of Kiribati, Tuvalu and the Soloman islands continued to protest unlicensed fishing in their waters by several American vessels one of which Kiribati subsequently seized. The SPICs remained suspicious of ATA's intentions and Washington's willingness to control it.

NUCLEAR GEOPOLITICS IN THE SOUTH PACIFIC : Not long after the dawn of the nuclear age, the South Pacific region has been turned into one of the most nuclearized regions in the world, by way of nuclear testing, dumping of nuclear waste and transit of nuclear weapons and missile carrying vessels. Many of the lush green islands and atolls of the South Pacific have been used by one nuclear power or another for weapon testing and perfecting its nuclear warfighting capabilities. The South Pacific micro-states considered that they have been exploited and used by the nuclear powers as guinea pigs in the nuclear arms race leading to contamination of their waters, serious health hazards to their citizens and complex security problems.

Before the shock of Hiroshima could subsidise USA started atmospheric testing over the Bikini atoll in the Marshall islands of Micronesia in 1946). In 1948, US began testing at Eniwetak atoll of the same island group, where they exploded first Hydrogen bomb in 1952. The consequences of Bikini and Eniwetak tests were horrondous for the Marshall islanders. The Hydrogen test explosion forced theislanders to leave their homelands and led to diseases such as Thyroid cancer, leukemia, miscarriage)- even after years of the explosion. T.V. Paul has rightly observed,

"Much of the anti-nuclear sentiments of the South Pacific people are the result of the painful experiences of the Marshall islanders and the intangible radiation effects of atmospheric testings at other Pacific sites." (8)

(Alongwith US, Great Britain also started using Pacific possessions and some Australian sites for nuclear weapon-testing. These tests, conducted until 1957 resulted in serious health hazards to the people living in surrounding region. However, it was the obnoxious French nuclear testing at Muroroa atoll in French Polynesia led to widespread protests and solidarity that the South Pacific countries had forged in their sturggle for redeeming the region from the formidable nuclear menace.)

France began its explosions in 1966, and since then conducted more than 100 tests of which 41 were atmospheric

8. T.V. Paul : "Nuclear free zone in the South Pacific: Rhetoric or Reality"; Round Table, July 1986. p.252-262.

tests. The continuing French nuclear testing in the region has been challenged by Australia and New Zealand in International Court of Justice, at diplomatic levels in the UN and other World Forums and through industrial and commerce trade actions aimed at curbing the movements of the French goods through the South Pacific.)

France in turn sought to justify the testing by saying that the tests are completely innocuous and do not pose any radiation or health hazards to the region. Subsequently it even resorted to terrorist type activities when French agents sabotaged the Greenpeace protest ship "Rainbow Warrior" in Auckland harbour; thus recklessly declaring its motive of removing forcefully all the obstacles from its testing programme. 'Rainbow Warrior' episode is a watershed in the nuclear geopolitical scene of the South Pacific. Some elaborate light must be thrown to highlight the high water mark of anti-nuclear movement of the region.

THE 'RAINBOW WARRIOR' EPISODE : On 10th July 1985, the ship 'Rainbow Warrior' belonging to the International environmental group "Greenpeace" was sunk by bombs in Auckland harbour, that caused international furore and diplomatic embarrassment for France.

France has continued testing nuclear weapons in the South Pacific primarily to protect and project its status

as a world power and to pursue the option of an independent nuclear deterrent, the decision which was taken in the mid-1950s. The tests embrace the variety of weapon system constituting France's independent strike for world's third largest nuclear arsenal.)

The programme of French nuclear test in the South Pacific first began with a 25-30 KT atmospheric explosions on 2nd July 1966. However, New Zealand succeeded to eliminate atmospheric tests from Pacific by compelling France with a permanent action in ICJ. The series of underground testing began with a 5 KT device of Fangatauta island on 5th June 1975. France exploded a 150 KT device on 9th May 1985, the 69th in underground series. Countries of the South Pacific have been united, local and persistent in their opposition to French nuclear testing. The opposition has been exposed by national leaders, through regional agencies and international fora. "However the basic difficulty in regional efforts to restrain and terminate French tests" says Ramesh Thakur "is that New Zealand and other South Pacific countries lack the military might, economic resources or diplomatic sections to compel France to terminate its nuclear programmes."⁹

The Greenpeace was founded in 1969 and has been engaged in protest activity against French nuclear tests

9. Ramesh Thakur; "A dispute of many colours; France, New Zealand and the Rainbow Warrior Affair", World Today, Dec. 1986.

since 1972. The Rainbow warrior, a converted fishing vessel sailed into Auckland harbour on 7th July 1985 to prepare for a flagship of anti-nuclear protest - Flotilla in anticipation of a resumption of testing at Muroura. On 10th July 1985, the Warrior was blown up by two limpet mines and sunk in Auckland harbour, killing a photographer Fernando Pereria, a Portugese born Dutch citizen. Arrest of two French citizens - Alain and Sophie Tuvenge intensified the suspect of official French involvement, the French Government repeatedly denied for having ordered any action against Greenpeace. Nevertheless, after investigative journalism by some of French journalists, the Tuvenges were identified by mid-August as serving officers of French security agency, "*Director Generale De La Securite Extenieure*". (DGSE). On 26th July 1985, New Zealand issued further warrants for the arrests of 3 Frenchmen who left Auckland just hours before the Greenpeace explosion in a boat "Owea". Growing domestic revelations and international scrutiny finally forced French Government to order enquiry in the Rainbow Affiar by Bernard Tricot.

Tricot delivered a 29 page report to the French Government on 25th April 1985 and confirmed that the Greenpeace anti-nuclear compaign in South Pacific had been under surveillance by two DGSE teams. Their mission was to undergo navigational training in South

Pacific to keep the French secret service informed on Greenpeace Flotilla assemblage and to study the possibility of joining a Greenpeace boat in future protest campaign. Tricot also confirmed the identity and military connections of Tuvenges and Ketch Ouvea. However, Tricot exonerated DGSE and French Government on the ground that there were no evidence to suggest that the Tuvenges or any other French agent had strayed from their mission and planted the two bombs that sunk the Rainbow Warrior. By issuing such a report, Tricot ensured himself a dubious niche in history. His report was greeted with instant dismissal and widespread indignation.

France, even after the embarrassment of the Rainbow Warrior Affair, refused to budge on the issue of nuclear testing at Mururoa. President Mitterand flew to Mururoa in mid-September 1985 to emphasize French determination to continue tests.

THE GENESIS AND EVOLUTION OF S.P.N.F.Z. TREATY : Increased regional feelings towards the continuing testing of lethal nuclear weapons in South Pacific were intensified and manifested in the early 1970s when the newly independent SPICs began to express their concern over the issues. The coming into power of Labour parties in Australia and New Zealand gave further fillip to the move towards denuclearization of the region.

The factors responsible for re-emergence and consolidation of nuclear-weapon-free-zone idea were following :

- i) Growing antipathy towards the French atmospheric nuclear testing in Polynesian territories.
- ii) The emergence of a consciousness of a South Pacific regional solidarity.
- iii) The desire of the Australian and New Zealand's governments to pursue independent policy choices.
- iv) The conclusion of Latin American Nuclear Weapon free zone (Treaty of Tlatelco) and other worldwide efforts towards regional Nuclear Weapon free zone (NWFZ).
- v) UN General Assembly move towards NWFZ.

The first serious effort towards establishing Nuclear weapon free zone in South Pacific was taken by New Zealand in 1975 at the South Pacific Forum meeting and subsequently at UN General Assembly . Despite the vagueness regarding the definition and geographical extent, New Zealand's proposal got unanimous support of South Pacific Forum in 1975 meeting.

The General Assembly Resolution¹⁰ initiated by New Zealand, Papua New Guinea and Fiji was adopted by a rate of 110, with 20 abstentions and no negative votes.

10. UN General Assembly Resolution No.3477 (XXX) 30th Session, 11th Dec. 1975.

The adoption of the resolution focussed international attention in the issue and strengthened the commonness of viewpoints among the South Pacific countries on the question. However, the initial euphoria regarding the resolution subsided with the change of government in Australia and New Zealand in 1975. The subsequent South Pacific Forum meetings dropped the idea from their agenda and their communication after 1976 did not mention even the issues until 1983 when it re-emerged under Australian stewardship.

The conclusion of the Raratonga Treaty owes much to the Australian Labour Party's (ALP's) disarmament policies and its interest in strengthening the regional security system. The ALP came into power in 1983 with a Foreign Policy manifesto in which creation of NFZ in the South Pacific was prominent. Earlier in 1982, an ALP conference passed a resolution condemning dumping of nuclear waste materials in the South Pacific, environmental contamination, and expressed support to South Pacific states, in opposing the testing of nuclear weapons, nuclear devices and other nuclear weapon systems in the region and asked the Australian Government to urge the UN to hold an international conference aimed at banning all nuclear weapons in the region.

This ALP resolution was transformed into specific proposal for a NFZ by Bob Hawke's Labour Government and was later submitted to 14th South Pacific Forum meeting

in Canberra in August 1983. At this meeting the proposal actually failed and it was confined to NFZ that would ban all nuclear weapon acquisitions, testing, storage and waste dumping. SPF meeting in 1984 in Tuvalu endorsed the Australian proposal and a final communique urged the desirability of establishing immediately a nuclear weapon free zone in the region. Australia again submitted its proposals in a draft-treaty in the SPF meeting at Raratonga, Cooke islands.

So, finally on 6th August 1985, the Hiroshima Day, 13 SPF countries concluded the SPNFZ Treaty, thereby declaring the region free of nuclear proliferation. 8 of the SPF members signed the treaty on the same day, while the rest were expected to follow suit in due course.

The SPNFZ evoked sharply different reactions - on the one hand, it was hailed as second most effective NFZ in an inhabited region in the World after the Treaty of Tlatelco. On the other hand, critics dubbed it as a "Clayton's Treaty" and as a cosmetic measure aimed at containing and defusing growing popular pressure for regional denuclearisation. Greg Fry, in this context has said, "the SPNFZ was a compromise of divergent views that the South Pacific countries hold on the question of eliminating the nuclear threat from region."¹¹

11. Grey Fry; "South Pacific Nuclear Free Zone ; Significance and implications" Journal of International affairs. Vol. 31. |

SALIENT FEATURES OF S.P.N.F.Z. TREATY : The SPNFZ Treaty entered into force on December 11, 1986. Under the Treaty, the signing parties undertake :

- i) Not to manufacture or otherwise acquire, possess or have control over any nuclear explosive device by any means anywhere inside and outside the region, not to seek or receive any assistance for such purposes, nor to assist or encourage any state to engage in such activities (Art.3).
- ii) To prevent in its territory, the stationing of any nuclear explosive device. (Art. 5).
- iii) To prevent in its territory the testing of nuclear explosive device (Art.6).
- iv) Not to dump or assist or encourage or to dump radioactive waste and other radioactive matter at sea anywhere within SPNFZ, and to prevent such dumping by anyone in the territorial sea.(Art.7).

Three Protocols were added to the Treaty :

- a) Under Protocol 1, three expected signatories - France, UK and USA were invited to undertake to apply a number of key treaty provisions in their territories in the region.
- b) Protocol 2 is open for signature by all five nuclear weapon states, and asks them to observe the treaty and refrain from using or threatening to use any nuclear explosive device against the parties or their territories.

- c) Protocol 3 addressed to all five, nuclear powers requests for a promise not to conduct any test of nuclear explosive device within the SPNFZ.

Criticism : The incompetence of the nuclear free character of the zone is evident from following five deliberate, calculated or manouevered omissions in the list of prohibited activities.

- i) The Treaty allows each party to decide on transit of foreign ships and aircrafts in its territory (Art. 5.2). No mention is made of permissible duration of such a transit of nuclear weapon carrying or nuclear fuelled vessels.
- ii) The Treaty does not extend the prohibitions to the larger portion of the zone, namely the high seas so that nuclear armed ships or aircrafts of states not parties to the Treaty. Toshiki Mogami has remarked on this, "in thissense although the treaty purports to establish a zone, it is zone only insofar as theparties to treaty are concerned, and to the extent the parties to protocols are bound by them. As it is at best a porous zone, the SPNFZ's approach might be called a 'pseudo-zonal' approach." ¹²
- iii) In context to the negative security assurances written under Protocol 2, the nuclear weapon states only guarantee not against the parties

12. Toshiki Mogami; "The South Pacific Nuclear Free Zone: A Fettered Leap forward", Journal of Peace Research, Vol. 24, No.4, 1988, pp.413-415.

to the treaty, they do not have to refrain from the use or the threat of use of nuclear weapons from within the zone. This can occur from the high seas or from the ports or airfields of the zone states. The former is an easy corollary of the principle of the "freedom of the seas", and the latter can occur as a consequence of de facto approval of transit.

- iv) The Treaty does not touch upon nuclear support facilities and installations for command, control, communication and intelligence, although these constitute an integral part of nuclear war fighting today.
- v) Missiles tests were not banned. Like support facilities missiles without warheads are not nuclear in themselves but are quasi-nuclear in that they are indispensable to nuclear weapon production and perfection.

SUPERPOWER'S RESPONSE : The response of the superpowers and the other nuclear powers to SPNFZ Treaty assume major importance in view of increasing great power involvement.

SOVIET UNION : The Soviet Union had not given the region much strategic values until recently when they expanded their fishing operations into the region. However, Soviet presence still was minimal as the South Pacific was part of Western sphere of influence

Soviet response can be understood in this backdrop. It has been very positive though Soviet Union was more interested in an exclusive and all-pervasive NFZ Treaty that would practically remove all the US nuclear facilities from the region. Moscow was also interested to see an end to the transit of US nuclear ships and submarines following the load taken by New Zealand in this context. The Soviet Union has seen the treaty as an important step in emergence of anti-nuclear movement and ultimate collapse of ANZUS.

THE UNITED STATES : Response from the US was ambivalent. Though the treaty would not anyway curtail its current nuclear activities in the region, the success of nuclear movement had disturbed the US plan to deploy more nuclear missiles in the region.

FRANCE : France, who was main culprit and to whom the treaty was mainly targeted, chose to neglect it for the time being. Mitterand Govt. thought that yielding to regional pressures would be a defeatist step as France was already disreputed because of certain blunders committed in tackling the anti-nuclear movement in the region.

The future of SPNFZ is greatly dependent on the willingness of nuclear powers, specially France and USA to sign and observe its protocols and provisions and to implement it in their territories of region.

RIFT IN ANZUS ALLIANCE : The most dramatic development in the South Pacific geopolitics, which has changed the existing equations of superpowers influence to great extent, has been the open rift between New Zealand and USA-two major partners of ANZUS over the issue of visits of latter's nuclear armed and powered naval vessels.

The ANZUS Treaty, signed in San Fransisco on Sept. 1, 1951 sought to institutionalise Western influence and dominance in South and South West Pacific. For almost three and half decades, the ANZUS has been a central factor in the foreign and defence policies of Australia and New Zealand. However, it came under severe friction after the Labour Parties came in power in New Zealand and Australia.

Daving Lange's government in New Zealand, having been elected on anti-nuclear platform has felt obliged to ban the entry of nuclear ships into New Zealand. As US does not normally certify whether or not its visiting ships carry nuclear weapons, this has created a crisis in trilateral ANZUS security pact. The Reagan administration immediately retaliated by banning New Zealand from joint military exercises, sharing of military intelligence and military training etc. In other words, New Zealand was virtually superceded from the ANZUS security links with US.

Lange justified the ship ban as a decision based on the national situation and not on some moral crusade.

But these arguments have not found any weight with US, which believes in the indivisibility of a security alliance relationship. It does not want to allow its security partners to pick and choose and reject parts of a total alliance system. T.V. Paul comments:

"New Zealand can not be expected to have the security of US connection while simultaneously refusing to fulfill its total obligations. It was the dominant US reaction on New Zealand's action." (13)

The Lange Government, in turn, sought to re-direct New Zealand's defence and foreign policies towards the immediate South Pacific neighbourhood, based on a higher degree of military self-sufficiency. In seeking to redirect its strategic priorities from South East Asia to South Pacific, the Lange Government was focussing attention to the danger of Soviet penetration. According to David Barber: "New Zealand has adopted more self-reliant rather self sufficient defence policy as a result of its exclusion from cooperation with USA"¹⁴ In a defence white paper tabled in parliament on Feb. 26, 1987 Government had stated that New Zealand's area of direct strategic concern overlaps with Australia and the South Pacific countries.

AUSTRALIA'S NEW DEFENCE POLICY AND THE ANZUS : After the open ruptures developed between two major allies of

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13. T.V. Paul; "Nuclear Free Zone in South Pacific : Rhetoric or reality; Round Table, 1988 July.
14. David Barber, "Defence, Self Reliance and Security" Far Eastern Economic Review, Vol. 135 , No.17, March 12. 1987.

ANZUS.-New Zealand and USA, it was speculated in diplomatic circles that US and Australia may forge a bilateral alliance to further their strategic interests in the Pacific but Australia's Labour PM Bob Hawke gave a shock by announcing during his visit to US that Australia was interested to refuse granting of support facilities to American planes monitoring the MX missiles tests in the South Pacific. Though Australia tried to clarify that there was no comparison between Australian reversal and New Zealand's rejection of US warship. But in no less strict terms, Australia has made it known that it was opposed to the testing of nuclear devices or delivery system or near its territory.

The current dispute within the ANZUS alliance partly results from the change in perceptions about the nature of security threat in the South Pacific. According to H.M.L. Beri; "with the acceptance of Japan as an almost full partner in the Alliance of industrial centres and opening of the Beijing to West, perceptions of ANZUS treaty has greatly changed in recent years. No longer China and Japan with whom they have good relations can be seen as threats so the attempts have been to bring the Soviet threat into focus. But following the American withdrawal from South-East Asia and the Soviet influence in Kampuchea and Vietnam the adversary has come much closer." 15

15. H.M.L. Beri; "Crisis in ANZUS"; Strategic Analysis, Vol. VIII, No.12, March 1985.

THE INTRA-REGIONAL PROBLEMS : THE NEW CALEDONIA ISSUE :

The New Caledonia, which comprises an area of 7300 sq.miles was discovered by Captain Cook in 1774, and was occupied by France in 1853 with Tahiti. In 1884, a separate administration was created for New Caledonia. However, it was served as a penal colony and suffered from neglect.

New Caledonia is rich in mineral wealth particularly Nickel, and it is this mineral wealth that is to great extent responsible for French temptation of eternal colonisation of New Caledonia. More sensitive aspect of New Caledonian colonia policies substantial encouragement to emigration by France. During 1960s and 1970s, French Government deliberately pursued a policy of emigrants colonisation. It had a direct consequence on the demograpnic composition of New Caledonia - as the indegenous Melanesian population known as 'Kanakas' have been reduced to minority in their own country. Out of the approximate population of 145,000 the Kanaks account for 43% while the remaining 57% is composed of foreign settlers. Among them, the French settlers known as 'Caloches' account for 37% while remainng 20% are made of Asian migrants of all races.

The latter two groups, which wish to remain part of the French Republic, constitute a majority of the population. Gino Naldi has remarked in this context;

"the fact that jointly the two non-Kanki groups are capable of truncating the option of independence in a referendum has seemed to aggravate the crisis."¹⁶

France has remained most reluctant colonial power to cope up with growing decolonization demand. In a period when colonialism has become an insitution of past French colonialism, New Caledonia remains as an anomaly. France has maintained remnants of colonialism in the form of small island territorial colonies of French Polynesia, New Caledonia and Wallis and Futuna islands.

What sets New Caledonia apart is that for the past decades particularly since the beginning of 1980s the relative calm in the territory was given way to a fierce freedom struggle of Kanaks under the banner of FNKK, and a civil confrontation between Kanaks - the Melanasian population and the Coldoche, the settler population.

The Kanaks are demanding independence and challenging the continued French rule, rejecting any form of association with France. On the other hand the Coldoche advocate regional autonomy for the territory under French rule or some farming association with France.

The New Caledonia conflict, being essentially a conflict of indigenous Melanesian population against the settler population has given a fillip to the growth of Melanesian nationalism. This had a chain effect in whole Melanesian region.

16. Naldi, Geon S; "Self-determination in the South Pacific: the case of New Caledonia", World Today, Vol. 1, No. 49.

CHAPTER - V

THE GEOPOLITICAL LINKAGES AND EXTERNAL
ENTANGLEMENTS IN FIJI CRISIS

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For most of the post-War period, the South Pacific has seen a relatively a low level of direct super power conflict. However, very recently the situation has changed bringing about new geopolitical equations which we have discussed in the last Chapter. The Fiji crisis has a deep rooted and generic linkage with these developments. To analyse the impact of South Pacific geo-politics in shaping the events of Fiji, it is essential to understand the motives and objectives of possible destabilisation and mischief by external powers.

CHALLENGE TO WESTERN DOMINANCE AND IMPACT ON FIJI CRISIS :

The balance of power in the South Pacific was always tilted towards the US and Western Powers. The strategic doctrine which has been the corner stone of US Policy alongwith its traditional allies Australia and New Zealand was the doctrine of 'strategic denial.'

However, South Pacific now is no longer quite an 'American lake'. In the sense that was more or less the case for the whole period from 1945 to 1975. Now there are undoubted challenges to American supremacy from the Soviet Union, potential and 'high risk' intruders Libya and Cuba from rising nationalism among the Polynesian, Melanesian and Micronesian people of the micro states and from suddenly doubtful looking allies like New Zealand and, to some extent, Australia. The Potential contenders Japan and China and several minor powers of the Pacific region are steadily becoming conscious of divergencies of the interests from the US.

Among these, most furious challenge has come from Soviet Union. Most important strategic development in regional geopolitics has been the growth of Soviet naval and air capability in the region since 1975. That growth has been partly based on the Soviet acquisition of facilities that the US built in Cam Ranh Bay and Dannang. Cam Ranh Bay was formally US base in the South Vietnam, now it is a major Soviet base. It is the only Pacific warm water base for the Soviet navy and is in the process of considerable modernisation and expansion. It was in August 1985 that the USSR secured its controversial fisheries access to Kiribati. But despite all important antecedents to a broader Soviet involvement in the region, Gorbachev's Vladivostak speech in July 1986 may mark the transition of Soviet

policy from one era to another. The Vladivostak speech appears to be designed to draw together a number of policy strands to create a creative and coherent Pacific oriented initiative. "To the extent", says Richard A. Herr,¹ that the South Pacific is a serious element in the grand Soviet strategy. The Soviet's previous reliance on opportunism was intended to be replaced by a more directed search for influence."

The present greater Soviet involvement in the South Pacific has elicited only limited and cautious reactions in the island countries, though it has produced something close to alarm in Western states with their own interest and stakes in the region. Richard Herr further says "Whether or not Gorbachov's Vladivostak initiative can be said to have caused it directly, the Western security posture of 'strategic denial' is now close to collapse."²

Those who believe that intercourse with the USSR will pose a threat to the island countries and through them, to wider Western security interests, are concerned at the prospect of an accommodation which could legitimate a continued Soviet presence in the South Pacific. These anxieties have been echoed by conservative sections of the Australian and New Zealand's politics.

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1. Richard Aherr; "the Soviet Union in the South Pacific" in the changing pacific : four case studies, ed. Theo Ray.
 2. Richard Aherr *ibid.*

The two principal regional powers in the South Pacific - Australia and Newzealand, have a history of continuous defence cooperation with the US from world War II and onwards. The two have been formally allied with each other since 1944, and with the US from 1951 in the ANZUS pact. Their participation in other Western alliance - SEATO and Five power's defence Arrangement, have served to extend their Military Commitment to Western security. Thus is is natural for these two countries that they would seek to maintain a politico-strategic climate in their neighbourhood which would be congenial to Western interests; more specifically that the island micro-states would be tied and aligned with the West as critical issues.

Early in the decolonisation of the South Pacific the Western political orientation was assumed more than pursued as deliberate policy. The islands' long contact with Western states the ready transfer of democratic institutions, the extent of deeply entrenched Christian values and the relatively peaceful passage to independence; all these tended to reassure the Western powers, including Australia and Newzealand that the post-colonial South Pacific would have a pronounced Western bent on the question of security.

However by the early 1980s, the newly found consensus on the general features of strategic denial, began to be challenged. In its fundamentals, a policy of excluding almost all Soviet influence in the South Pacific depended on one or two essential conditions. Either the islands would have to be so completely committed to their Western alignments that they would resist any blandishment from the USSR; or the Soviet interest in the region would be kept so low that no serious influence can be made. As the second option was not reliable; they worked towards ensuring the continuance of the islands' unquestioned loyalty to western security system. Ironically, for the Western powers it was precisely in this area that most of the politico-strategic changes were threatening strategic denial strategy.

The continuing ANSUS imbroglio over the issue of port access to US nuclear armed ships, had produced more than just a dramatic insight into asymmetrical treaty relations under stress. Richard A.Herr has remarked in this context : "The ANSUZ crisis revealed to the South Pacific nations how fully their own security was tied to the American nuclear umbrella. In some states this revelation provoked reflection,

while in others it served to reinforce commitment to a Western alignment."³

In the event, sufficient agreement existed for a minimalist Nuclear - Free Zone treaty to be drafted, signed and ratified, despite the objections of the British, French and US governments' objections to it. The Treaty of Rarotonga, thus was not intended to undermine the Western alignment of the region, but it did move the islands away from the critical configurations of great powers' security interests in the region.

Another kind of challenge to Western hegemonic dominance was posed by some bold and independent decisions of two of the small island states - Kiribati and Vanuatu. The impact of their granting fisheries contract to Soviet Union must be analysed here in his context. American stand on Marine resources, specially Tuna fish, was seen to endanger the widest and most intense suspicion regarding the benefits of Western alignment. The Reagan administration's refusal to accept the new Law of sea regime, vital to micro islands economies was seen as neglect of the primary interests of the poorest of island countries. For states with marine resources as the principal hope for some form of economic self - sufficiency this threat was tantamount to undermining their national sovereignty.

3. Richard A.Herr; "Regionalism, Strategic denial and South Pacific Security", Journal of Pacific History (October 1986).

It was almost precisely in these terms that President Tabai of Kiribati justified his decision to enter into a fisheries access agreement with the Soviet Union in August 1985. The Wisdom of Tabai's decision was questioned by island states as well as Western Metropolitan powers despite his claims that treaty was purely commercial and economic in nature. Notwithstanding his government's ambiguous efforts to prevent Soviet Union from gaining any non-fishing advantage from the agreement, he could not control the boost to Soviet influence in the region. It further stimulated Soviet efforts to seek similar access from other islands states. With the demonstration effect of the contract, Vanuatu reached a similar and more extensive agreement with the USSR in January 1987.

This altering power configuration was leading the Small states of the region to move towards declared policy of nonalignment. However only Vanuatu, under the leadership of defiant PM Walter Lini joined the NAM. The erosion of unequal support for alignment weakened the collective inhibitions on dealing with the USSR, with the result that a growing number of island states have been prepared to give at least some thought for commercial ties - ties that were unthinkable only five years earlier.

THE LIBYAN FACTOR : The Libyan intrusion in the South Pacific has been interpreted by some observers as instigated by the Soviet Union. For some other observers, Libya's interests has been motivated primarily by its drive to embarass French colonialists and confound the US. Whatever the reasons the Libyan adventure in South Pacific had raised Western doubts and helped to draw a higher level of Israeli involvement in the South Pacific region.

It is in this backdrop of immediate geopolitical environment of the region that the motives and intentions of great powers can be ascertained to establish the validity and took of external involvement propositions in Fiji. According to one established view, as expressed by John Cherian :

" The geopolitics of the region appears to have shaped the cause of recent events in Fiji."(4)

Let us have an insight into the various conspiracy theories of external entanglements offered by various analysts and investigative journalists.

CRITICAL STUDY OF US INVOLVEMENT: Substantial evidence of external, specifically US involvement in Fiji coup

4. John Cherian, "Fiji: An Indian dilemma"; World Focus (November 1987).

has been put up by different journalists. There are speculations from several quarters that US had been involved- through covert intervention by secret intelligence agency, CIA in general in the Fijian Military Coup.

Before judging the US complicity in Fijian destabilization, it is important to discuss the possible US motives behind such move.

- (i) US had very keen interest to maintain status quo in Fiji and frustrate any radical transformations in its internal politics. The US had for years been cultivating Ratu Mara as a faithful ally, having a marked anti-Soviet foreign policy.

Fiji's identification with the US interests was not new. A long history existed of Fiji's Alliance Government's close military ties with US and its foreign policy objectives. Robert T Robertson says: "Problem faced by US to disassociate itself from the coup, was the general knowledge that they were actively involved in shaping the destiny of Fiji to satisfy their geostrategic aims!"⁵

5. Robert T Robertson and A. Taminsau, Fiji: The Shattered Coups (Sydney 1987).

Mara's foreign policy had a special pro-US bias from very beginning. For example, even after being a member of S.P.F. speargroup, it did not go to the assistance of Vanvatu in 1980 when the US phoenix corporation and French settlers financed secessionist revolt in Santo. Nevertheless, as military ties with US increased, disquiet arose as to its implications. The government had not initiated public debates on foreign policy choices and total abandonment of nonalignment.

The Alliance Party under the leadership of Mara had maintained a close secret linkage with US. In 1982 general election, US consultancy firm "Business International" was hired to design an electoral strategy for his party. Anti-Soviet hysteria was used for election propaganda. There were accusations that NFP had been financed by Soviet Union and has received 1 million dollars for that. US agents were alleged to have masterminded Alliance counter attacks against NFP in 1982.

In past 1980 period, Fiji and US had come closer in security understanding. Mara was given important say in US's CINPAC Headquarter's policies and was appointed to the Standing Committee of the Pacific Islands Development programme (PIDP), the US version of SPF secretariat. In the same year Fiji lifted its ban on the visits of US nuclear ships.

US offered Fiji 3 million dollars per annum aid under its weapon standardization programme and eventually concluded on annual aid programme worth 2.5 million dollars. To administer the bilateral aid, an office was established under William Paupe, who was long time employee of USAID and served in US as part of CIA programme. Military links of Fiji with US were consolidated through US International Military Education and Training programme and Pacific Army Management Seminars (PAM). Col. Sitveni Rohika attended several of PAM seminar in Manila in 1981.

(ii) American interest in Fiji was not an isolated affair but accompanied renewed pressure after a changed geostrategic climate in the South Pacific. With a large number of elections due in the South Pacific (Australia, Newzealand, Fiji, Papua New Guinea, Kiribati and Vanuatu) in 1987 US pressures intensified. US had a growing realization that pursuit of US strategic goals was getting increasingly difficult. A new generation of Pacific island leaders with more venturous ideas for charting their directions of foreign as well as domestic policies was emerging and striving to come to power. Most of them believe that US had taken more from them than it had given. They had a feeling that US

had harvested regional fisheries, benefitted from the facility to its naval vessels and enjoyed their support in international fora without contributing significantly to the region's economic development. So, US needed very badly some pre-emptive measure against this growing antipathy to its status and powers.

(iii) More significantly, Fiji labour party had a very sound foreign policy stand, sometimes in total contrast to Alliance's foreign policy. Dr Bavadra had, during his campaign, asserted that he would follow a strong anti-nuclear line and establish close links with the NAM. The labour movement in Fiji was a formidable challenge to US policy goals in the South Pacific. To counter and stuttle the anti-nuclear sentiments in the Pacific Trade Union Forum (PTUF), a regional consortium of left and liberal trade unions in which the Fiji Labour Movement was most prominent, US started financing AAFLI (Asian-American Free Labour Institute) which had definite CIA connections. The Coalition leaders during election campaign focussed on all these issues. In one of very few foreign policy statements, the Labour Party leader Krishna Dutta declared :

" Banning all US nuclear ships would display in a more concrete way Fiji's displeasure at US actions in the South Pacific - in particular US's refusal to sign the Rarotonga Treaty and its disregards of democratic principles." (6)

6. Quoted by Robert Keith Ried - Island business (June 1987).

Richard A.Herr has further illustrated that it appeared that Labour Party has included within its policy platform a pledge to move Fiji out of its Western alignment. At the same time, potential was there to consolidate its ties with Soviet Union. ⁷

USA's CLANDESTINE COMPLICITY IN THE COUP : The military coup in Fiji has been interpreted by most of the Western analysis as the internal affair of Fiji. The issue of Fijian paramountcy was considered more justifiable than other reasons that give weight to neocolonial intervention. However, in South Pacific, the local factors have always been tied up with issues of global hegemony and regional geopolitics. US has constantly encouraged local dissensions because it facilitated the promotion of its own interests in the South Pacific. Admiral Ronald Hayes, Commander-in-Chief of the US Pacific forces (CINCPAC) expressed concern at the growth of anti-nuclear Fiji Labour party which challenged dominant interests of ruling elites intertwined with Metropolitan powers.



The reports in "Wellington Confidential", "Sydney Morning Herald" and one published in the 'US "The Nation" have given profound evidence of US complicity and involvement in the conspiracy to destabilize the FLP - NFP coalition government in Fiji. As pointed out lucidly

7. Richard A.Herr, "What is happening in our neighbourhood" Island Business (June 1987).

in the "Wellington confidential" report: " There has been an apparent triangle in Fiji European capital, Indian labour and ethnic Fijian land ownership - which manifests itself in all sorts of conflict. All these issues were involved in the coup, but there is lot of evidence that US encouraged and exploited them to bring about the coup."⁸

There is little evidence of direct US involvement in the 1987 election itself. However, before the coup, Bavadra Government was investigating that the US Embassy, via Willaim Paupe-the notorious Oliver North of Pacific, believed to be a CIA Agent, was funding Apisai Tora, the leader of Taukei movement. More than that Dr. Bavadra had publicly alleged after the coup that Willian Paupe had paid 2,00,000 Newzealand Dollars to Tora to step up violence and arson and create the excuses for destabilization. No doubt, after the April election results the Taukei movement in the name of spontaneous reaction, organised violent protest rallies which prepared the way for the coup. Apisai Tora, as a result was arrested for sedition. Mara's son Ratu Finau and other Alliance people were also involved in these rallies.

The nexus between defeated Alliance PM Mara and William Paupe was revealed by his trip to Honolulu, Hawaii. He went for the sake of explanation to attend a PIDP standing Committee, New Delhi. There he met Retired Admiral Liyod Vasey who was formerly in naval intelligence wing of CIA.

8. US Involvement in the Fiji Coup, Wellington Confidential Report.

The most important evidence of US complicity, direct or indirect, in military coup was the mysterious visit of General Vernon Walters. A few days after Mara was in Honolulu and two weeks before the coup, General Walters arrived in Suva. He was regarded as linchpin of several coups masterminded by the CIA worldover. The official reason for his Fiji visit was to discuss provisions of Fiji troops to the UN Force in the Middle-East. In fact, this was not discussed at all. He propagated phoney libyan scare and provided "evidences" of Libyan intrusion into the region. He assessed the political sympathies, vulnerabilities and potential corruptibilities of various Fijian leaders. He also induced a mood of complacency within Bavadra Government by playing down the US interest in the region and by reassuring that US is in no mood to intervene. According to Robertson "It was more likely that Walter's visit was designed simply to provide electoral ammunitions to US sympathizers, In this event his intrigue backfired!"⁹

What Walters did on his way to Fiji was probably much more relevant to the coup. He visited Australia, PNG, Soloman Islands, Western Samoa and Tonga, and spread a great trail of disinformation about Libyan activity in the South Pacific. The favourable reception of the coup and lukewarm response by SPF countries particularly by Melanesian countries can be explained as the success of Walter's visits.

9. Robert T Robertson and A. Taminsau, n5/p.41

Coming to other actors, affiliated to US and involved in the Coup, Joann Wypijewski, names an organization National Endowment for Democracy. At the time of the Coup, its patronage took tangible form in a conference on the "Meaning of democracy" hosted by Pacific Democratic Union at Sigotoka, Fiji. The PDU, an affiliate of International democratic union, was a regional alliance of right wing parties which received handsome sum of money from US. Maj. Gen. Singlaub who played dirty role in Philippines developments was also present there.

Newzealand journalist David Robie had reported that the PDU Conference which Mara co-chaired provided the former Prime Minister Mara an alibi against complicity in the coup, yet it is well known now that three days before the coup, he was playing Golf with Lt.Col. Rabuka.

All of these brings us to the coup itself. The coup was staged in most unusual manner. On May 14, 1987, Lt. Col. Rabuka stormed into the Fiji parliament followed by 10 masked men. These men had concealed their faces with either ski masks or gas masks. At least some of them had blackened their hands with what appeared to be shoe polish. They never spoke, but gestured to one another using hand signals. Rabuka gave orders only in English even at the moments of highest tension. These armed helpers hustled the captives into trucks, drove silently with them to Army Headquarters and then turned them over to Fijian Army regulars.

Then mysteriously those ten persons disappeared. In a subsequent interview with a Local Radio Station in Sydney, the deposed Deputy Speaker Noor Dean, also a Criminal lawyer, made a categorical statement that the men who arrested them were not Fijians. He reached his conclusion by observing their body types and movements. The "Nation" report has quoted Jack Terrel, an expert on mercenaries world wide and currently a special investigator for the Washington based International Centre for Development Policy went on to say that Rabuka used a squad of mercenaries - at least two of them American and another two South Africans - acting with the concurrence of the US government to stage the coup. According to Terrel, the mercenaries were brought to Fiji in a C-130 aircraft of SAF air charter - a subsidiary transport organization of 'Souther Air Transport of South Africa¹⁰.

It is said that at least one of the 10 marked men was Fijian. According to Terrell this is consistent with his mercenary theory since such operations invariably include a "pathfinder" or local military man acting as a guide. AN Sen in his investigative report " the American

10 Joann Wypijewski : "Fiji Coup was the US behind it."
The Nation August 15.22. 1987

hand in Fiji Coup" based on all available reports and instances says:

"Four C-130, aircrafts may have been in Fiji around the time of the coup. Former deputy speaker Noor Dean had said that a US C-130 aircraft carrying 15 black American mercenaries landed unannounced and undeclared at Fiji's Nadi Airport on May 12. Just two days before the coup."¹¹

Pentagon spokesman Commander Chris Baumann could not categorically deny the involvement of American aircraft and troops in the Fiji Coup.

Now it can be said that Col. Rabuka's May 14 operation was well chalked out and executed according to scheme. It was known only to a small core within the military. The Head of the Army, Brigadier Epeli Nalatikau was in Australia on that day and was stripped of his post along with Bavadra. Brigadier Nalatikau was very much against the coup and issued a public statement condemning the coup in June 3rd:

"All outside the Royal Fiji Military force who were involved should be made known to public."¹²

Col. Rabuka later said that he was forced to act in order to put a stop to widespread racial violence.

11. A.N. Sen; "The American hand in Fiji Coup" onlooker 1-15 March 1988.

12. Quoted in the "Nation" n-10.

US INVOLVEMENT: AN APPRAISAL

Over the last 6 years, Fiji has been the target of the most intensive cultivation by the US administration and its South Pacific command. Despite this Fiji managed to elect a government that intended to be nonaligned and nuclear free. US involvement or interventionist intrusions in Fiji's internal affairs can be established with the above mentioned facts. However USA complicity in the coup still depends on the journalistic evidence, conspiracy theories, and speculations which may not be acceptable to the World opinion. US interventionist attitude in Fiji can be ascertained by following main points in the post - 1982 policy.

- i) At political level cultivation and support for Mara and Alliance party by means of aid money, White House receptions, assistance in election campaign etc.
- ii) At the military level, cultivation of the Fijian military through officer to officer contacts and military aid.
- iii) At the more subtle level, subversion of trade unions by the agencies funded by US government, like AFLI,

Thus the US motives for destabilisation in Fiji can be very well established. However not enough has been conclusively documented on the facts of US involvement in the coup. The main grounds on which US entanglement can be founded are:

- i) Vernon Walter's visit to Fiji.
- ii) Financing of taukei movement by the US agents.
- iii) Activities of certain CIA Agents in the region.
- iv) USA's South pacific commands Libya bashing mission in the South pacific.

Even then a final judgement on total US complicity in Fiji coup can not be passed.

A STUDY OF EXTERNAL RESPONCES TO FIJI CRISIS

The reactions of foreign governments to the coup reflected their own understanding of the Fiji situation and in particulars the reasons and causes behind it. It is interesting to have a critical account of the responses of foreign government, and the factors influencing their reaction.

- i) Australia ; Australia's reactions were influenced by its long standing apprehensions at the rapidly changing political climate in the South pacific. During the early

Months of 1987, massive campaign against leftist tendencies under reason as well as Libya's involvement in South Pacific was launched in Australia. Following the visit of US Ambassador to UN Vernon Walters in late April, the Australian government whipped up a frenzy of media attacks on Vanuatu flirting with Libya.

Australian Prime Minister Bob Hawke's response to Fiji crisis was quite restrained and calculated compared to Newzealand. He had no sympathy for the coalition's nuclear free-policy. However, Hawke kept on saying that he recognised Bavadra as Head of government but he refused to meet him when requested by Bavadra. The right-being forces in Australia used the coup for their demand for greater Australian militarisation and urged the Australian government to raise its profile and use aid and trade to subjugate island states to US and Australian interest.

Newzealand : As soon as the coup occurred in Fiji Lange was apprised of the situation. He immediately established a special group of foreign affairs specialists to monitor telex reports from Suva.

He decried the coup as worse than martial law but insisted that other military initiatives remained open. The Military preparedness for any intervention was there and that

posture was accompanied by bitter attacks on Mara for his willingness to support the coup. Lange also contacted Queen Elizabeth in London and urged her to send a letter of support to Ganilay. Similar messages were delivered to the commonwealth secretariat. However, this fell short of the expectation of Dr. Bavadra's governments.

South Pacific Forum: The reaction of South Pacific Forum members, the small island countries of South-West Pacific has been lukewarm and reserved. Only Vanuatu's Walter Lini denounced the coup in strongest terms. Most of the island countries have backed the coup because of their sympathy for the assertion of Melanesian nationalism. The members of Melanesian spear group, Solomon-Islands and Papua New Guinea, opposed any idea of military and diplomatic intervention. PNG's foreign minister Ted Diro declared political developments in Fiji as a matter for the people of Fiji to resolve. When Melanesian leaders met at Rabaul on 21 May 1987 they urged Australia and Newzealand not to succumb to reckless military adventurism. Vanuatu P.M. Walter Lini declared Austro-American neocolonialism as the greatest threat to regional security and accused them for their hand in Fiji Coup.

Thus most of the Pacific Island leaders interpreted the coup only as racial conflict. They did not accept Indians as the equals to Pacific islanders. The requirements of multiracialism were lost to Pacific islanders. They believed that "all citizens are equal but those who came first are more equal. However, SPF in its meeting at Apia later on expressed concern at recent turmoil in Fiji and the need for reconciliation.

Great Britain and The Commonwealth: Military coups in commonwealth countries are usually a great problem for Great Britain. It is usually a cause of queen's dilemma of being the constitutional head of these countries - a responsibility without power. However, Fiji appeared to have been the exception to the rule. Here Queen had been able to exert pressure and exercise influence of much greater scale because of the considerable reverence monarchy enjoys from the Fijians chiefs and tribal community.

When Lt. Col. Rabuka launched his coup almost the first thing he tried was to attain the approval of the Queen. At first it seemed that he might succeed, for Sir Penaia did swear in him as Chairman of the Council of Ministers. But soon afterwards Governor-General announced that he had been advised by the Chief Justice that this was illegal and refused to swear in Rabuka's other nominees as ministers.

Then came a personal message of encouragement to Sir Penaia from the queen for his stand and his actions as custodian of the constitution. During the impasse that followed, Col. Rabuka threatened to turn Fiji into a republic and the Great Council of Fijian chiefs approved the idea.

Later on Ratu Ganilau in a strange turned up stand appointed a team member council of ministers which came which was an amalgamation of the military regime's ministers. Ultimately after 25 September's second coup the linkage with Great Britain was severed.

As Fiji's new leadership strengthened its grip over the archipelago by stepping up its military profile, world opinion about Rabuka's regime became less offensive. In the Commonwealth Head of Governments meeting at Vancouver in Oct. 1987 the Fijian situation was discussed in detail. At the verbal level CHOGM leaders were critical of the development in Fiji. But the idea of Commonwealth Peace Keeping force was not acceptable to them. India was alienated by Great Britain and Australia.

INDIA : Fiji has reminded India of a form of racism to which India was not very much exposed. Until India's sad experience in East Africa in the 1960s, racism was

ordinarily understood as the white man's prejudice against the Black and Brown species of the world whom the Europeans had conquered and enslaved.

The Ethnic Indian population in Fiji which has contributed much to the economic development of country and has a clear numerical majority over Melanesians and Europeans was deprived from its legitimate share in political power by the military coup. The decision to change 1970 constitution to perpetuate the hegemony of Melanesian population over Indians had created wide level of apprehensions and fears among Indians about their future in Fiji.

The Government of India reacted quite sharply to the development in Fiji. It sent its emissaries to UK, Australia and Newzealand to chalk out a collective programme of imposition of effective sanctions against the racist government of Rabuka. The motives behind efforts to try and forge a united plan of action were :

- i. Restoration of power to the democratically elected government in Fiji.
- ii) Upholding the provisions of the constitution which has come into effect in 1970.
- iii) Preservation of racial harmony.

However, Indian Government has not been successful in its policy and diplomacy over the Fijian developments.

CHAPTER - VI

CONCLUSIONS

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Before coming to the concluding part of the study it is essential to give a kind of post-script of the Fijian situation in the light of further developments. After more than two years of military coup, Fiji is still moving from deepening racial crisis to total catastrophe. With eroding concerns of international public opinion, lack of effective actions and also with covert support by imperialist powers, the military dictatorship under leadership of now Maj. Gen. Rabuka has deeply entrenched itself into the Fijian system. The Fiji today, under an effectively military regime with a facade of civilian rule, is going down in the familiar third World path of authoritarianism, suppressions of human rights and political victimisations. The legitimization and stabilization of Rabuka phenomenon has left very little hope of return of multi-racialism in Fiji.

The Indo-Fijian population in Fiji is constantly being pushed aside, alienated of basic political rights. They are passing through a nightmarish experience. They have come to realize that Fiji is not going to be same again. The policies of race is being recklessly used by the ruling regime to perpetuate itself domination. A new type of 'apartheid' has become a reality in Fiji.

The demand for restoration of democracy has become a far cry, and Fijian citizens in general are compelled to learn to live with the military dictatorship.

A closer study of the events after second coup in September 35, 1987 reveals that some new and quite dangerous tendencies have emerged in Fijian national politics, that in long term may lead to devastation of the social fabric of the country. The grim consequences of these developments are being felt in everyday life.

Most important of these is Rabuka's use of Christian religion to justify and rationalize this nefarious designs. This is in total contradiction to the tradition of liberal religious ethos in Fiji. In his much publicised biography "No Other Way", Rabuka has expressed his intentions to convert the Hindus (whom he chooses to call 'Heathens') into Christianity. The irony of the situation is that even Fiji's Christian church has been trapped in the Rabuka's ethno-centric parochial religious appeals. His earlier actions, like promulgation of the 'Sunday Decree', had attacked the free exercise of religious freedom by the non-Christian population in Fiji. The Hindus are being openly persecuted. This kind of religious communalism has given Fijian racialism a new obnoxious dimension that may inflict irreparable injuries to the Fijian society of future.

Another alarming development after the coup has been the acceleration in the rate of exodus of Indo-Fijians from Fiji. The Fijianisation of administration and politics has severely jolted the confidence of Indians in their future security. Unimpeded in their departure by any government restrictions, most of those leaving have been young, frequently in professional, managerial and technical occupations. Over 2000 Indians had emigrated in the first four months after the first coup.

This brain drain of skilled manpower - a much needed human resource for national development is leading to general decline in quality of services in both public as well as private sectors.

To some extent, it is also an indictment of upper strata of Indian population. It is unfortunate that a large part of Indian population is not showing much determination or will to fight for their legitimate political rights. Instead, an interesting syndrome of viewing the coup as an opportunity to fulfil their urge for upward mobility to richer countries like USA, Australia and Canada has emerged among such Indians. What is more paradoxical is that most of them are least inclined to return to India despite its concerted efforts to fight for the case of the Indo-Fijians in international forums.

The inevitable shift to Fijian political supremacy

is also being aided by the internal divisions and intrigues within Indian community. The divisions existing in India are reflected there in Fiji also for example the Hindu-Muslim divide. There is also a rift between commercial classes (mostly Gujaratis and Punjabis, the later migrants) and cane farmers of the Western Fiji (the descendants of indentured labourers from UP and Bihar). It seems that the business community is no longer interested in political rights and is showing no will to rub shoulders with their own brothers for a fight against dictatorship.

The common Fijians, mostly the rural-urban lower and middle classes, are also paying the price of the coup in the form of substantial deterioration in general economic and social condition. There is a discernible drop in living standards of salaried middle class because of rising prices. The collapse of tourist industry and setbacks to sugar industry has led to the growth of unemployment and impoverishment for common Fijians. These oppressive and exploitative system has demonstrated that racial bogey has been an effective tool in the hands of elites to control the destinities of people, and help them under subjugation.

In final analysis, it can be said that the declared objective of the coup and military regime of indigenous people's desire to run their own offices, is nothing but a farce. It simply means return of the

political power to the handful of chiefs, in particular the chiefs of eastern region. This has been precisely the intentions of proposed new constitution which provides for disproportional representation to Fijians, as well as increased role of the "Great Council of Fijian Chiefs." The concept of 'indigenous rights' is being abused by selfish ruling elites and it is difficult to distinguish ethno-nationalism in Fiji⁴ from xenophobic South-Pacific variant of Fascism.

The role of South Pacific geopolitics has been very crucial. Though Fiji crisis is portrayed as the internal affair, it has definite generic linkages with the geo-strategic environment in the region. The client regime of Rata Mara, when overthrown by a domestic multiracial political force, the coalition perceived as antagonistic to Western in the region, pretexts were formed to destabilize it through subtle and clandestine operation.

(There is a need of concerted action, as the part of international democratic forum and human rights groups to launch a campaign against racialization and militarization of Fijian system and massive violation of human, political and religious rights of the Fijian system. It is unfortunate that certain countries in the world has come with their apparent support of the dictatorial regime in Fiji. The true picture of Fiji problem should be disseminated by concerned journalism and academic writing.

An alternative to present parliamentary democracy must be found for the island multi-ethnic societies which are vulnerable to instabilities, the delicate ethnic balance should be maintained through the introduction of "consociational democracy" which effectively ensures power sharing, minority representation and protection of the interests of each ethnic groups, The present form of Majoritarian democracy must be replaced by consociational democracy, which has been discussed by Lijphart in his book "Democracy in Plural society". The debate on this form of democracy is essentially a need of our age.

APPENDIX

APPENDIX

Year	Percentage of Melanesian Fijians in total populations	Percentage of Indo Fijians	Percentage European, Australians and Chinese	others
1891	88.0	6.0	4.0	2.0
1901	78.0	18.0	4.0	-
1911	62.0	29.0	4.0	5.0
1921	54.0	39.0	5.0	2.0
1936	50.0	43.0	3.0	4.0
1946	45.0	46.0	2.0	7.0
1956	43.0	49.0	3.0	5.0
1966	42.0	51.0	3.0	4.0
1976	44.0	49.0	3.0	2.7
1981	44.6	50.1	3.5	1.8

Table 1: The Historical Pattern of Demographic Change in Fiji

Category	Acres	Percentage of Total
Native land	3714000	82.16
Free land	368000	8.15
Crown land	377000	9.45
Rotuman land	11000	0.24

Total 2 : Land Distribution in Fiji

Group	Communal Seats	National Seats	Total	Percentage
Fijians	12	10	22	42.3
Indian	12	10	22	42.3
General Electors	3	5	8	15.4

Table 3 : Allocation of seats in the House of Representatives

Nominess	Number
Nominess of the Great Council of Chiefs	8
Nominess of the Prime Minister	7
Nominess of the Leader of oppestion	6
Nominess of the Council of Rotuma	1

Table: 4 Composition of the Fiji Senate

Region/Country	Acquired	Ex/Persent Colonial	Present Status	Date of Independence
<u>Melanesia</u>				
Fiji	1874	Britain	Independent	1970
New Caledonia	1853	France	Overseas territory	-
Papua New Guniea	1884	Australia	Independent	1975
Solomon Islands	1892	Britain	Independent	1978
Vanuatu	1887	Britain and France	Independent	1978
<u>Micronesia</u>				
Federated States of Micronesia	1885	USA	Associated state	1985
Guam	1564	USA	USA Territory	-
Kiribati	1892	Britain	Independent	1959
Marshall islands	1885	Germay (Ex) USA	Associated territory	1985
Nauru	1888	Australia-US-New Zealand	Independent	1968
Belau	1885	USA	US Trust territory	-
<u>Polynesia</u>				
American Samoa	1899	USA	US Trust territory	-
Cook Islands	1888	New Zealand	Associated state	-
French Polynesia	1842	France	Overseas territory	-
Hawaii	1898	USA	US State	-
Nine	1900	New Zealand	Associated State	-
Tonga	1900	Britain	Independent	1978
Tokelau	1889	New Zealand	Dependency of New Zealand	-
Tuvalu	1892	Britain	Independent	1978
Wallis & Futuna	1887	France	Overseas territory	-
Western Samoa	1900	New Zealand	Independent	1962

Fig.

South Pacific Region : An introduction

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Europa Year Book of Far East and Australasia
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