

OVERLAND

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15 April 1988

Dear Mr Nandan:

I am taking the liberty of enclosing the most recent issue of the quarterly Overland in the hope that you may write for us.

While we can congratulate ourselves on having you with us in Australia, we deeply deplore the recent incidents and destruction of a promising democracy in Fiji. It would be particularly appropriate if a distinguished literary figure such as yourself would feel able to write for us on some aspect of this issue.

May I, perhaps, propose a "Letter from Fiji - In Exile", or some such topic. It could be a letter addressed to someone in Fiji, friend or enemy, or could be a letter addressed to Australians. Or perhaps you would allow us to publish an extract from your forthcoming book on Fiji.

We do of course pay -- not lavish commercial rates, but reasonably.

If you are in Melbourne perhaps you would care to lunch with us.

Yours sincerely,

Stephen Murray-Smith
Stephen Murray-Smith
Editor

29/3/88

Dear Stephen,

I feel we should contact Barbara Nandan to wish for O/L almost the comp and give after the comp, particularly in regard to its future proposals as the prospects of its multi-racial society. I enclose copies of news of the same.

AK



FOOTSCRAY INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY
DEPARTMENT OF HUMANITIES

With the Compliments
of
J. D. McLAREN
Head of Department

Fiji by ex-MP

MR Satendra Nandan was the minister of culture and education in Fiji during the days of the Bavadra government. He's now doing research at the Humanities Research Centre in Canberra, hoping to write a book on Fiji rather after the style of the Salman Rushdie one on Nicaragua.

Hotel highlights

SYDNEY'S Harold Park Hotel has 12 overseas writers appearing either on their way to, or coming back from, Writers Week in Adelaide. March 8 is an International Women's Week event, with Wendy Bacon, Janie Conway, Stephanie Dowrick, Alison Lyssa, Frances Peters and Lillian Peters reading at 8pm; and 12 there's a special 3pm session with Michael Ondaatje, Glenda Adams and others. No room to give you the details are later.

Australian. 5/3/88 (17)

Satendra Nandan

Zoo Story

I

an old woman in white
 sat where a corpse had been
 the wailing had ceased
 and grief begun —
 like a blackbird's
 her tiny eyes darted.
 then she sang songs
 learnt in another country
 almost in another tongue
 to the monotonous beating of the drum
 that told of sorrows more than death.

soon like the discarded drum
 she will lie in the corner —
 another corpse to be burnt.
 hold your nose, friend,
 the dead burning flesh has a familiar stench.

II

another old woman — toothless,
 hair a fallen hornet's nest
 wrapped in mats, sulu tied
 in borrowed black cloth
 stares starkly — her eyes
 grey like pools of yaqona;
 skin shrivelled bark of a raintree
 legs like dalos uprooted days ago.

she bares her bosom to the seawind
 as old birds sometimes do.
 then the rituals and the feast:
 the queue is long

just wait and watch
 at death
 barters on life.

from Lali
 a Pacific
 Anthology, 1993
 edited by
 Albert West, Longman Paul, 1993

III

on the beach
 a lonely figure drifts
 twisting her white bosom to the sun
 dreams are burning her desires into sins.
 she has journeyed from the south.

but why lie
 like an empty canoe on the beach:
 the sea is too alive
 the sun too hot
 go into the hotel — wait
 be cosy like a herring in tomato sauce;
 it's too late to curse or change your fate.

i see frogs beside a fallen beehive
 snap the honeybees to grow fat;
 is it death or life, friend, i am looking at?

Juicy Steaks

the aggressively ignorant student
talked of juicy steaks:

medium, rare, well done,
we joined in:

the conversation livened up
to gastronomy, etiquette,
and fine aussie wines.

a german colleague asked:
if on the distant islands
of the archipelago
we still had cannibals?
i said 'no' but had read
that the andes survivors
had eaten their dead to live
the rest was for the church to forgive.

next to us lay a picture
in the local vocal times
of a woman's breast
(or what might have been one)
stretching towards the mouth of her son;
both were dying or dead
the caption didn't make it clear
(you know how it's in black and white —
see the editorial, it urged).

peasants were dying somewhere in mauritania.
that's a peculiarly funny name for a place
we wondered what strange race copulates there.
our conversation turned to geography —
there are places still to visit
remote, primitive, torridly exotic.

we decided to have a barbecue
of juicy steaks for lunch.
a gust of wind thru a broken window
blew the paper towards the dust bin.
i was glad the dying or the dead
were not the colour of my skin!