CHAPTER – IV

AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL ELEMENTS

IN THE MAJOR WORKS OF SATENDRA NANDAN

Out of remembered tears of things
Memory weaves its incomplete web
More subtle than any spider’s:
Loneliness blinds your eyes:
You’ll not hear hearts breaking
Gaves grieving.¹

After the coup my memory had become self-editing: recalling names was difficult. I had begun wearing glasses to read. Something was happening inside my system and I found no release. Then I began writing – fiction: short short stories. And it is through those dozen stories, through fiction, in fact, that I could grapple with the truth, as I saw it, with the clarity of a stained glass window.²

Let me hold your hand
To take you on a journey
Into childhood’s land
Where the sun didn’t come
Peeping in at morn.³
Since times immemorial, man remains a constant narrator of his own sagas and tales. He tells or writes his own personal saga, his environmental surroundings and the people. The autobiography is a literary genre in which the writer depicts his own voyage, his own world and his own likes and dislikes.

Sometime, “an autobiography is a work of enlightenment in this direction where a glimpse of the individual’s most private thoughts is revealed not only to the readers but also to the writer himself.”⁴ Thus, the writer reveals his personal thoughts, attitude, vision and outlook in his autobiography. The writer has to select, modify, and distribute some of his life’s facts and record it, in a shape of a book. Augustine’s autobiography, *Confessions* can be the first example of a great autobiography, but “it was Robert Southey, who for the first time coined the term *autobiography* in 1809.”⁵ Slowly and gradually, it developed into a form of literature and many renowned politicians, writers, singers, actors, and prominent persons have recorded their lives in their autobiographies. Gandhiji’s *The Story of Experiments with Truth*, Tagore’s *Jiwansmriti* (1911), Edwards Gibbon’s *Memoirs of My Life and Writings*, Anne Frank’s *The Diary of a Young Girl*, A.P.J. Abdul Kalam’s *Wings of Fire*, Nelson Mandela’s *Long Walk to Freedom*, Purohit Swami’s *Autobiography of An Indian Monk*, Nehru’s *An Autobiography* (1936), Mulk Raj Anand’s *Seven Summers*, Paramhansa Yogananda’s *Autobiography of a Yogi*, Nirad Chaudhari’s *The Autobiography of an Unknown Indian* (1951), R.K. Narayan’s *My Days*, Khushwant Singh’s *Truth, Love and A Little Malice*, etc. are the examples of great autobiographies. Thus, we can quote here James Olney, who says; “Every work of art is a projection from the interior realm into exterior space where in becoming in cremated it achieves consciousness of itself.”⁶ A work of art becomes the expression of the inner life of a writer. Sometimes the writer doesn’t reveal too much about himself but connects the present with his past life and so we can find autobiographical touches in his book.

The renowned romantic poet, William Wordsworth says in his theory of poetry that, “Poetry is a spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings, of emotions recollected in tranquility…”⁷ and this quote can be fully applied to
the prose and poetic works of Dr. Satendra Nandan. Almost all his work bears
the mark of his character, attitude and personality. His works reflect the era and
atmosphere of past girmit days when his forefathers landed on the lonely shores
of Fiji. We can clearly see the image and glimpses of his life and times from
which he had journeyed and all these explicitly depicted with utmost clarity
and truth, in his prose as well poems. Sometimes he becomes a poet singing
‘voices in a river’ while sometime he is a novelist offering bleeding reality of
the wounded world. His pen and heart mingles with each other, and pours forth
the deep-rooted traumas and tribulations of his ‘bleeding unhealing wounds’.
As we know the term ‘autobiography’ is derived from the Greek word-
autobiographies—which means a book about the life of a person written by the
man himself. An autobiography is a literary genre and psychological
expression of the writer, which permits the writer to produce a work based on
his own thoughts, inner emotions and experiences, which he wants to share
with the readers. In this sense, Dr. Satendra Nandan’s Requiem for a Rainbow: A Fijian Indian story is an autobiography. It is a panoramic work in which Dr.
Satendra Nandan depicts his voyage from public to parliament, from meadows
to the minister’s chair and from calmness to coup. In this way, he narrates his
personal and political journey simultaneously. His autobiography Requiem for
a Rainbow: A Fijian Indian story provides the feel of a complete life in all its
variety of shades of pain, pleasure, trauma, betrayal, pride, displacement and
nostalgia. Like a true realist, Nandan makes his autobiography, a pure self-
expression narrating varied facets of his life. He writes in the inception of the
book:

Requiem for a Rainbow was written much before, May 19,
2000. Its major preoccupations were triggered by the Fijian
coup of 1987. I wanted to record for my children and the
children of Fiji my thoughts, experience and meditations:
‘Gather up the fragments that remain, that nothing be lost.’8

It is written in clear, lucid and simple prose. In the present work, Nandan has
captured not only his personal odyssey from Fiji to Canberra but he also
vividly captures the epical significance for his girmitiya grandparents.
Narrating the advent of indenture Indian laborers he explains the readers various paradigms of their coming and establishing the home away from home. According to John Docker:

“The story of Satendra Nandan’s life as so powerfully evoked in “Requiem for a Rainbow”- written with wit, sadness, anger, passion, insight-is the story of the dislocations and tragedies bequeathed to the people of the world by nineteenth and twentieth century colonialism, so careless to future consequences. Yet interwoven here are also stories of joy and discovery and passages and reflections of great wisdom, the product of a cosmopolitan writer and intellectual who has made many journeys, into his family history in Fiji, to India and love, to Australia as exile; voyage into memory, languages, life-worlds, and the fine art of autobiography itself.”

_Requiem for a Rainbow_ is subtitled as ‘A Fijian- Indian story” which clearly suggests that it depicts a personal struggle of the writer to achieve and establish identity in his own country. The autobiography is divided into five different segments according to their themes. These chapters are: ‘Fourteenth May: An Eclipse’, ‘Nadi: The River Between’, ‘Delhi: A Light among the Ruins’, ‘Suva: The Twice Banished’. Each chapter of the book has given a particular name of a place which describes Nandan’s attachment to the place. His autobiography is an outcome of his personal thought during the political upheavals of 1987. He himself admits it in “Author’s Note” of _Requiem for a Rainbow;_

I hope it _Requiem for a Rainbow_ inspires other to write their stories of the tragic events that have wrecked Fiji particularly the life of Fiji Indians- a people whose narratives are woven with the strands of sorrow and betrayal but also with hope and inspiration. Many individual and family tales bear testimony to a people’s deep and abiding faith in Fiji and the decency of her many citizens. Their fate is in their hands. This is a version of my story of life’s precariousness and its preciousness.
Further he writes about his autobiography:

I did attempt a piece in 1990-91: it came out as Requiem for a Rainbow and was launched in 2001 at the 13th ACLALS conference in Canberra by Bob Mc Mullen. But my new work, while taking account of my life until I left Fiji on Xmas eve 1987, revisits Fiji, Delhi, Canberra: Places in my heart, not so much through the prism of a single life, but through the live I’ve admitted, the many books I have read studied and in places I’ve loved and lived.

Nandan in this present book reveals each and every detail of his life with utmost fidelity and realism. It conveys to us the unimaginable traumatic affliction which he has endured and undergone during the coup of 1987. The first part “Fourteenth May: An Eclipse” describes Nandan’s experience of the coup. It is the traumatic outburst of his mental and moral conflict of five consecutive days. In the first part of his autobiography, Nandan gives a graphic description of his involvement in Fijian politics. He narrates how he has elected by the people and given a Ministry of Health and Social Welfare. Satendra Nandan writes about his own writing process and calls his book, Requiem for a Rainbow: A Fijian Indian Story his authentic biography. In his own words, “It’s taken me time to write, and, I know, like my life it is flawed and fragmentary. But it is my story, or a version of it: one’s life is, in the final analysis, the ultimate text. It would be pretentious to call it memoir; it is certainly piece of autobiographical writing.” He truthfully records the events the coup of 1987 and its aftermath. He also narrates the five long days of confinement with utter irony and sorrow. Those were the days of horror, brutality and betrayal and Nandan in his work, tries to find out the problems of the coup. The coup overthrew the multiracial Bavadra Government. Though the Prime Minister was a Fijian, the military group toppled down the government and divided the community on the basis of race and ethnicity. For the first time, his identity was questioned in his land of birth. He was humiliated, rejected and neglected by the people whom he thought of his own. Utterly dejected, Nandan left Fiji on 3rd December and settled in Australia. The chapter is like a moving plea to humanity and to the people of Fiji, to establish once again the rule of
law and justice, the rule of peace and brotherhood, the rule of social equality
and political stability. The second part, “Nadi: The River Between” reveals the
playful moments of Nandan’s childhood days. His autobiography brings before
us the natural landscape of Fiji, the village, river, streams, trees, and the place
where he was born and brought up. He also discusses several issues like deaths,
rituals, affairs, quarrels, characters, fights etc. Nandan portrays a fine picture of
all this in the lurking shadows of his indentured ancestors. G.J.V. Prasad, who
is a renowned poet and novelist from J.N.U., writes:

“Nandi : The River Between” is wonderfully written, a
must read for all who want to know the ways of life of a
displaced community… This is a book which people with
any interest in the Indian diaspora, or in the histories of
people who have been brutal victims of the dislocation
processes of colonialism and its aftermath, or in Fijian
politics and life, or even simply in good writing, have to
possess and read.\textsuperscript{13}

The second part is presented in contrast with the first. It describes the
calm and peaceful local life of the Indians with the Fijians in Fiji and there isn’t
any racial discrimination between the two. The third chapter, “Delhi: Amongst
the Ruins” is related with his experience of college life in Delhi. He presents
his vision for India and his inward feeling of joy and happiness. When he visits
India, he recalls:

I began to see the layers of India which a visitor normally
missed. Indeed a great such old, multicultural civilization.
I’d not even read enough or travelled. And coming to India
from Nandi, Fiji, was like jumping from the airport’s
swimming pool into the ever widening Pacific Ocean during
the cyclone season.\textsuperscript{14}

The next part “Suva: The Twice Banished” depicts his active political
zeal and his political activities in Fiji. He describes in detail his achievement as
an MP and also the need of reforms in Fiji politics. The, fifth and final part of
his autobiography, “Canberra: The Goldengrove Unleaving” is about his
academic career and renewal of hope in Canberra. He talks about his research
and Australian outlook towards Fijian politics. In short, in his autobiography,
Nandan delineates various myths and legends, realities and truths of the world. By capturing various moods and moments he poses before us some serious questions of race, ethnicity and identity. Jon Mee writes in this context:

*Requiem for a Rainbow* is a major contribution to postcolonial writing. It is not just autobiography. It is a history devoted to the descendents of the indentured Indian labourers in the late nineteenth century. But is concerns are not limited to Satendra’s personal present and his people’s past. The book is a reflection on the nature of politics today in Fiji after the coup of which Satendra was a victim, but also in places as far apart as Australia and India. The international nature of the book, which is set variously in Nadi, Canberra, Delhi, Leeds, and Suva, chronicles the itinerant life of a diasporic writer who possesses Naipaul’s sense of the bitter ironic or history along with Rushdie’s playful wit. 15

Thus his autobiography becomes a record of his times and moments, spent at different places. He reveals the pathos of displacement and uprootedness, through his autobiography:

My autobiography will, I hope, give the ideas of how writing can make injustices visible and audible. It may suggest ways of creating a sense of home for a homeless and countryless people. To me that is our one immense challenge to let thinking people in Australia know the truth on the streets of Suva away from the Island hotels. We cannot be tourists: We’ve to remap the world with words and images in our stories, in our writing. We’re a Pacific people; as are Australians and New Zealanders, among others. We cannot be defined constantly by others and bear the brutalities of the colonial experience for imperial crimes. 16

His identity as a Fiji born Indian makes him a symbol of suffering and affliction. Nandan’s autobiography has a novel like quality and characteristic while his novel, *The Wounded Sea* has the quality of an autobiography. It is a semi-autobiographical novel, based on the life of the writer. With some colouring of imagination, shades of fiction and clusters of characters, the novel presents before us a man’s saga from success to suffering. Some of the names of the characters and locations are changed, episodes reconstructed to make
them more dramatic. At the same time, the development of the story bears a close resemblance to that of author’s life and times. The theme of the novel presented cleverly in four parts. It can be rightly considered the magnum opus of Dr. Satendra Nandan, which was published in the year 1991. It was launched on 10 March, 1991 in Word Festival held at Australian National University. The novel gained instant popularity and soon acclaimed as a great masterpiece. According to Don Dunstan:

A significant part of that colour came from the very individual character of the original Indian indentured labourers and their descendants. Life’s rich fabric presented very vivid colours in Fiji. Satendra Nandan paints a brilliant picture… a delight; this book is a jewel…

*The Wounded Sea* is a work of high merit and expression of a traumatic personal experiences of an Indo-Fijian, who in his life-span, is twice- uprooted from his own land of birth. *The Sydney Morning Herald* quotes;

*The Wounded Sea* is the story of a paradise trampled upon and hurt to its innermost core. Nandan’s portrayal of what it meant to be an Indian in Fiji from the 1950s, to the later 1980s in superb.

*The Wounded Sea* is an eloquent expression of a writer who is in exile, who himself is a ‘girmit’ descent and one who wants to find a place of importance and recognition in his own country, where he had spent many of his life’s valuable years. The novel, in the sense, becomes a veritable record of the humiliation and persecution not only for our writer Dr. Satendra Nandan but also for millions of Indo-Fijians. Thus, we can say that, for Nandan the book is extremely close to his heart and bosom. He has depicted a celluloid film of his life in the pages of this book. It goes without saying that readers can find in it, the echoes of exile and saga of suffering of an individual and community. His utter sense of nostalgia and longing found deliberate words in this particular work. Here Nandan’s pen overflows with the concern for his predicamental state which he has undergone during the coup of 1987. In his first phase of writing Nandan has, extensively and meaningfully made use of his personal
experience of early childhood and adolescent in Fijian society. In Nandan’s *The Wounded Sea*, we can see how Nandan has represented his personal experience in the fictional writing. We have to keep in our mind that the representation of personal experience is always enriched and revitalized by some form of a tone means it can be the writer’s attitude to the particular experience. It is clear that Nandan has implemented the traditional and cultural base of the society and adopted an attitude which is often sarcastic but with a touch of respect, attachment, reverence and even protest. He is an intelligent manipulator, who cleverly arranges and organizes his autobiographical material in a chronological and systematic manner. Thus, we can say that Nandan’s personal memories, reminiscences of his life-experiences are covered and converted in the autobiographical material. It is his autobiographical elements, which forms a substantial base of his writing. *The Wounded Sea* can be considered as a dramatic fictional biography in which all the autobiographical elements blended in a way that, the chief protagonist of the novel represents certain actions and events that are real in writer’s life. The boy-narrator in the novel is the writer himself, describing the events in the first person narrative. Using this technique, he wants to convey us an autobiographical view of his life through the medium of the novel. Not only Nandan’s writing exhibits a unique attachment for the land of his birth but he also have strong dislike for the prevalent system of racial separatism. With utmost realism and truth, Nandan retells the tales of his girmitiya ancestors and evokes memory related to the past indenture era. In writing about himself as an uprooted, exiled man, Nandan also concentrates on his essential and indispensable role as a writer in people’s lives in an alien land in postcolonial period. Though his book *The Wounded Sea* labelled as a novel, everyone who is acquainted with his life and personality, clearly can say that it is a book directly drawn from his own account of personal experiences. By using autobiographical narratives, Nandan interrogates the basic problems of the Indo-Fijians like race, culture, ethnicity, identity etc. In *The Wounded Sea* he recalls that as a boy in Fiji he was familiar with the varied aspects of Fijian life and culture which he has lived in the midst
of the people of Fiji but in his later age, he was uprooted and mutilated from his own ancestral land. *The Wounded Sea* is an autobiographical novel in which Nandan records his traumatic details and feelings of his life in Fiji. The story of *The Wounded Sea* is divided in four interesting chapters. Every chapter gives us a kaleidoscopic view of Nandan’s ancestral home in Fiji, his early childhood days, education, tales and adventures with friends. Nandan, in this novel, weaves many facets of Fijian way of living; like traditions and tales, cuisine and culinary, spirit and sport. The chapters of the book are as under:

1. *Landscape of Little Ruins.*
2. *Love in the Orchards.*
3. *The Day of the Colonel.*

The first part *Landscape of Little Ruins* opens with the writer’s moving encounter with a young female news reporter from Radio New Zealand at the airport. When the reporter questions the writer about his reflections on the present political scenario of Fiji, Nandan answers; “I was glad my father was dead, he wouldn’t have survived this betrayal; this fatal stroke.” Here, he wants to convey his feeling of uprooted and betrayal caused by the fatal Coup of 1987. Satendra Nandan expresses the atmosphere of uncertainty, danger and trauma, sitting in the cozy chairs of the flight, he remembers –

> The headline in the newspaper laying on the next seat said, “They died instantly”. The chief’s neck was broken, his wife’s face bashed. Two prominent Fijians from the West were dead. “Carnage on the roads is becoming commonplace.”

He starts the chapter with the depiction of anarchy and chaos in Fiji and then gives a beautiful picture of happy and contented life of Indo-Fijians, living harmoniously with native Fijians few years before. He describes the Fijian society which is now a kind of ruins. The presence of masked gunmen in Parliament house still haunts the writer’s mind. At this time, his plane was about to take off for Sydney and he was leaving Fiji because of his political insecurity in Fiji. It is a country where he was born, spent greater part of his life
and today he was thrown out of his ‘Paradise–Fiji.’ When the flight announced its departure, he feels quite secured by the haunting, horrifying Fijian political conditions. From the plane, the writer could clearly see the cane fields, tin roofs, coconut palms, foam filled sea and also Nandi, the village which was very near and dear to his heart - his janmabhoomi birth place. In his own words -

Nandi town looked like an over turned box of jewels as my flight made its ascent through the darkness… I was leaving my country, at Christmas, with death on my mind.

In this particular line, Nandan autobiographically reveals his feeling of homelessness, displacement and exile; he was leaving his village, his country with a heavy heart. But at this juncture he remembers his early childhood days, his upbringing among brothers and friends, his family living with Fijians. He also depicts the timeless struggle and untold hardships of his girmitiya grand parents, and how his father and mother established a home in an alien land, pouring their blood and sweat. All these he depicts with acute realism and utmost fidelity. Creating various real and fictional characters like Principal Ratu Reddy, Birbal, Krishna Rao, Nandan also draws different aspects of Indo-Fijian life. He gives a realistic portrayal of Indian customs and cuisine which found its place in their day-to-day life. In his writing we can find a feeling of reverence for the Indian thought and traditions, rites and rituals like Katha, Aarati, Puja, Hindu philosophy, funerals etc. At one place, he writes about the importance of ‘Katha’ in the life of Indo-Fijians – “Katha, I recalled was the most popular Hindu ceremonies, performed on a special occasion. ….The same ritual must have followed the purchase of the taxi. It was going to be an interminable affair.”

Like a staunch Hindu, his father shows his reverence for Lali, the cow. In one of their conversations, father rebukes Nandan, when he saw that his son is riding a cow sitting on its back- “Riding a holy cow is paap (sin), betu.”

Here, the father explains him the importance of a cow for a Hindu, which shows that though living thousands of kilometers away for the years,
they never had forgotten their identity as an Indian. Still in their life, they believe in ancient Hindu belief that a cow helps a person after his death, to cross the divine river. The Indian religious philosophy related with death has found its place in the lives of the Indo-Fijians. The writer wants to convey the idea that though they are living in Fiji’s adverse and harsh circumstances, these Indo-Fijians have retained their inborn Indian identity and cultural roots. The first chapter ends with the humorous description of Birbal, the village pundit, who makes his profit by befooling the village people.

The second chapter of the novel, *Love in the Orchard*, is based on writer’s youthful activities. It starts with a crucial debate of land lease. The land which the Indians possess in Fiji was given to them on lease from native Fijian chiefs. The land must be returned to them on the expiration of the lease. The local Fijians denied for the renewal of the contract, after its expiration. When the child Nandan asks his Nani about why too many coconut tree growing is not good, Nani replies:

Too many coconuts mean Fijian reserving the land one day she explained. “Reserving” meant the reverting of land to the native Fijian owners, leaving the indentured laborers and their children landless.24

Nani’s reply highlights the stark reality of the Indo-Fijians and points out the future impending danger on Indian indenture labourers, who will rendered homeless, landless and ultimately nationaless because of the expiration of the contract. The wasteland which was barren and unproductive, some years ago, these girmitiyas transformed it into a veritable agricultural paradise by their blood, bones and sweat. As the title of the chapter suggests, it also depicts the amorous activities of youth. In this chapter, Nandan’s realistic pen presents before us various sexual encounters of the village people that took place in the darkness of orchards. Here the orchard becomes a symbol of sexual activities. Jaddu, the watchman finding Chanchal, Sukhu’s wife alone enters home. Unexpectedly, Sukhu arrives early from his job and caught Jaddu and Chanchal red handed. She screams loudly and runs out for help while Jaddu
disappears into the dark. Nandan depicts the whole scene realistically in this way:

The village gathered in Sukhu’s courtyard. Chanchal was inconsolable— as though in the throes of a failed orgasm that created its own mania and momentum. “My izzat! My reputation!” She moaned. She screamed, tearing her loose hair.

Chanchal’s so called rape case was discussed in the village panchayat, where Pritu, the milkman and writer’s father, punished Jaddu for his crime. Here some new characters like Sukhu, Zhaman, Ramu, Jagat Mahajan, Chotka Singh, Mr. Karia are introduced. Then, Nandan autobiographically depicts some of the details of his youth, especially about his career. Nandan describes his preparation for the Government of India scholarship, for which he has to go Suva, the capital city of Fiji. Nandan depicts his relation with Gautam’s wife, Joan and recalls the days when Nandan was working at Tilak High School, as a teacher. He autobiographically narrates the whole affairs. In the school, during their teaching sessions, he met Joan and both develop an amorous relationship with each other. Jagat Mahajan was the richest man of the village. His son, Gautam after completing his LL.B. from Delhi returns with a newly married Delhi girl, Joan. Nandan starts his career as a teacher, where Joan was working. Because Gautuam, a busy and money minded man was unable to spend and share feelings and time with Joan. Receiving dissatisfaction and discomfort from Gautam in Fiji, Joan began to come closer to the writer. Both began to meet each other in the lonely hours. In the silence of the primeval forest of Sawani Hills, they surrendered to each other and enjoyed pure bliss in the form of sexual intercourse. Nandan faithfully recaptures the moments of bliss, ecstasy and joy in the pages of the novel:

My tongue instinctively explored the inner sides of her full, opening mouth, she lay in my lap. I kissed her hair, her forehead, then her eyes, nose and, ones again, her opened, waiting mouth. …Then my first clumsy attempt –breath to breath, breast to breast, when both became one, and one both. She moved in waves in a rhythm I’ve never felt again.
Here, he discloses their intimate moments, and as a true autobiographer, he depicts it with accurate realism and truth. He reconstructs his days of youth, passion, love and attraction; on the pages of the novel. The second part ends with pathetic news of Joan’s death, after some days. He feels utterly lonely and dejected when he hears this sad news from one of his colleagues.

The third chapter entitled *The Day of the Colonel* begins with sad news of his brother’s death, who had died, crushed underneath his old tractor. Nandan gives readers, a realistic picture of the Fijian society, where death notices are never taken seriously. The conditions, particularly after the coup was more adverse and deplorable than ever. Narrating the cruel and violent social atmosphere of Fiji, Nandan depicts those happy days when both Indians and Fijians were living harmoniously, sharing each other’s joy and sorrows. Nandan presents the social conditions of the time before the coup and writes in the fourth chapter:

> We village children all swarm together, grazed out cattle on the same fields, ate the same stolen coconuts, pawpaws and watermelons. My parents sat and drank grog with Fijians every night and ate from the same plate. There were Lesu, Blooma, Kini, Laisa, Anna with whom we swam in the Nandi from dawn to dusk. Matalita, Ilmeleki, Solomani were the names of some people with whom my paternal grandfather, and my parents, joked, laughed and worked.²⁷

The whole chapter describes the fractured picture of the Fijian society where suddenly, race has become the most important issue between Indians and Fijians. The social and political structure was shattered by the advent of the coup of 1987. Like Bacon, with economy of words, Nandan gives exquisite picture of the aftermath of coup: “I had heard that the death notices on Radio Fiji had lengthened after the coup: shock, betrayal, uncertainty and anguish were killing many peasants Indians.”²⁸

The chapter, which was started with the news of one death, ends with many death notices. Nandan, in this chapter, gives reference of two thrilling episodes. Here, he elaborately talks about his brother’s life and his sexual encounter with a Fijian girl named, Anna. The girl’s two brothers threaten
whole family but after a few days they were reconciled. This shows mutual friendship of Indians and Fijians. He also depicts the protagonist’s heartily feelings of love and attraction to a Christian girl named Karuna, whom he had admired during his school days. He minutely depicts his relationship, pure and free from physical contact: “she had seeped into my consciousness as a sad Hindi film song.” He further writes about his feelings:

Karuna seem so romantic me, her slim waist reminding me of a fish flitting through the ripples. It was on the banks of the Nandi by a Hindu temple, near the Fijian Koro, that Karuna and I had learnt our lessons and grown, together and separate, dreaming and longing, never touching each other, and keep the secrets of our love to ourselves.

Nandan reveals that during their Senior Cambridge class, Karuna and he came closer. During and after the school time, he follows Karuna but didn’t have the courage to express anything. He sends an envelope on the advice of his friend, Nandu. When Nandan goes Delhi for his higher studies, there was a regular exchange of letters between them. Nandan narrates his own condition as a lovelorn young man, studying in Delhi, far from his beloved. After a period of three years, suddenly Nandan receives a letter from his dearest friend Nandu, informing him that in Fiji, he was converted himself as Nathan Stevenson and was going to marry Karuna. Neither Karuna nor Nandu had informed him earlier. In the form of a letter, Nandan found death of his lovelorn youthful passions. His heart fills with utter sense of loss, deception and betrayal.

In the last part of the chapter, Nandan poignantly raises a fundamental question of race and identity in Fiji. Through the story of The Mahabharata, he describes the injustice and unjust racial discrimination of Indians in Fiji. When the lease of land ended, many Indians were forced to migrate to other countries. To explain this fact, Nandan gives instance of a fable of dove, who finds shelter in the lap of the noble king to get rid of a hawk. The compassionate king saves the creature by giving the flesh of his own lap to the hawk. Through this fable, Nandan points out that the helpless and shelterless people should be saved and protected at any cost. To protect the fearful is the Indian tradition, but in Fiji,
the Indians have made shelterless by the very community, whom they (Indians) have protected. The people, who are the decision makers, few days ago, are now landless, faceless refugees.

The last and final chapter, *The Night of the Mongrels*, Nandan autobiographically depicts the causes and consequences of the coup of 1987. Here, he reveals his true identity as a political leader and a minister in Bavadra government. Making exquisite use of flashback technique, Nandan describes the pathos of exile and his departure from Fiji, his beloved country-

> It was to be the longest journey of life: as I've said already, I was leaving my country... He had to check with the military to find out if I was allowed to leave the country—my country, that is. The country where I was born...  

Sitting in the departure lounge of the Nadi airport with his wife and two daughters, Nandan fearfully describes the prevalent socio-political conditions and personal insecurity-

> When the departure of the Air Pacific was finally announced, I joined the eager queue of passengers of cheated hopes. As I fastened the seat belt I wondered if someone would come and take me off the plane. It had happened before, to my political colleagues.  

The present chapter starts with Nandan’s mentioning the exact date and conditions of exodus. It was 3rd December, 1987 when he left the country. Then his memory goes back and using flashback technique in narration, he depicts the whole chronology of the coup. He explains the readers the causes and consequences of the coup of 1987. He describes how slowly and gradually racism in Fiji appeared in its worst form. He presents before us the background of the coup giving actual facts and figures of the election of the year 1987. He had won the first election with 94.5 percent of votes and in 1987 won second election with 89.9 percent of votes. The Labour Coalition Party won total 28 seats and emerged triumphantly. Dr. Timoci Bavadra, a Fijian became the Prime Minister of the multi-racial cabinet. Nandan was given the Ministry of Health and Social Welfare. It was a democratic government elected by the
Fijians and the Indians. On the day of the Coup 14<sup>th</sup> May, 1987, Nandan attended an interview at the Fiji Broadcasting Commission and during his talk with the reporter, Nandan’s mind peeped into the past memories, when first indentured Indian labourers sailed into the Fiji Islands through a ship named, ‘Leonidas’ from the distant harbour, Calcutta. He remembers the whole girmit history and their social evolution in an alien land. He proudly thinks that the Indians have done well here in Fiji, mingled with the natives and developed the economy. He proudly remarks –

I remember thinking in that studio, impressed me particularly about my country, Fiji: I’ve not known of any country where a migrant race, which came not as colonizers but as victims of colonialism, did so much to protect the indigenous way of life. Today in Fiji, the native Fijians, own eighty-five percent of all land; they had more seats in the parliament more ministers and top government positions, and at anytime more money spent on their education… I told myself that Fijians are, in short, the most privileged indigenous community in the world. The sweat and suffering of the Indian migrants had ensured for them a future with a sense of wholeness.  

Through the novel, Nandan wants to convey the idea that the Indians have cultivated the soil, poured their blood and sweat, worked hard for hours in the scorching heat. The result is today’s economically sound Fijian society. At present, the indigenous Fijians are enjoying rich fruits of the hard labour done by the Indians. The Indians doesn’t have any regret or complain against this fact. They don’t have any feeling of superiority or prejudice. Till today, they lived in harmony, undisturbed and uninterrupted life, eating and drinking grog with each other. Nandan writes –

Race then was unimportant to us. We were unaware of its many manifestations… only now do I know that indigenous racism, like local liquor, is worse than the imported variety.  

When the interview was completed and the host asked him about his favourite song, Nandan preferred S.D. Burman’s famous song:
O Musafir jayega Kahan,  
Yianh kawn hai tera  
O Traveller, where’ill you go now who is here that is yours.\textsuperscript{35}

The lines of that particular song ironically suggest the pathos and pangs of upcoming tragedies in his life. Nandan compares himself with a traveller who is alone and alien in this land. It also suggests that one cannot be aware about his or her future. Then, Nandan reached the parliament building on May 14, 1987 and all the officials, ministers, speaker were present in their routine manner. The Prime Minister, Dr. Timoci Bavadra was also present with his cabinet. The session starts with a common prayer and then starts the proceedings. All of a sudden, an army colonel named Sitveni Rabuka entered the central hall of the Fiji Parliament, in civil dress, with him entered masked gunmen, who cordoned the whole area. They aimed their guns at security officers and seized all the ministers. Dr. Bavadra with all the ministers shoved into an army truck, which took them to the Queen Elizabeth Barracks. Now all the ministers were prisoners. Thus, the cycle of untold suffering, trauma and confinement started. It was like a tragic nightmare for all of them. They remained under the strict surveillance for five long days. All of them suffered inhumanity and barbarity from the Fijian guards. Soldiers all the time hovering around them like blood-thirsty vultures. They were restricted to one room of that particular building and have no permission to contact outside. Dr. Nandan stealthily records this period of trauma and confinement and he started writing his own experiences and expressions on sheets of paper. He minutely noted each and every detail around him, about his fellow prisoner ministers and their behaviour in these traumatic days. He also note down moods and incidents that took place between them. He stealthily kept a written record of their day to day schedule and their effort to overcome the feeling of fear, horror and danger. Nandan’s graphic description of the five days of imprisonment at the Barracks is the core and centre of the whole novel. This forced alienation makes him aware about the racial discrimination of Indian ministers by the local guards. For the first time, he became aware of the forms of humiliation and racism
which divided the land and communities, all these from the very people with whom he had served the nation. He feels utter sense of betrayal and treachery. Nandan records realistically –

As we slid out of the trucks, we were surrounded by a swarm of armed soldiers, all deeply agitated and mumbling to each other. They herded us into a small building to the left to the entrance gates. I think it must have been erected to sleep drunken soldiers for the night. Here they tried to push us into about eight small, urine-stinking cells. We refused to enter them… we remained in the front room. There was one chair, a kerosene drum, a bench and a dirty phone on the window sill.\(^{36}\)

With great secrecy and realism, he captures all the details on stolen papers from somewhere, sitting in the toilet. If some soldiers try to inquire, he hides them into his socks. Many of the passages of the novel were written like this. Nandan says that writing gives you inspiration and courage. He writes:

> Writing makes things bearable and clarifies the ‘situation’. Words can give tremendous distance and objectivity to events too close to the heart. And how inspiring that is? From one word to another word we can grow in strength and love and become conscious of a shared destiny.\(^ {37}\)

Nandan also expresses his heartfelt gratitude towards his girmitiya parent’s efforts to provide him good education, in a land where generally people prefers to be a teacher or cane cutter in a cane plantation. He explains the value of education, which he received by the various sources and branches of knowledge. Nandan puts stress on the value of education through which he has endured and sustained the tragedy of the coup. According to him, he survived because of his vast reading of literature written by great writers. During their imprisonment, in their group there were ministers from different professions, there were lawyers, businessperson etc. However, all of them want to hear morning prayer from Nandan, which suggests the soothing, aesthetic, and divine effect of literature. According to Nandan, words are the unstoppable sources of strength, inspiration, and calmness in solitude. The various struggles and sagas of characters like Rama, Christ, Siddhartha, King Lear and Ulysses
provides him courage and confidence to confront the uneasy, horrible consequences. He says; “….Only through education can one understand how, at great moments of crisis, momentous or personal, individuals and communities may derive strength from their literature, mythology, religious thought and art.”

Further he explains:

The metaphor of Christ on the cross; the odyssey of Siddhartha leaving his kingdom; wife and child at midnight; the exile of Rama on the eve of his coronation; the tears of Ulysses by the shore after so many of his companions had been killed by the Cyclops; and the scene of king Lear coming on the stage holding his dead Cordelia… the fragments of poetry, mythology, religion I’d picked up in my discursive reading became rays of sunlight on broken columns.

According to Nandan, literature provided him courage, calmness of mind and internal strength in this situation. Even the daily prayer provides them inspiration and moral courage. He also gives importance to fast in this circumstance where one becomes weak, mentally and physically. They also used the weapon of hunger strike when the soldiers tried to separate them. Nandan remembers Gandhiji, when he used this weapon against the imperial British. Nandan cites an epigraph from his favourite author, Patrick White’s novel, Happy Valley where he (Patrick White) quotes Gandhiji:

It is impossible to do away with the law of suffering, which is one indispensable condition of our being. Progress is to be measured by the amount of suffering undergone… the purer the suffering, the greater is the progress.

Nandan argues that Gandhiji had developed his firm belief in South Africa, among the indenture girmit people and he proved himself in creating a social consciousness among them. Nandan says that it can be the case with Fiji, where a fast can awaken the conscience of millions of people. At the end of fifth day, they were released from the custody. He recalls it as “a long day’s journey, from a nightmare to a home.” In the epilogue of the novel, he pathetically says that:
During these last years, Fiji has remained one bleeding, unhealing wound. I have often thought of going back. But I have not returned.\textsuperscript{42}

What Nandan wants to convey is that Fiji has become a racial state. In the past years, it was a multiracial paradise but the machinations of some of the Fijian politicians and industrialists had made Fiji racially divided. He concludes the novel with an age-old fable of two mongrels and a monkey. Every time the monkey takes the larger piece of the roti from the heavier portion and this way he eats the whole roti, brought by the mongrels. Nandan, citing this example of colonialism tries to explain that politicians are eager to play monkey game by giving all the benefits to one community, excluding the other. Nandan clearly writes in the acknowledgment of \textit{The wounded Sea} - “The fourth part of \textit{The Wounded Sea, The Night of the Mongrels}, is a fragment from my memoirs of the coups in Fiji written at the Humanities Research Centre.”\textsuperscript{43}

Thus his writing becomes for us a mirror in which a writer’s personal life reflected. Also, in his plethora of writing, he always emphasis on the creation of a work that is essentially true and should reflect the aspects of reality. He can be considered to be the most autobiographical poet of his period. A lasting and deep personal melancholic note pervades in all his essays and poems. His works are moral, philosophical and above all autobiographical. Nandan has suffered intensely from the prevalent political strife and this moral and mental conflict comes to surface, when he writes essays and poems. In his volume of poems, \textit{The Loneliness of Island} he writes:

\begin{quote}
A race without a place must forever die;  
Uprooted, transplanted lives grow in pain  
To live, must their generations die again?\textsuperscript{44}
\end{quote}

As Albert Mordell says in this context, “the works of imaginations open up to the reader hidden vistas in man’s inner life just as dreams do.”\textsuperscript{45} If we examine closely, in Nandan’s case this opening of the hidden vistas is the core of his entire body of writing. His prose as well as poetry seems to be personal and in autobiographical mode. His writing exhibits that the man in the book and the man who writes it, both are one and same; and thus denies Eliot’s division “the
man who suffers and the mind which creates.” Thus, we can compare Nandan with the famous American poet, Walt Whitman or the English poet, Wordsworth. His literary corpus seems to configure an internal consciousness beyond self. The Loneliness of Island is a record of his poetic journey from 1976 to 2006. It is his one of the most prophetic and mature poetical works. The present volume of poems with two other, Voices in the River, Faces in a Village form a solid and concrete base and established Dr. Satendra Nandan’s visible presence in the folique of emerging writers of this century. According to Seri Luangphinth; “Some of Nandan’s more political poems from previously published collections can again be found here. Readers will quickly recognize old favorites that are frequently cited as the foundation for girmitya (indentured Indian laborer) literary representation: “Line Across Black Waters,” “Arjuna’s Anguish,” and “Siddarth.” Through the invocation of Hindu and Buddhist myths, these earlier lyric reflect the development of exilic wandering, suffering and return as philosophically empowering metaphors for Fiji-Indian history and identity.”

He further writes:

In the next poem, “The Loneliness of Islands,” this loss for words becomes clearly associated with “That yearning, this longing / For a place that is / No more” in the historical context of Fiji, land and ability to call it home have been at the center of racially motivated political upheavals. While memory of place for the poet evokes images of cane cutters and their graves, he acknowledges that the labor and sacrifice of these people did not guarantee undeniable inclusion; instead, Nandan’s allusion to Judas’s betrayal of Jesus serves as an indirect reference to the call for the expulsion of Indo-Fijians from political office (as was the case in the 1987 and 2000 coups) and from the country itself, even as recently as 2004 with Senator Adi Litia Cakobau’s proposal to the Fiji Senate.

His personal vision and autobiographical tone has sharpened his poetic technique. As a result, there developed a lucid, limpid as well as sharp and subjective verse form. The most remarkable quality of his writing is his autobiographical sentiments which we can find in the lines of prose as well as
verse. The girmit background and prevalent Fijian conditions makes a strong imprint on the minds of readers. For this, Nandan has to suffer and endure, once again, the stigma and trauma which he had suffered before years. In recreating them, Nandan feels an emotional bond between himself and his creations. After confronting immense personal grief and betrayal, Nandan gives vent to his innermost emotions with complete alibi. He writes –

Like the soldiers’ blackened boots;
The knives hang their blades in shame
The music on the air waves is the same.
The silence in the mouth of a gun
Echoes the betrayal seen of the masks
Of treachery on a postcard sun.49

The tormenting nightmare of the coup forces him to express his anguish and sense of betrayal in his poems. Not only the political conditions but also the natural surroundings, personal relations and animate-inanimate objects have found their place in Nandan’s prose and poems. Nandan’s preference is for the clear, simple and lucid poetry as used by Wordsworth with a purpose to impart natural realism. He explains successfully the tormenting conflict of his mind. Nandan’s essays and poems offers us a wide ranging experiences, delineating the legends and myths, the culture and histories, stories of his native Fijian land and also the girmit psyche. The poems in the volume, *The Loneliness of Islands* also contain a vast ocean of personal – autobiographical visions, images and thoughts. The poems shows Nandan’s search for identity and major theme of loss, longing, exile and nostalgia. In one of his poem “An Evening Raga” which is taken from *The Loneliness of Islands*, Nandan talks about the feeling of displacement:

This sorrow is not of dying
Or that fear of flying;
It is the sadness of leaving
Where homes have doors shut
And the evening comes quickly
Empty – handed, uninvited,
And whimpers in the hollows
Of your harrowed heart.50
The writer longs for the lost and past girmit days. He talks about the age of
ghimitiya, age of brotherhood and freedom. But the personal dream turns into a
nightmare and poet become sad and philosophical. He often combines
humorous incidents in between ugly and unhappy socio-political conditions of
Fiji. Sometimes, he ends his poems with optimistic note and future happiness.
In all these poems autobiographical character runs deep into the lines. Here the
poet, like a skilled and versatile artist chisels his work in such a way that it
provides immense pleasure to its readers. Nandan is always aware and
conscious of his humanistic role as a creative artist. Through the medium of his
poems, Nandan expresses his strong dislike for the duel nature of the Fijian
chiefs and politicians and thus the poet reacts adamantly to the false practice
prevailing in Fijian society. The poet tries his level best to awaken and arouse
society from the deep slumber that seals their human sensitivity. Touching the
core of personal exile, he narrates the plight of the twice-banished and
displaced man. Nandan’s poetry is saturated with many of his memories of the
past, reconstructing of Indo-Fijian sensibility. His constant search for his roots
and identity leads him to express himself in his poems. According to Prof.
Bruce Bennett –

Every heart makes its own pilgrimage. In the Loneliness of
Islands, Satendra Nandan takes us on a personal, poetic
pilgrimage to his beloved homeland Fiji and to his adopted
countries Australia and India. The poetry richly evokes a
tropical paradise, its fall from grace and the author’s hopes
for new signs of humanity. A man of vision, Satendra
Nandan has created a personality haunting portrait of an
island country.51

Other poems like Matalita, A Churning in Oceania, The Ghost, Wailoaloa
Beach, A Remembrance, Easter’ 88, Arjuna’s Anguish, The Gift of the
Girmitiyas, Light all are personal in treatment and autobiographical in
character.
The debut of forty-three new poems reflects a further evolution in Nandan’s craft in that the bitterness of the Indo-Fijian experience is acknowledged as posing a fundamental problem for the poet, whose continual rumination on suffering can lead to moments of utter despair. In fact, the opening of Loneliness with the fragmentary prose piece, “To Be a Poet,” depicts the death of a patriarch at a typewriter housing a blank piece of paper. The blankness of paper compounds the tragedy of death – the father spends his whole life in search of truth, but leaves without having ever issued forth a manuscript. 

Nandan’s second volume of poems, *Lines Across Black Waters* gives a heart-rendering view of the coup of 1987 and the diaspora history of the girmitiya parents. Nandan’s pen is determined to express the truth of his traumatic expressions. His hypnated ‘self’ finds expression as an Indo-Fijian exiled writer living in Australia. Nandan’s poems in the volume, *Lines Across Black Waters* narrates the various visions and versions of Indian life in Fiji. He has brought to diasporic poetry a new vigour, diversity and freshness as far as its subject matter and theme is concerned. His poems are the expression of conflict and contradictions, which is prevalent in Fijian society. His intense feelings of hatred, political-social loss, and nostalgia remain the particular themes of his poems. The stories of dislocation, transplantation, and banishment of the Girmitiyas and their children make its strong impact on the writer’s psyche and he makes it his base for creative writing. He also makes use of Indian, Christian and native Fijian mythologies to extend the scope of his diasporic poems. Nandan in his poems presents natural surroundings of Fiji, minutely, realistically and beautifully. The narrator in his poems wishes to envision the charming beauty of the nature and draws fine verse-pictures. His natural poetic talent reaches to its height of expression when he dwells on images of his Indo-Fijian identity. His poems proved that memories, reminiscences and the past could be rewritten to express the sense of protest, nostalgia, anger, and ironic humour. Nandan’s poetry celebrates strength, optimism, and hope. He is a poet of society, speaks for society and for the cause of society. According to Nandan- “Lines Across Black Waters is the essential experience of the
diasporic identity of a people forging ahead often against overwhelming odds.” Nandan captures the image of his ancestors and goes back to the distant land of the girmitiyas:

Sugar sweet the slave crop grew
Elsewhere it had depopulated half the universe
Here my father’s father,
Sleeping on our mother’s breasts.

Sugar sweet the slave crop grew
Elsewhere it had depopulated half the universe
Here my father’s father,
Sleeping on our mother’s breasts.

In short, Line Across Black Waters is the mixture of powerful poetic imagery and indenture reality. The indenture labourers who were brought from India to work on the plantations reappear in these lines. It tells us the endless saga of suffering, brutality and exile. He depicts their historical significance to develop the Fijian economy and culture. It presents before us an ironical picture by describing present socio-political uncertainty for Indians in Fiji. Nandan’s poems as well as prose consist of ample autobiographical touches. In his writing, we can say, a person speaks in a shadow of a writer, Nandan’s essays also exhibit the anguish and irony of the immigrant psyche that comes from constant discrimination. Autobiographically, Nandan examines and portrays his own attitude to the people of a land, where he was born and brought up, nourished and nurtured. He describes his political-poetical career and also the fruition of his nostalgia. In his essay-writing, he minutely weaves memories, incidents, myths, and racial history and thus, reproduces a gigantic world of imagination. According to Christopher Bantick –

Nandan’s book is usually timely...He demonstrates in the collection that he is a writer of profound understanding of the essence of Fiji. Nandan writes as he speaks, using language with strength and grace.

Essays in the volume, Between the Lines like Beyond Colonialism: The Artist as Healer, Ancestor: Distant Mirrors, Writing in Fiji, Remembrance and Reading, A Sense of Exile, Beyond the Coups: The Writer, Writing Fiji in Asia-Pacific are all autobiographical, in the sense, they all exhibit his emotional social bond with Fiji and the Fijians. Nandan says; “Whatever our perspective on the girmit experience, there’s no doubt in my mind that the girmit people
gave us our history and heritage, our culture and community; indeed by sailing in a new direction they discovered and created a whole new world for us.” Nandan emphasizes here, that his girmit ancestors had given him education, good upbringing, pride and boost to live a life in an alien land. His ancestral memory creates a sense of dignity and honour in him. He explains the importance and significance of the word ‘Girmit’ which was a term of abuse, shame and disgust for the Indian labourers used by the white colonizers in early 80s, He says:

Girmit now has an immortal meaning. And a new definition to an old indefinable experience – only the word girmit conveys the resonance of lives that could not be destroyed: girmit – the fallen cannot be obliterated from the soil beneath their feet.

In his essays, Nandan autobiographically narrates the truth of their identity in Fiji, and at the same time he expresses his sharp indignant towards the racial discrimination of the Indians, which eventually divided the multi-cultural society of Fiji. He not only possesses serious questions against contemporary Fijian army chiefs who held autocratic power, negating the equal share of the Indian, but he also provides easy solutions or conclusions for the problem. In one of his thought provoking essay, The Indian- Fijian: A Complex Fate, Nandan writes-

The military in Fiji had an honourable tradition until the day of the coup… However, it would be false to assume that, after the coups, the Fiji Army (99.9% Fijian) has the same image in the minds of many people. Many of their tactics during the coups and its aftermath were deplorable, dishonourable and reprehensible. For the first time, the people of Fiji were subject to such racial abominations and abuse.

He raises the question of recognizing and establishing one’s identity in a multiracial society, where the colour of the skin and race determines one’s centrality and marginality. In his writing, we can find the true self and identity crisis as the prominent part of the narrative. The Fijian society by refusing the integrity and acceptance of the Indians with them consequently undermines the
self – respect and recognition of the immigrant race. In case of Nandan, this racial humiliation and hatred becomes responsible for the loss of identity and nostalgia. Thus, in his essays like *The Adventure of Indenture: A Diasporic Identity*, *Tomorrow is another Coup?* and *A sense of Identity* he wants to express not only his personal search for identity but he also tries to establish the significance of his forefathers. Nandan’s autobiographical writing explores the interconnections between his Indian-Fijian-Australian life experiences. In his writing he frankly accepts the literary influence of Patrick White and Naipaul. Not only has that he also presented a continuous debate in his writing about political, spiritual and social thinking in a post colonial period. He remembers his girmit forefathers when they had landed on the barren shores of the Fijian coast, their sweat and toil on the plantations and their cultural, socio-political contribution. By immense toil and trauma, they succeeded in establishing their presence in that land and earned their livelihood. They created a new ‘home’ in an alien land and mingled with native Fijian population without discrimination.

In the early phases of his writing, Nandan has extensively and very meaningfully have made the use of his personal reminiscences and memories of childhood from his early to the professional life. *The Wounded Sea* and *Requiem for a Rainbow* can be considered Nandan’s lasting masterpieces, which go beyond the fictional narratives and thus can be called personal narratives. It is a spectacular search of an author who has been in search of ‘self’ as an individual and writer, crossing the conventional boundaries of writing. Nandan has understood the meaning and value of ‘experience’ for an author, the significance and truth of its ‘translation’ into words of personal realities. The autobiographical sense which began to be put to use by Satendra Nandan in his early works like *Voices in The River*, in his later works like, *The Wounded Sea* is now fully explored in his latest masterpiece, *Requiem for a Rainbow*. Nandan encompassing autobiographical mode in his fiction, in his characters, situations, settings, imagery and descriptions he makes his prose and poems authentic, personal and realistic. He uses memory as an effective, influential tool for historical and personal reconstruction. He himself validates
the truth in “Acknowledgement” given in the inception of Fiji: Paradise in Pieces.

Out of numerous pieces I’ve written on Fiji, over more than 20 years, I selected a dozen. I didn’t want the books to be more than 200 pages. Besides, it had to be personal, refracting the Indian-Fijian experience through fragments of history, memory, politics, people, writing, journeys, ethics and the habits of an exilic existence. According to Nandan himself, various personal fragments is the backbone of the book. Some of his essays in Fiji: Paradise in Pieces like Treason at Ten, The Politics of Dispossession and Exile, Writing at Resistance reflects Nandan’s traumatic days of the coup; while other essays like Mangoes, The Indian-Fijian: A Complex Fate, The Last Rites describes his personal memories of childhood, youth and familial bond. Other essays like Death of the Prime Minister, Portrait of a Hostage PM depicts the writer’s concern for the pathetic Fijian politics, racism and injustice to the Indians by the Fijians. Essay like Of Politics, Politicians and Power expresses his personal thoughts on politics and the need of ethics in politics. He quotes Nehru, Gandhiji, Mandela, Napoleon and Cromwell and argues to make and reestablish a healthy political atmosphere in Fiji. According to him a politician should be a leader of mass, not the leader of any one social group or race. He gives importance to the constitution of country; he firmly advocates that equal importance should be given to all the races of a country, and in country’s constitution. He puts forward the example of Thomas Jefferson who drafted American constitution without making any special provisions for the slaves, even though he himself was a slave owner. Jefferson gave equal importance to the Black as well as the whites and thus created an equal identity and opportunity for both of them. He strongly asserts –

Indenture was not only an experience our grandparents went through, for us it is an attitude of mind which others often show when dealing with us. We must eradicate this attitude.
Nandan’s recently published and much acclaimed essay collection, *Beyond Paradise: Rights of Passage* peeps into the author’s personal memories. In the words of William Zinsser, the present volume is a panoramic view of Nandan’s seven journeys covering fifty years. Further he notes:

Each (journey) can be read as a rite of passage. Satendra Nandan call them ‘Rights of passage’. … These voyages of self discovery and self-reflexivity chart different paths from and within Fiji: the first flight from Nadi Airport to his mother’s Antyesti Samskara at the Wailoaloa crematorium. The lyrical beauty and ethical depth of a writer’s experience in Fiji, India, Australia are reflected in each piece: a rare revelation of the journey into one’s self.61

William Zinsser is absolutely true when he compares the seven essays with seven journeys of the writer into the land of ‘self’. The present volume contains essays which are highly autobiographical and personal in treatment. The book starts with an essay, *First Flight, First Love* which describes at length, Nandan’s journey from Fiji to India via Australia for the purpose of his higher study. Expressing his personal saga of maiden journey to his motherland, India –

The India of my childhood imagination, that India which had seeped into my childhood consciousness with immense force through her epics, songs, memories of grandparents, films, pictures of god and goddesses, portraits of Gandhi and Nehru, posters of *Lord Krishna* in a kitchen stealing and eating butter, Ram and Sita in an idyllic forest, was quite different from India and the Indians one jostled with on the cobbled streets of Delhi.62

Remembering India, he also remembers various facets of Fijian life, his childhood days, schooling and friends, college days at Delhi, his love for Jyoti, impact of literature etc. He also autobiographically expresses his feeling of attraction and love to his college mate, Jyoti. He minutely describes his school days and how he selected for the Government of India Scholarship. All these details are described with utmost fidelity and correctness.
In the second essay entitled, *Into White Australia* Nandan depicts his tour to Australia, for various occasions, first when he goes to India via Australia and later for his Ph.D. studies. The third essay, *A Return Flight to Paradise* reveals his encounter with his own childhood memories when he reaches his village where he was born, Nadi. He compares Nadi with paradise of his childhood, but at present this beautiful village gives him a sense of shock, sadness and hatred. Here, he visits some of his relatives, friends and professionals. He met few of his political colleagues and worries about the present scenario. He also visits University of South Pacific at Suva, the capital city of Fiji, where he once worked. The fourth segment of the book is, *Post colonialism in the Time of Plague* is related with Nandan’s academic experiences at Simala. Here, he compares Plague in different cities with the effect of coup in Fiji. The fifth segment of the book, *Antyesti Samskara: The Sea* depicts his sorrow on his mother’s death. Praising the natural landscape and scenery of Fiji, Nandan mourns on the death of his mother:

> My mother was not an articulate woman. She spoke in her silences and acts of affections. Like so many woman of her generation in Fiji, they lived in their children. How can I ever forget her image in widow-white framed in the doorway waving goodbye to me…..

The present essay ends with the minute depiction of Hindu rites and rituals still alive in an alien land. The sixth essay, *Tomorrow is Another Coup?* is another contemplative essay on the Fijian politics and coup. He gives a daring reply to Sitveni Rabuka, who was a colonel and overthrew the Bavadra government in 1987. The last essay of the volume, *Reading and Writing: The Endless Journey* is a kind of exposition of his writing career. In this chapter, Nandan autobiographically reveals that how literature and literary artists influenced him and helped him to articulate his traumatic experience. He firmly believes that writing serves a kind of Catharsis for a writer and becomes a potent instrument.
in the eradication of the evils of society. Quoting allusions from different text, Nandan mentions that these texts had an indelible impression on his writing and personality. He says-

> Literature is constantly challenging and changing one’s identity. In the flux of life, the fluidity of one’s identity is always redefined in relation to other lives.\(^6\)

Nandan’s second volume of essays *Between the Lines* is an excellent example of the emotional expression in prose. Nandan’s second volume of essays, *Between the Lines* contains his personal reflection on variety of topics like Colonialism, writing, education, reading, coup, identity, ethics, nation, corruption, motherland, leadership etc. He also talks about Gandhi, Nehru, and other recent political developments. He also describes the literary impact of V. S. Naipaul, Patrick White, and Wole Soyinka on him. His essays in the volume like; *Ancestors: Distant Mirrors, Remembrance and Reading, Beyond the Coups: The writer*; are highly autobiographical. Quoting different writers like Naipaul, Soyinka and Patrick White he emphasis on the importance and significance of writing, particularly in the South Pacific region. In this context, he remarks in his autobiography, *Requiem for a Rainbow: A Fijian Indian Story*:

> To me both he (Patrick White) and Naipaul are political writers in the deepest sense of that overflogged word. It Naipaul made me see my world and history with new meaning and honesty, White gave me a sense of the creative nature of art no matter how seemingly and the outer landscape of one’s existence.\(^6\)
References:

5. Ibid. p.37.
8. Ibid. p.6.
10. Ibid. p.6.


