

Stolen Worlds: Fijiindian Fragments, edited by Kavita Ivy Nandan. Canberra: Ivy Press International, 2005. ISBN 0-9757223-0-1; xii + 353 pages, maps; written in English and Fiji Hindi with some English translations. A\$29.95.

As 2004 marked the 125th anniversary of the arrival of the first Indians in Fiji, the release of *Stolen Worlds: Fijiindian Fragments* represents the latest in the development of Fiji(-)Indian/Indo-Fijian literature in the diasporic context. Spanning several generations, religions, and regions of origin (in South Asia, Fiji, and elsewhere), this collection of writers offers an honest and unmitigated look at the ongoing legacy of the indentured Indian laborers, or *girmitias*. These narratives further demonstrate the unresolved incongruity that exists between globalized multicultural visions of the nation and aboriginal/indigenous nationalisms. For the scholar of Pacific Islands literature, postcolonial politics, or migration studies, this newest anthology offers “real-life” insight into the problem of migrant identity that suffers from the trauma of colonial history and the contemporary crises that erupt as issues regarding “Pacific” sovereignty come to the forefront.

The nineteen entries start with a poignant piece by former Bavadra Coalition cabinet minister and contemporary poet Satendra Nandan and end with an essay by Anglo-Australian Anthony Mason that touches on, among other things, the political ramifications of linguistic markers for a people all too often

considered “foreign.” These entries trace the lives and movement of “Fiji-indians” within Fiji as well as across the Pacific Ocean, from Australia to North America. Editor Kavita Ivy Nandan notes the reasoning behind the title, *Stolen Worlds*: the Indians of Fiji had to contend not only with the loss of the homeland and the brutality of plantation life, but also with the series of coups that left the political landscape reverberating to this day with lingering discrimination and racism (xi). Not surprisingly, one of the main goals of certain entries in this volume is to demonstrate the exclusion of Indo-Fijians from the national imaginary. This is a point well made by Bhaichand Patel’s analysis of the official crest of the city of Suva in his piece, “Suva: Electric Shadows” (63).

As one would imagine, intense pain and sorrow emerges from these stories of stolen lives and histories that embody universal truths concerning colonization. Several writers’ reference to the Pacific as “kala pani,” or the dark waters, invites a comparison to the Middle Passage (journey of the slave-trading ships from Africa) and to the inhuman Atlantic traffic in bodies for labor. Specifically, as Satendra Nandan’s piece, “Ancestors,” reminds readers, the experience of the first generation involved some eighty-seven ships that left Calcutta beginning in 1879, and later from Madras, with more than sixty thousand bodies headed to a “new world” of dispossession and displacement (8). Bhim Singh’s piece, “Koronubu: Across the Bridge,” further relates how the hardships and the lack of human rights

these immigrants faced led to the association of the word “girit” (indenture) with “narak” (hell). This account is not unlike the experience of the Japanese and other ethnic labor enclaves of Hawai‘i as outlined by local scholars and writers such as Ronald Takaki (*Pau Hana* [1983]), Milton Murayama (*All I Asking for Is My Body* [1975]), Juliet Kono (*Hilo Rains* [1988]), and Virgilio Menor Felipe (*Hawai‘i: A Pilipino Dream* [2002]).

Stolen Worlds additionally presents a useful understanding of the persistent bitterness within immigrant consciousness and identity formation, given the contention that has arisen over the legitimacy of the Asian experience in parts of the contemporary Pacific. In particular, racial tensions in Fiji have resulted in coups, what Sulochana Chand (in his entry, “Levuka: An Island Lost”) describes as “the rape of democracy” and a “slippery slide toward apartheid, when the rest of the world was actively demolishing barriers” (42). Divakar Rao’s “Vitidays: An Indian Passage” goes one step further in enunciating what Fiji blindly ignored and what it still stands to lose: “It would be a sad commentary on Fiji society if it did not evolve into something more homogeneous and wholesome. If Fijians, Indians, Chinese and Europeans had gone to school together for the past century, we would have witnessed a lot more inter-racial marriages between people of Fijian, Indian, European and Chinese origins. Under these circumstances there would have been less likelihood of racial polarization that

we now witness” (125). Rao later recalls the materialization of a nationalism “directed at the ‘Indianness’ of the Indians” (129); his narrative ends with a terse acknowledgment of the 1987 upheaval, of the “Black Friday” that brought an end to his “dreams and aspirations” (135). Here, a comparison demands attention. For scholars familiar with Hawai‘i’s local literature, the arguments made against Asian American writers for their “Asian-ness” and their falsification of history and culture make for an interesting parallel with Fijian political rhetoric.

At the same time, love, joy, and hope also permeate these tales of past and present experiences. Satendra Nandan’s “Ancestors” entreats writers to remember, “Whatever our sadness may be, today we are the envy of many. It is on that legacy of the girit people that we must continue to build: not only to honour them but to open doors of hope and windows of opportunity to those less fortunate than us. . . . Our acts are a memorial to our ancestors: their service and visionary generosity is our inheritance” (8). Mohit Prasad’s childhood memories serve well in demonstrating the reverence for that legacy. His “Lines: In the Mist” weaves together humorous and wistful recollections of elders, including a great-grandfather rumored to have been a British spy and a trained assassin; the sophisticated reader will clearly understand the profoundly political nature of a montage that seemingly avoids all references to actual politics. Other stories explore the jubilant visions of life in Fiji, a life full of food, festivals,

sports meets, music, English and Latin classes, and the ever-present family. These more celebratory images certainly counter expectations of a Fiji-Indian presence in perpetual decline, instead suggesting a resilience similar to the one that prompted Derek Walcott's observation of the *Ramleela* (the epic dramatization of the Hindu epic, the *Ramayana*) in the Caribbean: "this shipwreck of fragments, these echoes, these shards of a huge tribal vocabulary, these partially remembered customs . . . they are not decayed but strong" ("The Antilles: Fragments of Epic Memory," Nobel Prize in Literature lecture, 7 Dec 1992).

Inevitably, the act of writing itself becomes the focus of this text and an exploration of literature as a transformative medium. Serving as more than simply a stopgap measure to resist the exclusion of the Indo-Fijian experience, writing, Kavita Nandan argues, "can be a way to make meaning out of the rupture of the past. Writing allows us to give some structure or recuperate wholeness" (301). In many ways, the "Fijiindian fragments" of this collection symbolize the larger literary movement by colonized peoples to recover and recuperate their right to speak for themselves; from the Pacific Writing Forum in Fiji, to Bamboo Ridge Press and *Ōiwi* in Hawai'i, the desire for self-articulation is one that can help unite authors and critics as they explore new pan-Pacific avenues to address some of the darkest and some of the more illuminating moments in Oceanic history. For this reason, *Stolen Worlds* makes an excellent companion to such

anthologies as *Southern Exposure: Modern Japanese Literature from Okinawa* (edited by Michael Molansky and Steve Rabson; University of Hawai'i Press, 2000) and *Whetu Moana* (edited by Albert Wendt, Reina Whaitiri, and Robert Sullivan; Auckland University Press, 2003).

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Waa in Storms, by Teweiariki Teairo. Suva: Institute of Pacific Studies, University of the South Pacific, 2004. ISBN 982-02-0368-6; xvi + 114 pages, figures, photographs, appendixes, written in English and the Kiribati language, glossary. US\$25.00.

Waa in Storms (Canoe in Storms), Teweiariki Teairo's follow-up to his first anthology, *On Eitei's Wings* (2000), marks the growth of an important Pacific literary voice and visual artist. Teairo elegantly weaves together the poetic traditions of his home island nation, Kiribati (pronounced Kiribas), with those of the West and the "Niu" contemporary Pacific emerging from urban centers such as Suva in Fiji. *Waa in Storms* also grew out of a particularly challenging period in the author's life, and many of his pieces convey this turbulence.

The collection, containing a mixture of poetry, narrative, and nineteen ink-on-paper drawings, is divided into four "waves" or movements: "Pond Storms," "Lagoon Storms," "Ocean Storms," and "Calm again." The use of waves to represent time is a trade-