

production. Not all recent publications of the Australian National University Press have been so blessed. At the same time it is to be regretted that there is no indication given in the notes, placed at the back of the book, as to what page they refer. For ease of reference such indication should be *de rigueur* for all academic publications.

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*The Fiji Indians: Challenge to European Dominance 1920-46.* By K.L. Gillion. Australian National University Press, Canberra, 1977. x, 231 pp. Aust. price: \$9.95.

THE AUTHOR views the history of Fiji Indians, 1920-46, as a challenge to European dominance. He fails to explain either the nature of the dominance or the challenge. He does not state whether the dominance was one asserted by officials or settlers or both. As for the challenge, it was a myth created by Europeans. Fiji Indians saw their efforts, 1920-46, in more positive terms: as attempts to find acceptance as citizens in a new and permanent home. They sought neither to displace Europeans nor Fijians; they could not have, since they lacked (and still do) the skills to govern alone. By 1921, 44.2 per cent of the Fiji Indians were Fiji-born and by 1936, 71.7 per cent. These, with their Indian-born parents, desired the restoration of their *izzat* (self-respect) lost through *girmit* (indenture). Gillion is aware of this and recognizes 'there were different paths to *izzat*' (p. 130), but he does not explore them. Had he done so, he might have produced a lasting work of history.

We are taken through the main events in Fiji Indian history, 1920-46, seen overwhelmingly through official records interspersed with references from the *Fiji Times*, the voice of European settlers for most of its history, and Colonial Sugar Refinery (C.S.R.) files; occasionally other sources intrude into the footnotes. The data leads, the historian merely transcribes; and the prejudices of the sources are scattered through the pages. Indians, we are told, were 'vulnerable to the demagogue' (p. 19); in the 1920 strike 'bands of hooligans intimidated' (p. 27); there were Indians who were 'extremist leaders' (p. 144), 'bully-boys' (p. 167) and 'hot-heads' (p. 167); often these words have been heard in Fiji, but not from scholars! Those writing history should evaluate their sources and probe beneath the surface. Why are some branded demagogues? Why are so-called demagogues successful? By what criteria are some branded hot-heads, bully-boys or extremists? Gillion fails to ask and answer these questions.

Then there are generalizations made without evidence. Of Manilal, Gillion contends, 'he emerges from the record as touchy, resentful, underhand, and careless with truth' (p. 21). What record we are not told! He had a tendency to exaggerate; he employed two indentured labourers, and he was sensitive to the racism of colonial rule. These do not warrant outright condemnation. Those Indians who knew him admired him and to this day Indians speak with

affection of him; this too is record. The Sadhu, Basisth Muni, does not fare better (p. 56). Those acquainted with him remember a humane, deeply religious man, independent and refusing to accept alms from others. He organized the 1921 strike which continued for some months after his deportation. And A.D. Patel in the 1943 strike is called 'the key figure...with his complex ambitions for himself and his people' (p. 182). What of Ayodhya Prasad, Lakshman, and Swami Rudrananda? Patel alone could not have engineered and sustained farmer support. And no details are given of 'complex ambitions'. Since the work is about Fiji Indians their ambitions should have been amplified, not insinuated. The comment, Patel's 'ambitions for himself', was frequently directed at him by his political antagonists, especially Europeans.

Yet when an official speaks derogatively of a Fijian chief, Gillion omits the insult and the official's name (p. 175) and states that the deletion is his (reference to footnote 3, p. 214). No such discretion is shown in judgements on Indians. Double standards also characterized colonialism!

We are told Fijian protest 'was a rare event' in Fiji's history (p. 176). Gillion ignores the Tuka, Luveniwai, Avalosi Nawai, the Free Church of Lau, Naibogibogi, the Children of the Poor, and the Fijian Chamber of Commerce. Gillion writes, 'In Fiji land is the ultimate prize' (p. 70). This is misleading. Land was the prize the white settlers once desired but after 1880, except from 1905 to 1908, Fijian land has been inalienable. This was confirmed in 1940 and again in the 1970 Constitution. Today 83 per cent of the land remains in Fijian hands. All that Indians, and others, desire is a security of tenure for leaseholds cultivated in their interest and those of Fiji's economy.

Gillion states, in 'the last analysis' C.S.R. officers did more for Indians 'than the government or the missions' (p. 161). He ignores the rigours of *girmit*, the strikes of 1920, 1921, 1943 and 1960 when Indians bitterly fought C.S.R. for better wages or cane prices. While C.S.R. sub-imperialism oriented Indians towards the cash economy, it also contributed to farmer indebtedness, while producing profits for the Company's shareholders outside Fiji. When in 1970 the Denning Award guaranteed farmers a fair price for their cane for the first time, C.S.R. decided to leave, and then after obtaining a handsome sum from the people of Fiji for its assets. Besides, Indian achievement in Fiji is based on education largely provided by the missions, Christian and non-Christian. The C.S.R. opposed western education for Indians!

While Gillion displays familiarity with official records and their tenor, his knowledge of Fiji Indians lacks depth. Had he spent enough time discussing with Fiji Indians their own history, especially in the rural areas outside Suva, and had he been sufficiently acquainted with the works of Frantz Fanon, V.S. Naipaul, and Hugh Tinker, he might have written a balanced historical study.

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