Global Shradhanjali for Professor Brij Lal

"Professor Brij V. Lal was one of the greatest historians and scholars of indentured labour in the world during the late 20th and early 21st centuries. His eventful life, accomplishments, struggles, and publications have touched hundreds of academics, researchers, historians, activists, and teachers in many countries of the Indian Diaspora especially in Mauritius. He is the finest example and the most well-known scholar that Fiji has produced in its history. During his rich and illustrious career, Dr. Lal was a true Fijian patriot who played a key role in introducing the terms 'Girmitya' and the 'Girmitiyas' in the academic terminology and discourse of indentured labour in Mauritius, Fiji, and other countries of the Diaspora. He was a true academic, patriot, fighter, role model, mentor, a man of the people and with the people of Fiji in the struggles for social justice, dignity, and equality. He is and will be greatly missed!" - **Satyendra Peerthum, Historian, Aapravasi Ghat Trust Fund, Acting Secretary of the Indentured Labour Route Project and Chairman of the IOC, Mauritius**

"We knew Brij Lal from 1988 when he presented a paper at the 150th Anniversary of the Arrival of Girmitiyas to Guyana at Columbia University. His analysis drew remarkable parallels with the budding dictatorship in Fiji and the established one in Guyana. We have remained committed to his vision of equal rights of citizenship for Girmitiyas in their homelands." - **Ravi Dev, Ex-Member of Parliament (ROAR); Focal Point for Guyana to ILRP, Guyana**.

"We, the children of Girmitiyas from **GUYANA** and in the **USA**, share the pain and grief of all Fijians on the passing of Prof. Brij Vilash Lal. Lal's passion for documenting and revealing the silenced history of the Fijian girmitiyas was inseparable from his willingness to condemn the military coups of 1987, 2002 and 2006. His outspokenness against the abuses of the Fijian military regime led the government to declare him 'persona non grata' - forcibly exiled and banished from the land of his birth for more than 12 years. His legacy – and love for Fiji - will live on in eternity." - **Dr Baytoram RamHarack, Dr Vishnu Bisram, Dr Lomarsh Roopnaraine, Dr Tarron Khemraj, Dr Tara Singh, Guyana & USA**

"As we mourn the loss of History Professor Brij Lal, we must also celebrate his Life and Legacies. In tribute to him, the Indo-Caribbean Cultural Centre (ICC), the Ameena Gafoor Institute (AGI), and the 1860 Heritage Centre in South Africa are organizing a ZOOM Public Meeting on Sunday, January 16, 2022. Contact indocaribbeanstaff@gmail.com or WhatsApp +1 868 756 4961 for details." - **Anthropologist Dr Kumar Mahabir, University of Guyana (Coordinator of ICC- Trinidad)**

"This is indeed a tragic loss. I had been in constant touch with Brij these past few weeks as he was reading the early drafts of my V S Naipaul manuscript. He never said he was ill or in any way indisposed; the suddenness of his death has, therefore, shocked me. He would forever be the gold standard that all children of indenture would aspire to - after all he was appointed a Research Professor at the ANU when he was only 45. A great loss of a scholar who was simply the best in the field….Some months back I wrote a Foreword to his latest book, Road to Tulsi's Store….In sadness and grief." **- Vijay Mishra, Perth**

"The demise of Brij Lal is really sad. He had lived in exile for his ideas. I met Brij in Mauritius when we celebrated the inscription of the International Indentured Labour Route Project we initiated with UNESCO (2014). I will remember him for his immense work and human warmth." **Dr Khal Torabully, Poet and Semiologist, Mauritius**

"Brij Lal was a genius scholar and historian. His contributions to the research of our shared histories as a diasporic, multicultural Indian community — from his beloved Fiji to Mauritius to my homeland, Réunion — cannot be overstated. Brij Lal had a profound gift for threading the personal with the political, and his legacy will continue to flourish forever. He was a mentor and a friend and a once-in-a-lifetime virtuoso. The research community has lost a guiding light but has now gained an ancestor. May he rest in power." **- Dr Céline Ramsamy-Giancone, Reunion island University (France), Association ODI Reunion**

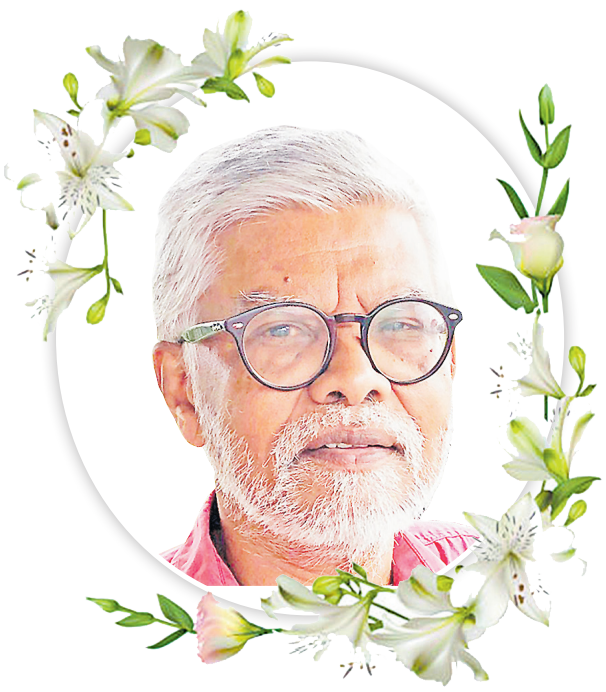
"Girmitiya historian, prolific writer, editor and much much more, Professor Brij Lal's life does not come to an end in his passing….the legacy will remain forever." - **Nalini Naidu, Sydney, Vice-Chair, Global Girmit Institute Museum Project ….**

"Brij Lal once told me that he liked the Indian Diaspora conferences the best because they are directly or indirectly about yourself and your loved ones. We share that feeling. Through his tireless personal commitment in speech and writing, he helped build the Girmitya diaspora and make it 'visible'. Brij will be remembered as an icon of the Girmitya diaspora, an eloquent speaker, an astute thinker, a prolific writer, a courageous fighter and a warm person. He was indispensable, his demise will be felt for a long time." - **Dr Ruben Gowricharn Professor, Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam, The Netherlands.**

"As Girmitiyas in South Africa we have literally passed through the same sugar plantation 'mill' and suffered the debilitations of being denied our rights of citizenship in our country, as Girmitiyas in the Diaspora. We resonate with the life and times of Prof Brij Lal, whose journey and banishment are ours – source of admiration and motivation. Prof Brij Lal matched academic excellence with a selfless fight for the dignity and rights of fellow Gormitiyas. Our condolences to his family, especially his wife who remains banned. Satyame Jayate. Truth will Triumph." - **Children of Girmitiyas . Prof. Bhugwan Singh & Pradeep Ramlall, Hindu Dharma Association of South Africa, Durban. South Africa** …

"… When the Ameena Gafoor Institute was being set up in 2020, Brij was exceptionally helpful, agreeing to be an Honorary Patron , connecting us to distinguished scholars worldwide, writing an essay for the first issue of its Journal, and other multiple deeds of kindness and support, for which we remain exceptionally grateful." **Professor David Dabydeen, University of Warwick, 1984-2019, 2021-Hon Fellow, Selwyn College, Cambridge University, UK**.

"In 2017, when in Trinidad, Brij proclaimed that he should have been a Caribbean jahaji bhai. He related that his nana, the original girmitya, had been consigned to BRITISH GUIANA but as he ascended the gangplank to board the jahaj, the door was shut and he had to retreat to the ''Coolie'' enclosure at GARDEN REACH on the Hoogly river to wait assignment to another colony. That colony was Fiji where he served out his term. For this reason, Brij developed a keen interest in the Caribbean. From early on, he included the Caribbean in his research and writing as he widened the scope of diasporic studies. He provided the essential comparative perspective which has enriched girmitya studies. His approach has provided a template for a generation of diasporic studies." - **Prof Brinsley Samaroo (UWI) & Dr Primnath Gooptar, Trinidad and Tobago**



"A distinguished academic, historian, and a true son of Fiji, I have learnt a lot about Fiji's history and especially of the Girmit era from the work of Professor Brij Lal. Having read many of his books, I am glad I did to pass on that information to my own kids. He will always hold a special place as a Historian of Fiji. Thank you Sir for your most valuable contribution. Om Shanti.' **- Navneet Sharma, https://www.facebook.com/groups/myteachersfiji/ ; Melbourne, Australia**

"The news of the sudden demise of Prof Brij V. Lal on 25th December 2021, has left the world of diaspora studies numb and speechless. A highly respected historian, and scholar, and an immensely loved friend and human being, Prof Lal has left a rich legacy of intellectual works that will keep enriching and inspiring the community of scholars, researchers, and students in India. The depth of his knowledge and understanding was visibly outstanding. Prof Lal's going has created an unprecedented void and loss for the Diaspora studies and Fiji whose history he brought to the fore from the margins of the Asia-Pacific histories." – **on behalf of scholars in India on Diaspora Studies, Dr. Amba Pande, School of International Studies, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi, India**

"In their tributes, others have spoken of Brij's massive contribution to scholarship, and his valiant efforts, through his writings, to make Fiji a better place. His desire for a better future for Fiji also found expression in being one of the three Constitution Review Commissioners in the mid-1990s, when I happened to be working at the University of the South Pacific. Despite a punishing schedule, he still found time for other things, and that included teaching my ten-year-old son the technique of kicking a soccer ball…..Brij's friends doubtless have their own special reminiscences – the ones we treasure Mine is the sight of this distinguished professor and a small boy kicking a soccer ball in a spacious front yard in Suva. Often it's the little things that matter. Despite Brij's tragic passing, his legacy will nevertheless live on, and so will the individual memories indelibly etched in our minds." - **Doug Munro, Adjunct Professor of History, University of Queensland**

"It was a privilege to know the great Professor Brij Vilash Lal, who was such an inspiration, not just for his scholarship, but for what he stood for. It is an unfathomable loss for the country, but at least the legacy of this giant of a man will remain for generations to come." - **Dr. Shailendra S. Singh, Suva & Brisbane**

"A real Gem. Brij Lal will keep shining" – **Hirdesh Sharma, Lautoka; Ravindra & Sharmila Pillay, Melbourne**

"Dr Brij Lal who I had known from my Labasa Secondary days and later with Dr Padma Lal - we became good friends. I had the pleasure of attending the marriage of their daughter Yogi in Canberra. Brij became an acclaimed historian and human rights activist. He was banned for life from Fiji by Bainimarama, head of Fiji's military regime for speaking out to return Fiji to parliamentary democracy. His wife, Dr Padma Lal, an academic who contributed immensely to the Fiji Sugar industry, was also banned. Despite many representations and calls for lifting the ban, Govt remained unmoved. Perhaps by destiny, Dr Brij Lal may finally achieve victory in his death to return to rest in his mother land, his matra bhumi, Fiji. We pray Dr Brij Lal's soul find peace and eternity." - **Jagannath Sami, Auckland**

"Your life's work have gifted me with perspective and direction I would not have otherwise had. I thank you". – **Anonymous, staff of a University in Fiji**

"History shines a mirror on ourselves and asks questions. Dr Lal focussed on this forgotten part of the world so that we too may feel as contributors to history. Brij Lal, teacher, scholar, a global citizen and distinguished Fijian now himself joins history. We are collectively better for his life and work." – **Anonymous, Melbourne.**

"Professor Brij Lal was the most renowned and esteemed scholar. He has left a treasure trove of books and articles on Girmit, Fiji, and the Pacific. A humble, courageous and honest man treated despicably by FFP government." - **Professor Vijay Naidu, Suva.**

"A man with professional, intellectual and international reach - who has reshaped our thinking and understanding of Fiji, Asia-Pacific and investigated the Indian Diaspora especially our hidden Girmit history. He has been an inspiration, encouragement and a blessings for many in finding their roots."- **Rahul K Raju (PhD candidature in Law), Gold Coast, Australia**

"Professor Brij Lal was an inspiration to all of us. Despite his unparalleled achievements, he remained humble and had time to assist anyone who approached him for guidance. You will never be forgotten Sir." – **Dr. Subhash Appana, Suva**

"Rest in peace my friend and Girmitya brother. Thanks for the friendship, brotherhood and inspiration you gave to many of us. We will miss you. On behalf of myself, colleagues from Suriname and from the Indentured Labour Route project." **Maurits S. Hassankhan, Anton de Kom University of Suriname, President of the ISC-ILRP**

"With the passing of Professor Brij Lal, the Indian Diaspora has lost a great friend who has fought with all his might for the welfare of the Indian Diaspora. His legacies and contributions on the history of Indenture and Girmitiya will live forever. His strong voice as a champion of democracy and human rights as well as his service to the Indian Diaspora will always be remembered in the land of his birth, Fiji, in his adopted home Australia and in France, Guadeloupe, Martinique, Reunion Islands as well as many other parts of the world where people of Indian origins are present." - **Mehen Poinoosawmy, Indian Diaspora Council - Guadeloupe and France**

FIAS & GGI's Tribute to Professor Brij Lal

The Fiji Institute of Applied Studies and the Global Girmit Institute place on record their sincere appreciation to Brij Lal for the untiring support in the research and publication work of the FIAS and the GGI. In 2003, when the FIAS commenced its journal, Fijian Studies: A Journal of Contemporary Fiji, while many academics of Fiji showed their skepticism on such an initiative, Professor Brij Lal (together with the then VC of USP Mr. Savenaca Sitawibau), became the strongest supporter of the journal. Brij became the founding chairperson of the Editorial Advisory Board of Fijian Studies, and continued to provide the guidance necessary all along. Such was his love for academic endeavours. During his chairmanship, the journal rose to a B-rank in the ARC journal ranking, the highest rank which any journal from the Pacific outside Australia and NZ had reached.

Brij was always keen to see the development of independent think-tanks in Fiji and the Pacific. For this reason, he was keen to support the creation of a Centre for Indian Diaspora Studies and a Centre for Indigenous Studies at the new University being developed by the FIAS in 2004-5. Unfortunately, for reasons to be left to another occasion, the Centre for Diaspora Studies did not see the light of the day. Later, while still at the Australian National University, fruitful discussions were held to honour Brij on his return to Fiji with a fitting senior honorary position in the academia in Fiji; almost on the eve of implementing this, Brij was deported from Fiji and subsequently banned for life from return to his homeland. This part of Brij's journey is known; his commitment to Fiji and specifically to democracy, is also well-known. What is not known too widely is that his commitments also matched his actions. He donated over 2,000 books from his collection to a local University, which received it gladly and with a lot of fanfare, only to decide to purge it from its collection some years later for reasons many of us know of. Brij immediately instructed that these books be passed to the Global Girmit Institute for its new Library, and committed almost his entire collection to the Library. The 'Brij & Padma Lal Library' of the Global Girmit Institute was officially opened in May 2018 by the former Prime Minister of Fiji, Sitiveni Rabuka, a man against who Brij had stood firm as a destroyer of democracy in 1987, but who he came to appreciate for his role in bringing to life the 1997 Constitution of Fiji, a constitution which was based on the report of the Constitution Commission Brij was part of, together with Sir Paul Reeves and Mr. Tomasi Vakatora. The 2nd lot of about 700 books were handed over by Brij to GGI volunteers in Brisbane in September this year.

Brij's passion for Girmit history was immense. He always had a larger than life standing and presence in the Girmit Conferences which the FIAS and GGI organized in 2017, 2019 and 2021. He gladly accepted the role of the Editor-in-Chief of the first indenture studies journal, Indenture Papers, in 2018, but which he could not get to launch on account of his health.

Despite his own health concerns, he remained a strong supporter of 'more Girmit history, correct Girmit history' and had started work with the GGI on the development of an international Post-Graduate programme in Girmit History; work on the creation of its global host institution had started with fullest support and encouragement by Brij.

Simultaneously, and more recently – 2019 - Brij was thrilled with the offer of a Visiting Professorship at the Solomon Islands National University, where he and 3 other historians of global repute were engaged in discussions to launch a Post-graduate programme in Pacific History. Covid-19 intervened before this could be formalized.

Brij breathed Girmit. To his last breath. He knew of his pending departure, writing on 10 December: "Mercifully my own girmit is coming to an end". On our response: "... you cant say bye without doing it in person, face to face... And I am not coming to Aust anytime soon!", Brij replied: "Thanks for this Bro. These days matters of life and health are in the laps of gods who do not always oblige. But let us keep hope alive of meeting, even in Fiji." And then he continued on matters closer to his heart - of a new manuscript he was to send in a few months, and his comments on goings-on at a particular university in Fiji…. This was Brij; this is Brij. His legacy will remain alive, forever.

Trustees & Management Board of FIAS & GGI.