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10 Ethnic aspects of education in Fiji

Introduction

Human sociocultural institutions and relationships change over time. Ethnic identities and interethnic relations likewise are susceptible to change depending on circumstances that affect the relationships among and within ethnic communities. In other words, both what constitutes an ethnic community and how that community interacts with others are socially created and perpetuated. One very important factor in moulding ethnic identities and significantly influencing perceptions about ethnic groups is socialisation in general and education in particular. When access to education becomes a basis for competition and conflict between ethnic communities, the boundaries between such categories become more clearly defined and the extent of their cohesion is enhanced. These general remarks are applicable to Fiji.

Ethnic divisions are socially engendered

Prior to the incursion of Europeans and Asians, there was no Ethnic Fijian 'racial' and/or national identity, language or polity; these emerged in tandem with interactions with outsiders as well as among themselves. The so-called 'Fijian race' is an admixture of Melanesian and Polynesian gene pools with a characteristic manifestation of Melanesian phenotype in the western and interior regions of the main islands and a Polynesian phenotype in the eastern islands.

Similarly there was no common ethnic identity among the indentured labourers who came from the Indian subcontinent. The shipboard identity moulded as a consequence of the journeying together of *jahajibhais* or *jahajis* did not submerge pre-existing ethnic identities, which very often followed linguistic lines. The attempts by some Muslims to define themselves as non-Indians illustrates their ongoing confusion about their ethnicity.

The names 'General Electors' and 'General Voters' have brought together a number of ethnic categories that do not necessarily have common cultural or religious traits. Yet, their position as minorities and their incorporation in a single political group have engendered the identity 'GEs'.

Ethnicity and education in a historical context

Education as a factor in ethnicity needs to be contextualised within the wider society and societal processes. It is influenced by and in turn influences the latter. Two centuries ago there was no such entity as Fiji; instead the islands that now comprise the Fiji group were divided into more than 40 polities with linguistic and cultural differences that affected the extent to which any one polity could extend its influence over others (Henderson 1931; Calvert 1983; Brewster 1922). A multiethnic society emerged slowly with the arrival of white settlers and the establishment of colonial rule. The use of Pacific Island and Indian labourers in colonial enterprises contributed to a more diverse multiethnic society.

Late nineteenth and early twentieth century colonial rule was founded on racist precepts, which led to a policy of keeping persons of different ethnicity apart. Some would argue that divide and rule suited the coloniser. This led to the physical separation of the so-called races: an economy based on a racial division of labour, and an administrative and political structure that facilitated and promoted the separate administration and representation of the so-called races. Needless to say separate education was fostered.

Two factors particularly influenced educational development: first, the lack of government involvement in the establishment of schools in the early years of colonial rule, thereby compelling community-based initiatives; and second, the policy of segregation and differential treatment in education pursued by the colonial government until the early 1960s.

Education in Fiji has been a non-governmental and community-based endeavour. Christian missions have been especially active in building schools throughout Fiji, which have catered for all communities and for boys and girls. Other religious and cultural organisations such as the Arya Samaj, the Gujarati Samaj, the Fiji Muslim League, the Sangam and the Sanatan Pratinidhi Sabha have also established schools. Local communities with very little or no external support have constructed local schools, which have been run by community leaders.

The 1995 Annual Report of the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology (Parliamentary Paper No. 25 of 1996) recorded 698 primary schools of which 14 were government and 684 non-government (Table 1). Of the 148 secondary schools, 135 were non-government. In teacher training, government operated two institutions and two others were run by religious bodies. In aggregate, of 900 educational institutions, some 93 per cent were non-government run. A mere 2 per cent of primary schools and 9 per cent of secondary schools are directly owned and operated by government.

While the initiative and perseverance of non-government and community-based organisations is admirable, their preponderant role in education has had a number of implications. Two of these relate to ethnicity. First, with schools run by religious and/or

Table 1
The number and type of schools controlled
by various educational agencies, 1995

Controlling authority	Special schools	Prim.	Sec.	Tech/Voc.	Teacher training	Total
Ministry of Education		14	12	1	2	29
Fijian Affairs Board			1			1
Assemblies of God		1	1			2
Brethren Assemblies		3	1			4
Catholic Archdiocese		44	17		1	62
Church of LDS		1	1			2
Diocese of Polynesia		6	1			7
Marist Brothers Catholic		2	1			3
Methodist Church	1	16	9	2		28
SDA Mission		11	2		1	14
Sisters of St Joseph			1			1
Arya Pratinidhi Sabha		17	6			23
Sanatan Dharam		4	2			6
Ahmadiyya Muslim		1	1			2
Fiji Muslim League	1	17	5			23
Macuata Muslim League		4	3			7
Gujarat Education Society		5	3			8
Dakshina India Andhra Sangam		5	2			7
TISI Sangam		22	5			27
Chinese Education Society		1	1			2
Rabi Council		3	1			4
Fiji Sugar Coop.[sic]		1				1
Civil Aviation Admin.			1			1
Crippled Child. Soc.	8					8
Fiji Blind Society	1					1
Society of Disabled	5					5
Private		4	1			5
Committee		515	71			586
Vocational centres (TVET Section, MOE)				31		31
Total	16	698	148	34	4	900

* Prim. - Primary, Sec. - Secondary, Tech/Voc - Technical/Vocational
Source Ministry of Education, Women, Culture, Science and Technology, *Annual Report for the year 1995*, Parliamentary Paper No. 25 of 1996, p.2.

cultural organisations, there has been a tendency for segregation based on religion and/or culture, which reinforces separate distinct subnational identities. This observation has to be qualified by the fact that these days no school in Fiji openly states a preference for students of a particular denomination or ethnicity. Indeed in some urban schools there

have been large numbers of children of religious and ethnic backgrounds that are not that of the organisations that operate the institutions.

Second, the quality of education varies considerably depending on who owns and operates a school. Generally government-owned schools are better resourced and staffed, followed by religious and cultural organisation-operated institutions, with the local community-owned and committee-run schools, which tend to be in rural areas, being the most poorly resourced.¹

Given the large rural population and especially the more dispersed nature of Ethnic Fijian settlement, the schooling of rural children generally and Ethnic Fijian children in particular is adversely affected by inadequate physical facilities, non-existent libraries and unqualified teachers.

Government has responded in the past to this obviously disadvantaged situation of rural Ethnic Fijians by making additional funds available for Fijian education. While this in itself is justifiable, the actual form the allocation of funds has taken has been widely criticised.

Segregated schooling and discrimination

Differential treatment of the citizens of Fiji is not new. During the colonial period racial discrimination was widespread, as was the differentiation between commoners and chiefs amongst Ethnic Fijians. Until 1916 there was no government school for Indo-Fijian children and the schooling of chiefs took priority over that of commoners. There was vigorous opposition to Indian and native education, by the Colonial Sugar Refining Company and Europeans generally.

Education policy was implemented by the Department of Education and a Board of Education established under the Education Ordinance of 1916, which was replaced by the 1929 Education Ordinance No.1. Although the Board of Education sought to establish some standardisation in education by the registration and classification of schools and teachers and the adoption of a common curriculum, it also fostered exclusively racial schools. Thus by 1938, of the 442 schools in Fiji, 16 were for Europeans and Part-Europeans, 346 were for Fijians and 80 for Indians (Narayan 1984:73).

Narayan observed that the number of schools for each ethnic category limited educational access of Indo-Fijians and Ethnic Fijians relative to Europeans and Part-Europeans. Thus Indo-Fijian literacy rates for school-going-age cohorts for the decades between 1920 and 1950 were well below the other ethnic categories.

Europeans had access to the best schools in terms of facilities, curriculum and quality of teachers. Of the 16 European schools, four were government schools, the CSR Company operated five, four others were mission-owned and three were run by local committees. Books and stationery were supplied at cost price. There were no school fees charged in these schools with the exception of the government schools in Suva and Levuka.

While all European schools were grant-in-aid schools, only 144 of the 346 Fijian schools were eligible for grants-in-aid. Only seven of them were government schools and only one had a secondary section. Most of the Fijian schools were sub-standard and staffed by teachers who were not qualified.

Of the 80 Indian schools in 1938, seven were government schools and 66 were eligible for grants-in-aid. Only one school had a secondary department. The establishment of the Marist Brothers Secondary School in 1934, the first multiethnic high school, opened the doors to some Indo-Fijians. Narayan recorded that in 1938, two-thirds of the country's 15,000-odd Indo-Fijian school-going-age children between the ages of 6 and 14 were not attending schools (Narayan 1984:73).

Narayan points out that although government's gross expenditure on education had increased from £59,000 in 1938 to £184,428 in 1947, the disparity in the allocation of funds to the designated racial categories remained. The net expenditure per pupil for the Colony was £3.10s.5d, but the amount spent on a European child was £7.9s.7d., for an Indian child £3.18s.2d, and for an Ethnic Fijian child £2.19s.0d.

A decade later, in 1957, the number of children in schools was 69,125 spread over 540 schools. However, children continued to go to segregated schools. There were 326 Fijian schools, 155 Indian schools, 25 European schools, 2 Chinese schools and 32 mixed schools. Some 8 per cent of school-age Ethnic Fijian children and 30 per cent of Indo-Fijian children did not attend school at all. Many of the latter were Indo-Fijian girls. The racial distribution of schools in 1961 is shown in Table 2.

Table 2
The distribution of schools in 1961, by race and type

	Government	Aided*	Unaided	Total
Fijian	13	309	18	340
Indian	11	164	23	198
European	8	12	1	21
Chinese	-	2	-	2
Mixed	5	27	8	40
Total	37	514	50	601

* Aided Schools received grants-in-aid from Government to cover teachers' emolument.

Source: Legislative Council Paper No. 10 of 1962, Table II, p.12.

In terms of the extent of education provided, it is noteworthy that about 100 out of 155 Indo-Fijian primary schools taught up to class 8, whereas only 53 out of the 326 Ethnic Fijian schools taught up to this level. In other words, approximately 84 per cent of the Ethnic Fijian schools taught only up to class 5. This contributed to a decline in Ethnic Fijian students at the post-primary level. In 1957 they constituted 48 per cent of primary students relative to Indo-Fijians, who comprised 46.5 per cent. At the secondary level, however, Ethnic Fijian pupils made up less than 30 per cent while Indo-Fijians constituted 56 per cent of pupil enrolments (Narayan 1984:74-75).

The persistence of monoethnic schools and segregation in education is not a product of an explicit government policy to continue racially exclusive schools. However, the government's laissez-faire approach to education, without any apparent proactive measures to encourage integration in schools, does not augur well for the development of a multicultural Fiji.

In this regard the comments I made on this matter two decades ago remain valid today.

It is not sufficient for the politicians to speak of the importance of a multi-racial society. Unless the young accept the validity of such a society, nothing much can be gained. How much does a student going to an 'Indian' primary school, then an 'Indian' secondary school, understand about the Fijian community? How much does a Fijian student passing through a 'Fijian' primary school, then into Queen Victoria School, understand about Indians? How much does a Chinese student going to a 'Chinese' primary school learn about the other ethnic groups? To have a harmonious multi-racial society, people must learn how to live in it. The development plan has nothing in it as far as this goes—and yet it is purported to be for the welfare of the people. This early division on racial lines is reflected in the institutions of society, for example, the Fijian Teachers' Association and the Indian Fiji Teachers' Union, though they are trying to achieve similar if not identical objectives.

Besides English the schools must also teach Fijian and Hindi. At the primary level, these two languages should be more important than English. Language is the fabric of culture, and one can only understand the other ethnic group's way of life by learning at least a little of its language. When an Indian speaks Fijian reasonably well, he is more readily accepted by the Fijians and vice-versa . . .

[There is a need to] create individuals who are multi-cultural, that is, people who have attributes 'like a belief in the common unity of mankind, cultural relativism of values, cognitive flexibility, membership in international and trans-national social net-works, and supra-national reference groups (Bocher:1973)' (Naidu 1975:137-38).

Ethnicity and educational performance

The disparities in schools in terms of facilities and staff, together with varying priority given to children's education by parents of different cultural and socioeconomic backgrounds, have had serious implications for the relative success of each ethnic category in education.

This disparity in the quality of education, together with the rather complex factors that contribute to success in education, have resulted in differential rates of achievement between Ethnic Fijians and Indo-Fijians. Burns (1963) observed that Ethnic Fijians were not able to compete successfully for overseas scholarships and many of those who received scholarships neglected their studies. Differential rates of achievement between students of different ethnic backgrounds have persisted in the postcolonial period.

In 1973, the New Zealand School Certificate results indicated that 338 Ethnic Fijians were successful compared to 843 Indo-Fijians and 191 Others. In that year, 58 Ethnic

Fijians passed the New Zealand University Entrance, compared to 232 Indo-Fijians and 62 Others; and of the 56 Fiji citizens who graduated from USP, only 10 were Ethnic Fijians (Ali 1975:75).

More recently, in 1989, an aggregate of 140 Ethnic Fijians compared to 188 Indo-Fijians and 25 Others obtained Certificates, Diplomas and Degrees from USP. In 1991, 150 Ethnic Fijians, 239 Indo-Fijians and 94 Others received the above qualifications. In 1994, 184 Ethnic Fijians, 260 Indo-Fijians and 106 Others graduated from USP. These disparities do not reveal the very small number of Ethnic Fijian graduates in the sciences (e.g. 14 out of 71 graduates in 1994) and in subjects such as accounting.

The differential achievement rates between ethnic categories are also reflected in secondary school public examination results. The pass rates for Ethnic Fijian students in the Fiji Junior Certificate Examination averaged 82.35 per cent, compared to 86.35 per cent for non-Ethnic Fijians, in the period 1990–1993. On average over the same four-year period, 2,000 more non-Ethnic Fijians than Ethnic Fijians passed this examination each year.

In the Fiji School Leaving Certificate, Ethnic Fijian pass rates averaged 39.2 per cent in the period 1990–1993, compared to an average pass rate of 58.9 per cent for non-Ethnic Fijians. In numerical terms for 1993, 4,750 Ethnic Fijians sat this examination and 1,806 or 38.0 per cent passed. In the same year, 8,280 non-Fijians sat the examination and 3,217 or 60.9 per cent passed.

At the Form Seven Level, the disparity in achievement between Ethnic and non-Ethnic Fijians persists. Pass grades of A, B and C are offered for each subject successfully completed. In 1993, for English, a grade A was obtained by 22 Ethnic Fijians, 73 Indo-Fijians and 23 Others; a B grade was obtained by 198 Ethnic Fijians, 442 Indo-Fijians and 66 Others; and a C grade was awarded to 287 Ethnic Fijians, 698 Indo-Fijians and 49 Others. In Accounting, an A grade was received by 3 Ethnic Fijians, 25 Indo-Fijians and 2 Others, a B grade by 32 Ethnic Fijians, 259 Indo-Fijians and 21 Others, and a C grade by 62 Ethnic Fijians, 367 Indo-Fijians and 26 Others. In Chemistry, while no Ethnic Fijian achieved an A grade pass, 73 Indo-Fijians and 3 Others did; 22 Ethnic Fijians, 197 Indo-Fijians and 12 Others obtained a B grade; 94 Ethnic Fijians, 25 Indo-Fijians and 15 Others obtained a C grade. In Mathematics, an A grade pass was obtained by 16 Ethnic Fijians, 177 Indo-Fijians and 11 Others; a B grade pass by 102 Ethnic Fijians, 404 Indo-Fijians and 24 Others; and a C grade pass by 252 Ethnic Fijians, 494 Indo-Fijians and 74 Others. Ethnic Fijians lagged behind in Biology, Economics, Physics, Technical Drawing and Agricultural Science (see Table 4.14, Ministry of Education, *Annual Report for 1993* 1993:139).

Affirmative action in Ethnic Fijian education

Since the pre-independence period there has been a concern for Ethnic Fijian education and measures have been adopted to achieve parity with non-Ethnic Fijians.

Burns (1963) pointed out that the colonial government was aware of the shortage of Ethnic Fijians in secondary and tertiary institutions and their relative lack of competitiveness in education. Through scholarships the colonial government sought to boost the number of

qualified Ethnic Fijians. Thus in 1961, of the 126 overseas scholarship holders, 53 were Ethnic Fijians and Rotumans, 52 were Indians, 12 Chinese, and 9 Europeans or Part-Europeans (Burns 1963:221).

The postcolonial Alliance government also sought to address the disparity in educational achievement between the two main ethnic categories. This was done by making additional opportunities available for Ethnic Fijian students and reserving 50 per cent of government scholarships for Ethnic Fijians. This policy, articulated in *DP7* and *DP8*, was supported by the Opposition.

However, in 1977 the introduction of differential criteria for sponsorship awards to Ethnic Fijians and Indo-Fijians for the predegree Foundation programme at the USP became a political issue. Indo-Fijians were now required to have at least 261 marks in the NZ University Entrance Examination to obtain sponsorship, whereas a pass mark of 200 was set for Ethnic Fijian students. Although this issue may have been a contributing factor in the Alliance Party's defeat, as 'Education is to Indians what land is to Fijians, the source of their existence' (Ali 1980:203), the policy of applying differential criteria for USP sponsorship continued, as did the reservation of 50 per cent of sponsorship for Ethnic Fijian students.

With many more Indo-Fijians and Others (proportionate to the population) successfully completing their School Leaving Certificates, the competition among them for Form 7 sponsorship has become stiff. The actual cut-off mark varies from year to year, averaging around 270–290 marks, but in 1994, it was as high as 312. In contrast, for Ethnic Fijian students, the competition is not as keen and therefore much lower marks (above 250) are acceptable. Ethnic Fijian students who do not obtain PSC scholarships have another chance of sponsorship through the Fijian Affairs Board (FAB) awards.

Affirmative action in education for Ethnic Fijians is enhanced by the subvention of \$3.5 million annually for 'Fijian' education. Last year the amount allocated was \$4.7 million. Previously, the Ministry of Education allocated these funds, but Fijian education now comes under the ambit of the Ministry of Fijian Affairs. With this shift to Fijian Affairs, nearly all the educational funds are allocated for scholarships at USP and abroad, i.e. the money is almost entirely used to finance tertiary studies. In the past, the Ministry of Education also set aside a sizeable proportion of these funds for the purpose of upgrading facilities in Fijian Schools.

As the recipients of the FAB Awards tend to be academically weaker students and mature-age in-service persons, the failure rate amongst them has been high. The precise information on success and failure rates is not available to the public. On the basis of the information accessible to the author on USP pass rates, it seems that FAB students have not done well, particularly in the sciences.

The distribution of FAB scholarships has become politicised and these days, there is an attempt to provide equality of access to the 14 provinces. However, certain provinces have consistently received the largest number of awards (supposedly) based on merit. This tendency reinforces the inequality in educational achievement between provinces.

The performance of Ethnic Fijian students at the level of upper secondary and tertiary education continues to be less than satisfactory when compared to students of other ethnic categories. It is debatable whether the solution is to provide scholarships for post-

secondary education. There is no doubt that some provision needs to be made for this purpose but there is also a dire need to upgrade physical facilities, teacher qualifications and professionalism, at both primary and secondary levels; to establish preschools; to ensure good nutrition in boarding schools; and to motivate Ethnic Fijian parents to be more supportive of their children's education.

Quality of education

Primary, secondary and post-secondary education in Fiji is seriously affected by the quality of teaching staff. The building of local capacity with respect to teaching at all levels experienced a major set-back as a result of the 1987 coups. Eight per cent of the teaching profession migrated immediately after the coups and some of the best qualified and highly experienced teachers continue to leave their vocation. At the same time as this severe decline in qualified teachers occurred, the government took the initiative of re-establishing Form 7 in secondary schools. As a result, the remaining qualified teachers have been pushed upwards, at the expense of quality teaching and learning lower down in the system.

The numbers of untrained primary school teachers have increased significantly and currently fewer than 80 per cent of all primary school teachers have certificates or diplomas in teaching and 70 per cent have only gone as far as completing Form 5. In secondary schools, the number of untrained teachers nearly doubled from 491 in 1987 to 846 in 1990, while the proportion of graduates teaching in secondary schools declined from 40 per cent to 38 per cent. A significant percentage of secondary school teachers (28 per cent) had not proceeded beyond Form 6 and, overall, more than 45 per cent of secondary school teachers remain untrained.

The provision of state resources to both schools and students by way of scholarships has been heavily biased towards the promotion of Ethnic Fijian education, with the result that unevenness in the quality and standard of facilities among schools is widening and inequities in access to education, particularly at the post-primary level, are increasing. Government schools are usually better funded, but certain government schools that are exclusively for Ethnic Fijians are today the beneficiaries of the largest allocation of resources. These schools receive funding from both the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Fijian Affairs. Although many non-Ethnic Fijian schools have a sizeable Ethnic Fijian student population, no additional funding is received under the provisions of the Fijian Education Fund.

For many educators interested in the betterment of Ethnic Fijian performance in education, two factors in the schools are seen as significant stumbling blocks. The first relates to over-emphasis on sporting activities, which require rather long hours of physical training. This often leaves students tired and disinterested in their studies. Sports become more important than academic achievement.

The second pertains to the over-indulgence by Ethnic Fijian teachers, particularly in rural schools, in the consumption of *yaqona* (kava). This addictive drink, when imbibed for long hours each evening, seriously affects the enthusiasm, motivation and effectiveness of teachers. Sadly, in spite of many appeals for teachers to moderate their consumption of kava, the habit continues unabated.

Many schools lack basic facilities such as clean water, toilets, playing fields and well equipped classrooms. Many others also do not have adequate science and industrial arts education facilities, whereas a privileged few are well equipped and are moving into computer education. Many of the boarding schools, which number 117, have not been able to provide sufficiently nutritious meals to students. In 1994, only 17 of these schools were visited by the Education Officer concerned.

Vocational education and training, which caters to students who have attained Form 4 level education and aims at preparing them for either self-employment or the labour market, is addressed by 50 centres. These generally suffer from the lack of qualified staff, poor facilities and variable standards.

Post-secondary education

Post-secondary education and its linkages (or lack of them) to the labour market were the subject of a World Bank study, which reported its findings in April 1992. Fiji has seven state-run post-secondary institutions: Fiji Institute of Technology (FIT), Fiji School of Medicine (FSM), Fiji School of Nursing (FSN), Lautoka Teachers' College (LTC), Fiji College of Advanced Education (FCAE), Telecom Training Centre (TTC) and Fiji College of Agriculture (FCA). Non-government organisations, namely Montfort Boys' Town, Fulton Missionary College, Navuso Agricultural School and Corpus Christi Teachers' College, also offer post-secondary education and training.

Unlike primary and secondary education, post-secondary education is predominantly a government responsibility, with 2,878 students (86 per cent) and 271 (87 per cent) staff members in government institutions. Government's policy of ethnic discrimination (affirmative action) has led to a number of government-run institutions providing education to much lower numbers of students relative to the demand. In FIT, FSM, FCA, LTC, FSN and TTC government's rule that 50 per cent of the scholarships are for Ethnic Fijians is applied. This means that many deserving non-Ethnic Fijian students are unable to enter these institutions since they are not able to afford the required fees. Racial and ethnic as well as socioeconomic discrimination is systematic. Deserving students are being denied scholarships/placement in post-secondary institutions on the basis of race. Given the severe shortage of skilled human resources, this is a myopic policy.

Although the racial allocation of scholarships influences student intake at the regionally-owned University of the South Pacific, the deliberate encouragement of private students has meant that deserving students who can afford to pay the fees are not denied access to university education. Obviously there remains a category of non-Ethnic Fijians who are unable to obtain scholarships and who cannot afford university fees, which are higher than the per capita GNP of Fiji. The adoption of a quota system for student intake, which favours government-sponsored students, will seriously jeopardise the ability of private students, who are largely Indo-Fijians, to enter the university.

There are many needy Ethnic Fijian children attending non-Ethnic Fijian schools such as those run by the Fiji Muslim League and the Sangam. There is no support at the secondary level for these students. The current FAB scholarship arrangements for Ethnic

Fijians tend to reinforce elite reproduction (see Bolabola 1979). There is an urgent need to introduce means-testing for those being considered for scholarships, by both the FAB and the PSC.

The generally lower level of achievement of Ethnic Fijian entrants to the post-secondary institutions has the consequence of their performance being below that of non-Ethnic Fijian students. This, coupled with high failure rates, has led to allegations of discrimination in marking and assessment by non-Ethnic Fijian staff. In the aftermath of the coups, a university lecturer was detained and tortured by the military because of a supposed Indian conspiracy to fail Ethnic Fijian students.

The shortage of qualified and experienced teachers has seriously affected the standard of education provided at all levels of the system. This is especially the case for rural schools. Dr Tupeni Baba has noted that 'The worst impact of this shortage is going to be felt by Fijians who are already lagging behind the other races in terms of educational achievements and the number of qualified people they have available in the areas of Science, Commerce and Technology' (Baba 1988:3–4). There is an ongoing brain drain from Fiji, which includes teachers, because of the continuation of a sense of insecurity. Interestingly enough, qualified Ethnic Fijians are also emigrating.

Possible options in education

Education can be a very powerful agent for integration in society. Hitherto it has been used largely to reinforce divisions along ethnic lines. The consolidation of primary and secondary schools in particular localities has been taking place but there is a need for government intervention to phase out segregated schooling.

The continuation of government-funded ethnic schools is detrimental to the development of a multiethnic society. Indeed, the perpetuation of the more or less exclusive Ethnic Fijian schools is detrimental to the very existence of multiculturalism. Exclusively ethnic schools have produced the racial chauvinism that is all too apparent in post-coup Fiji.

While affirmative action for Ethnic Fijian education needs to be promoted, such a policy requires clearly-articulated time-bound targets and regular reviews. If assistance in education continues to be given only to the children of the socially mobile and politically influential, then an injustice is being done to other Ethnic Fijians.

Further, affirmative action policies should not be to the detriment of deserving non-Ethnic Fijian students. The fact that talented and able Fiji citizens are being deprived of the opportunities to develop their potential ultimately means that the country as a whole is disadvantaged. The presence of well qualified and committed teachers in classrooms will benefit all children irrespective of their ethnic background. There is a need to explore ways in which deserving non-Ethnic Fijian students can gain access to opportunities for further education and training so that they may be able to contribute meaningfully to society as a whole.

The teaching of conversational Bauan Fijian and Fiji Hindi should be made compulsory in all schools. Beyond this, both Fijian and Hindi could be taught up to class 8 or Form II. Language learning must be accompanied by cultural studies and positive awareness of

the excitement and richness, as well as the responsibilities, of living in a multiethnic society and a multiethnic world.

There is a need for systematic research in Ethnic-Fijian children's educational development so that the factors that affect their progress, both positively and negatively, are identified. Some negative factors—such as poor nutrition, the lack of preschool training, the disinterest of parents and the lack of 'child-centredness' in families, as well as poorly qualified and trained teachers, excessive kava consumption and relative emphasis on sporting activities—are already recognised and require immediate action. Positive factors need reinforcement. This includes giving high visibility to the exemplary achievement of individual Ethnic Fijians and other professionals as role models.

In conjunction with the formal academically oriented school system, there must be scope for children to leave school, say at the age of 16, to enrol in vocational training institutions. The Montfort Boys' Town-type of training needs to be replicated all over Fiji. This strategy should help reduce the lack of livelihood-skills in nearly all school dropouts.

The absence of compulsory education in Fiji is a major factor in the extent to which school-age children do not attend schools. There is provision for fee-free education from class 1 to class 8, and beyond that there is scope for remission of fees. Cooperation between school management and parents should resolve other financial matters. Regrettably, it seems that there are more Ethnic Fijian children out of schools than there are non-Ethnic Fijians.

Conclusion

Among the fourfold objectives of Development Plans 7 and 8 were the goals to 'encourage a greater sense of national awareness, self-reliance and pride in being a citizen of Fiji' (DP8 1980:254) as well as human resource development. Neither of these objectives has been met in a meaningful way in post-coup Fiji. If anything, there is evidence that the quality of education has considerably declined and any sense of national awareness has been seriously eroded by heightened subnational identities and, at least for one half of the citizenry, pride in being a citizen has been replaced by insecurity about what the future holds.

Far from strengthening a sense of national awareness, education has tended to maintain subnational divisions that threaten Fiji's multiethnic composition. There is an urgent need for the adoption and implementation of policies with two emphases: the promotion of education that assists in national integration, and the putting in place of affirmative action that is not divisive.

Note

1 The International School, which caters primarily for the children of the well paid and relatively wealthy expatriate communities, is an exception to this pattern.

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