CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSION
To conclude the role of external factors in the politics of Fiji, it can be stated that it is linked with domestic compulsions. Fiji wants foreign investment, foreign technology, foreign aid and trade for its development and it can't ignore international opinion. It has to show its faith in the democratic polity and human rights and 1987 coup had been necessitated due to power politics. Ratu Sir Kamisese Mara had lost the election and Dr. Timoci Bavadra had been voted into power. The two leaders had adopted irreconciliable position which facilitated the military to stage a *coup d'état* in 1987. Why the coup occurred and what were its consequences are still relevant for analysing the contemporary politics in Fiji.

There are conflicting opinions regarding the coup of 1987 and this can be understood if different variables, i.e., race, class, custom, and specific interests of some external powers are examined. Racial factor and antagonism between the two ethnic groups, and their apprehension against one another had activated Rabuka to stage a coup. He himself gave racial tensions as his primary justification for staging the coup. In his early announcements, Rabuka declared that he had staged the coup for the paradoxical reason that racist elements within the indigenous Fijian community (represented by the "Taukei Movement") were causing unrest. The indigenous Fijians felt a concern about increased role of Indians in the politics of the country, and subsequently about the future monopoly over the land rights.

Rabuka explained the genesis of the coup in his book, *Rabuka: No Other Way*, by stating that the perceived threat posed by Indians to Fijian-owned land was the motive for the *coup d'état*. But this apprehension was misplaced as Brij V. Lal, says that although the importance of race can't be lightly dismissed but Fijian fears about loss of land, were unfounded, given the restrictions within the 1970 Constitution upon altering land-use legislation. Others, such as
Stephanie Lawson and Robert Robertson and Akosita Tamanisu, held similar views.

A second explanation for the coup deals with conflict between the working class and upper class in Fiji. Economic and social problems experienced by Fiji in the mid-1980s, it is said, led to (primarily urban) working class dissatisfaction. This dissatisfaction prompted Fiji's trade unions to form Fiji Labour Party in 1985. Labour changed the face of local politics; unlike the Alliance and National Federation Party, it placed economic and labour problems squarely on the political agenda, and thereby gained support among Indians and Fijians. When allied through the Coalition, with the NFP's Indian racial vote, this broad-based support for Labour defeated the "upper class" Alliance, and threatened the Alliance's chances of ever regaining power.

The result, according to this explanation, was a campaign of disruption by Alliance Party leading to the coup. The coup itself is seen as the upper class's method of regaining the political and economic power which it had lost in the April 1987 elections. The class factor has been considered both positively and negatively. Some view that the class analysis is inappropriate in the context of the coup and others like Scarr denied Labour was or is a working class party. Labour Party was viewed as representing urban middle class, and called a front party for the National Federation Party.

Many indigenous Fijians hold the conviction now that their community's past must be reflected in the nation's present political system. At the simplest level, this is expressed as a desire for Fijian political paramountcy. The Fijian community's past is, however, reflected in Fijian political system in more concrete ways. Social and political divisions and structures from the past have played a role in both the day-to-day politics and the political structures of modern Fiji.

The view that Fijian custom was highly important in ensuring the coup's success cannot be overlooked. Customary divisions within the
Fijian community are essentially of two forms, each to an extent overlapping the other. The first is the “East/West Divide”: the “Polynesian” east has had the upper hand over the “Melanesian” west in Fijian politics since 1874. Dr. Bavadra government’s championing of Western Fiji alarmed Western leaders and they conspired to overthrow the regime led by Dr. Bavadra.

With the increasing urbanisation of Fijians, the chiefly system is becoming increasingly redundant, and their political dominance may not be secure. For the chiefs, the FLP epitomized this threat by challenging their dominance. David Robie says that this prompted a chiefly conspiracy leading to the coups, with input by Mara and Ganilau in their chiefly roles. At the least, it ensured chiefly support for the coup which was essential for its success.

The importance of Chiefs in Fijian politics stems from the widespread discussion of their role in the coup. The coup leaders repeatedly showed reverence towards bodies such as the Great Council of Chiefs. The new leaders emphasized the importance of customs and traditions in shaping post-coup Fiji. The second military coup and the 1990 Constitution, lend weight to a custom explanation; indeed, they are different to explain one without another.

The three factors i.e., race, class, and custom provide clues towards understanding Fijian politics and motivating factors for the 1987 coup. They give evidence that the potential for a coup was implicit in Fiji’s society and its political system. But explanations have also been given which centre on the motivations of specific organisations and individuals, such as the Alliance Party, Rabuka and Mara. The factor of “specific interest” is concerned with people and events unique to the time and place of the coup. There are two sub-categories of specific interest: the specific interests of individuals, such as Rabuka, Mara, and Ganilau; and the specific interests of organisations, both internal and external to Fiji, such as the Alliance, the military, and the CIA.
Regarding CIA involvement in the coup, there are no conclusive evidence. The Americans were not happy with the developments in South Pacific. New Zealand was proving itself too much assertive and nursed nuclear-free aspiration for the South Pacific. Thereafter the anti-nuclear policies of the Bavadra government was likely to upset the United States. Another point of dissatisfaction with the Bavadra Government was its proximity with the Fiji Indians and hence pro-Indian, and thus pro-Soviet. This feeling was never acceptable to the US. Thus the projection was that the US was behind the coup in 1987.

Further the coup leaders had accelerated a propaganda drive just before the coup, which highlighted two points. First the Coalition planned extensive links with the Soviet Union and Libya. Taukei Movement leaders circulated pamphlets saying that the Coalition led by Dr. Bhavadra planned to use Libyan troops to exterminate indigenous Fijians and to enable Indians to seize power. The combination of anti-left propaganda and racism was deliberately fostered to create anti-Indian feeling which proved crucial for the success of the coup.

The common thread of all such explanations is that the groups and individuals concerned acted in response to personal circumstances, or to circumstances unique to Fiji in 1987. By implication, they may have acted differently, or not acted at all, under different circumstances. The category of specific interest, then is distinct from those of race, class and custom; and, given the prominence of the people and groups concerned, it is a category of major importance.

The political turmoil and civil unrest in 1987 leading up to the Declaration of the Republic of Fiji had raised questions internationally about the political stability and economic viability of Pacific islands, for the region had hitherto been seen as an area of relative peace and prosperity. The economic consequences of the coup had served to highlight the structural constraints inherent in such isolated small
island nations. But the emergence of indigenous nationalism had given heart to other indigenous groups who are struggling for recognition.

At the end of 1987 Fiji was beset by the repercussions of two coups in less than six months. Fiji was a divided nation. It was a community riven by racial tensions and political uncertainty where rumour and suspicion prevailed. The economy was in jeopardy and the local currency was devalued; inflation was rising, and there was little new investment. The business climate was uncertain, many businesses were closed, others cut costs by reducing wages, and laying off employees. Government expenditure was dramatically reduced, civil servants had taken an enforced pay cut.

Fiji's main foreign currency earners, sugar and tourism, faced a questionable future. Fiji's reputation as a safe, happy tourist destination had been ruined. The 1988 sugar crop was threatened by the effects of severe drought and possible retaliation by the predominantly Indian workforce. Even the physical environment was changing due to political upheavals. A quarter of Fiji's pine forest had been destroyed by fires, many of which were started deliberately. And in an attempt to generate foreign earnings logging contract were signed which depleted Fiji of its remaining stands of sandalwood, and devastated the country's hardwood forests.

Further, one of the most important economic trends in Fiji has been a decline in private investment spending since the mid-1980s. According to the Australian Agency for International Development (AAID), total investment (both private and public) dropped from 21.3 per cent of GDP in 1985 to 15.8 per cent in 1994. The drop in private investment will have important consequences. With total investment down, the economy will not be able to generate enough jobs for its expanding labor force without the support of foreign resources. The strains exposed by the 1987 coups are rooted deeply in Fiji's history and political economy, but a forced departure from reconciliation and rebuilding, rather than strengthening Fiji's comparative economic
advantage, diminishes it. Preferential access to large markets such as Australia, New Zealand, the European Union and, to a small degree the United States, can aid Fiji's economy in the short run, but Fiji cannot be able to compete economically unless it builds its economy with capital and a skilled workforce.

Meanwhile, Fiji's external accounts continues to reflect some uncertainty. Fiji's current account showed a deficit averaging F$26.0 million in 1991-97, because the surplus in services (mainly tourism) was not enough to make up for the deficit in merchandise trade. Another item contributing to the current account deficit has been a notable investment income going overseas (repayment of foreign investment) averaging F$90.0 million in 1990-97. Transfer payments, including aid, which averaged F$103.9 million in 1991-97 made up for that shortfall to a large extent. A surplus in the capital account averaging F$33.6 million in the 1990s also provided financial relief to Fiji's external accounts.

Direct investment in Fiji by overseas concerns reflects expectations of future economic stability and income, and contributes to a healthier external account system. This investment has so far been lower than foreign aid and other transfer payments, which is not out of line with the general characteristics of open, developing economies with global links. It is unlikely that Fiji will attract more capital soon. However, recent political reforms allow for such a flow to occur if decisive action is taken on long-term land leases for sugar production. Although sugar is expected to play a gradually reduced role in Fiji's economy in the years ahead, it remains critical for income stability in the short term.

An alarming development after the coup was the acceleration in the rate of exodus of Indo-Fijians from Fiji. The Fijianisation of administration and politics had severely jolted the confidence of Indo-Fijians in their future security. Unimpeded in their departure by any government restrictions, most of those leaving were young and competent. They had significantly contributed to the country's professional, managerial and technical spheres. Over 2000 Indians had
emigrated in the first four months after the first coup and at the end of 1988 their number swelled to more than 12,000. This braindrain of skilled manpower - a much needed human resource for national development - was leading to general decline in quality of services in both public as well as private sectors.

To some extent, it was also an indictment of upper strata of Indo-Fijian population. It was unfortunate that a large part of Indian population was not showing much determination or will to fight for their legitimate political rights. Instead, an interesting syndrome of viewing the coup as an opportunity to fulfill their urge for upward mobility to the richer countries like USA, Australia and Canada had emerged among such Indo-Fijians. What was more paradoxical was that most of them were least inclined to return to India.

The inevitable shift to Fijian political supremacy was also being added by the internal divisions and intrigues within Indo-Fijian community. The divisions existing in India were reflected there in Fiji also. For example the Hindu-Muslim divide. There was also a rift between commercial classes (mostly Gujaratis and Punjabis, the later migrants) and cane farmers of the Western Fiji. (The descendants of indentured labourers from UP and Bihar). The business community was no longer interested in political rights and was showing no will to rub shoulders with their own brothers for a fight against dictatorship.

Most important of these was Rabuka's use of Christian religion to justify and rationalize his designs. This was in total contradiction to the tradition of liberal religious ethos in Fiji. In his much published biography "No Other Way", Rabuka expressed his intentions to convert the Hindus (whom he chose to call 'Heathens') into Christianity. The irony of the situation was that even Fiji's Christian church had been trapped in the Rabuka's ethno-centric parochial religious appeals. His earlier actions, like promulgation of the 'Sunday Decree', had attacked the free exercise of religious freedom by the non-Christian population in Fiji. The Hindus were being openly persecuted. This kind of religious
communalism had been given Fijian racialism a new obnoxious dimension that inflicted irreparable injuries to the Fijian society of future.

However, anti-Indian stand of Rabuka was diluted a decade later. He had to take the support of Indians to remain in power. In early 1996 a rift within the General Voters Party resulted in two of the four GVP members of the House of Representatives withdrawing the support from the Government. The Prime Minister was unsuccessful in persuading parliamentary members of Fijian Association Party to join the government. It prompted Rabuka to seek support from Indo-Fijian dominated opposition coalition partners. This was an attempt to establish a more secure majority for the SVT government led by Rabuka.

This was a significant development in Fijian politics. The report by the Constitutional Review Commission to the government in September 1996 thus submitted a moderate stand vis-a-vis Indo-Fijians. The Report proposed that the House of representatives be enlarged to only 71 seats in which 23 seats should be reserved for ethnic Fijians, 19 for Indo-Fijians, 3 for general electors, one for Rotumans and remaining 25 seats open to all races. The Committee also agreed to remove the provision that only an indigenous Fijian could become the Prime Minister. The recommendations were officially endorsed by the Great Council of Chiefs followed by the unanimous approval of the Constitution Amendment Bill by the House of Representatives and the Senate in July 1997.

Following the approval of the major constitutional reforms, Fiji applied for readmission to the Commonwealth and rejoined the organisation at a meeting of member states in October 1997. Further the diplomatic relations were resumed between Fiji and India. Correspondingly the announcements were made in 1998 to establish High Commissions in Suva and New Delhi. The Indian government also removed 10 years old trade embargo against Fiji following these developments.
It was quite evident that a decade of experience in politics has apparently had a sobering effect on Rabuka as he has led the way to promote a relatively pluralistic Constitutional arrangement. The new system will definitely encourage political parties with multi-ethnic membership to field candidates for both reserved and general seats. That, finally will lead to a stage when ethnic reservations become superfluous and Fiji becomes a truly democratic multi-ethnic nation. Thus we find that the politics in Fiji is still in the transition phase, but it can be easily observed that anti-Indian euphoria is evaporating.