

**IN MEMORIAM
FOR PROFESSOR BRIJ VILASH LAL (1952- 2021)**

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berthed
in the Fijian archipelago
you traverse
the wide world
East to North
North to South
carrying in your soul
the “green undulating hills of Tabia”¹
of the sacred
Vanua Levu
that birthed you

land of lore
where the sun always rises
first
lifting the pall
over the rugged mountains
and valleys
southeasters from Mount Tomanivi
to the vast Pacific waters
and beyond
you are forever

¹ From Prof Lal’s statement in October 2020, in reference to his banning from Fiji, since 2009.

born
and re-born
in innumerable lives
bearing
*“the wound of severing”*²
exiles adrift
sojourners forever
searching
for home and homecoming

your eyes trace
and re-trace
*“the leaves of the banyan tree”*³
tattered pages
*“scattered in the gales of continents
in the currents of colonies”*⁴
you seek out
*“midnight’s children”*⁵
*“on the other side of
midnight”*⁶

as you teach us to ride
the *“levelling wind”*⁷
create new worlds
of fellow travellers
find *jahaji bhais and
behans*
beyond the bondage of
borders

² Title of Book by Brij V Lal.

³ Title of Brij V Lal’s PhD study, 1980, at ANU, Canberra.

⁴ Quote from *Coolitude*, By Marina Carter and Khal Torabully.

⁵ Title of Rushdie’s novel, published in 1981, on Indian Independence.

⁶ Title of Brij V Lal’s book, published in 2005. National Book Trust:New Delhi.

⁷ Title of Brij V Lal’s collection, published in 2019. ANU Press:

You refuse
the servitude of silence
shine a torch
on “areas of darkness”
forever expanding
“intersections”⁸ of new girmit days
in your endings
are your
beginnings...⁹

BETTY GOVINDEN is a literary and educational scholar and poet. She is the author of the award-winning book, *Sister Outsiders – Representations of Identity and Difference in Selected Writings by South African Indian Women* (2008), *A Time of Memory – Reflections on Recent South African Writings* (2008), and *Words on Water – Reflections on Selected Writers* (2010).

⁸ Title of Brij V Lal’s collection, published in 2011,

⁹ Adapted from title of Preface, “Beginnings and Endings”, in *Chalo Jahaji – on a journey through indenture in Fiji*, by Brij V Lal, ANU PRESS: Canberra. 2012, pp. ix-xvii.