

Deryck Scarr, *Fiji. A Short History*. Laie, Hawaii: The Institute for Polynesian Studies, Brigham Young University--Hawaii Campus; Sydney: George Allen & Unwin Australia, 1984. Pp. 202, illustrations, bibliography, index. \$18.95.

Lying on the supposed boundaries of Polynesia and Melanesia, the seat of British colonial power in the South Pacific in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, and the home of a complex multicultural population with competing political and economic interests, Fiji has unique historical past among the island nations of the Pacific. It has long been in need of an integrated general historical account. We have several excellent histories of the individual segments of the Fijian population but not, until now, a book that told the story of the Fijian mosaic as a whole. We should be grateful to Dr. Deryck Scarr of the Australian National University, the preeminent scholar of Fijian history, for attempting such a difficult task. Dr. Scarr already has to his credit a masterly survey of the Western Pacific High Commission, as well as exhaustively researched though controversial biographies of Sir John Bates Thurston and Ratu Sir Lala Sukuna, two influential individuals whose legacy is lovingly described in this book. It is, in the judgment of this reviewer, Scarr's best written study to date. a

The book covers an impossibly large ground, from the beginnings of the human settlement of the Fijian Islands some fifteen to sixteen hundred years before the birth of Christ, through the advent of Western colonialism in the nineteenth century, to the traumatic aftermath of the 1982 general elections--all within the span of a mere 177 pages of text organized in four chapters! Compression has its advantages in this age of exorbitant publishing costs, but it has disadvantages too. The narrative moves at a brisk pace with little time or space for a reflective assessment of the leading personalities or a measured judgment of critical problems. Instead, the author keeps to the high road, frequently using the shortcut of cameos. This is understandable and some of the examples chosen bring history to life, but the general reader is left uncertain about how representative these in fact are.

The Fijians, the *tauvei*, occupy the center stage in this book, a very large part of which is devoted to chronicling their hopes and fears and their varied attempts to come to terms with the alien forces impinging on their lives. Dr. Scarr writes with assurance and infectious enthusiasm about Fijian tribal conflicts and chiefly intrigues, leaving the firm impression of a dynamic traditional society. Still, the uninitiated reader will have some difficulty following the complex genealogies and the

course of traditional political affiliations. Dr. Scarr writes about Indians with objectivity though with less sure-footedness. This is betrayed by his reliance chiefly on secondary published sources on the Indian community, and occasional misspellings of Indian names: *Samatan* should be *Sanatan* (156), *krishnik* should be *krishak* (150), Manilal not Manalal Doctor (125). However, Dr. Scarr does give more credit to Manilal and A. D. Patel than does Ahmed Ali, his former graduate student turned politician, in his foreword to the book.

Dr. Scarr's scholarly bias gives the book a lopsided structure. Of the 177 pages of text, 128 are devoted to the period before 1914. There is only one chapter that deals with the major developments in twentieth century Fijian history. Even if one conceded the author's implicit argument that the basic foundations of Fijian history were laid in the nineteenth century, one can still point to critical aspects of the twentieth century that deserve more attention than they have been given here: the powerful, if ultimately futile, challenge mounted by the Indians against the ideological foundations of British colonialism in the 1920s; the Second World War and the intense debate about political representation; the gradual move toward self-government in the 1960s; and the continuing dilemmas of independence since 1970. These issues are all touched on but not analyzed, and they are probably more significant in the long run than the much discussed problems of Fijian provincial administration in the nineteenth century. And what about social and cultural themes and the emerging Fijian literature at the University of the South Pacific to which reference is made? But close criticism of this kind is perhaps unfair for a work that claims only to be a short introductory history. This book is a welcome addition to Fijian history. Its conclusions will provoke debate and encourage further enquiry, and that, as the foreword says, is what any good history should do.

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