

## Passing of BRIJ VILASH LAL, Indo-Fijian historian



The **Indian Diaspora Council (IDC)** joins in solidarity with individuals and organizations in Fiji and Australia and other Indian Diaspora countries in mourning the passing of renowned Indo-Fijian historian and researcher Brij Vilash Lal.

Brij Lal passed away on December 24, 2021 at his home in Australia where he lived in exile from Fiji. Brij Lal was born in 1952 in Labasa, Fiji and was married to fellow-academic Padma Lal. She, too, has been prohibited from returning to Fiji.

He was educated at the University of the South Pacific, the University of British Columbia and the Australian National University. A harsh critic of the Bainimarama government, which originated in the military coup of 2006 and retained power in the 2014 elections, he was living in exile in Australia.

Lal was currently Emeritus Professor of Pacific and Asian History at the School of Culture, History and Language at Australian National University. He had previously lectured at University of the South Pacific in Suva, the University of Hawaii at Manoa, and at the University of Papua New Guinea. He was also a Visiting Professor at University of the South Pacific and, simultaneously, head of the Centre for Diasporic Studies at the University of Fiji.

Among his many books are: An autobiography, *Mr Tulsi's Store: A Fijian Journey* (2001), which won the San Francisco-based Kiriama Prize in 2002. He is also the author of *Chalo Jahaji: On a journey through indenture in Fiji* (2000) and editor of *Bittersweet: The Indo-Fijian Experience* (2004), the latter two recounting the history of the trials and triumphs of the Indo-Fijian community. He is the present Editor of the *Journal of Pacific History* and the Founding Editor of the literary journal, *Conversations*.

In the 1990s, Lal served as the nominee of the Leader of the opposition, Jai Ram Reddy on the three-member Constitutional Review Commission, whose work culminated in the adoption of the present constitution in 1997-1998. Lal condemned the Military coup d'état which deposed the government of Prime Minister Laisenia Qarase on 5 December 2006. In March 2015, Fiji's Defence Minister Timoci Natuva announced that Lal was prohibited indefinitely from returning to Fiji because his actions were "prejudicial to the peace, defence, public safety, public order and security of Government of Fiji". This decision was reiterated in late June or early July 2015.

"He has been my inspiration and a good friend. Although I had some differences with his interpretation of certain aspects of the girmity history, I had and will always have respect for his tremendous contributions towards our history and for his vision for perhaps the best constitution Fiji ever had. What Fiji did to him and his dear wife is unforgivable and a huge blot on Fiji who profess to be a democratic country and freedom of expression. Today is a very sad day for us" - *Dr. Satish Rai, Director-Indian Diaspora Council of Australia Inc. (IDCA) & President-Global Girmity Association Inc. NY (GGA).*

"Brij Lal was a well-known pioneer among Indo-Fijians in researching and writing about the Indo-Fijian journeys from Indian indenturedship in 1879 to the present day Indian Diaspora in Oceania and other parts of the world. He was the author of the highly acclaimed "The Encyclopedia of the Indian Diaspora" which is used as a Girmitya reference book by academics and historians. He was highly respected among scholars and historians of the Indian Diaspora. He will be missed". *Ashook Ramsaran, President, Indian Diaspora Council International.*

