

## Case Studies in Contemporary Pacific Leadership

Commissioned and produced by the Leadership Development Unit of the Governance Program at the University of the South Pacific in August 2007, the Case Studies in Contemporary Pacific Leadership project attracted researchers from around the Pacific region to conduct studies on leadership aspects in the Pacific.

The case study on ‘Imrana Jalal – Human Rights Activist’ was researched and compiled by Dr Rae Nicholl based at the University of the South Pacific, Fiji. Dated: September, 2008.

*You are welcome to make use of this case study for educational and training needs, however full acknowledgement must be given to the author and the Leadership Development Unit - Governance Program of the University of the South Pacific. For further information on this case study, contact [nicholl\\_r@usp.ac.fj](mailto:nicholl_r@usp.ac.fj)*



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## **Imrana Jalal – Human Rights Activist Rae Nicholl**

When she was five years' old, Imrana Jalal became a feminist. 'If you grew up a girl in a family in the 60s, then you have an instinctive understanding – you are treated this way because you are a girl. You don't have as much freedom as your brothers and all your male cousins. You can't go out by yourself because you're a girl. I think I became an instinctive feminist – I was feminised when I was five, six years old' (Jalal, 9 October 2007). Described variously by her colleagues as brilliant, straightforward, determined, bossy, and outright terrifying, today Imrana is known as a lawyer who has spent a lifetime devoted to the cause of women's rights.

For a small state, Fiji has a large number of non-government organisations (NGOs). Many of these organisations are involved with improving the position of women in a society that has not placed a high value on females, either as human beings or as citizens capable of taking up a meaningful role in society. Imrana's reputation as a dynamic and energetic leader stems from her ability to co-found not one, but two, internationally recognised NGOs - the Fiji Women's Rights Movement (FWRM) and the Pacific Regional Rights Resource Team (RRRT).

Imrana comes from the ranks of reformers, people who, according to the American political scientist, Robert C. Tucker, are 'characteristically outraged by contradictions between what their political community professes and some of the practices it condones'. Reformers 'typically possess and persuasively convey to others a vision of what the society would be like, how it would look, *if its ideals were realized in practise*' (italics in the original) (1995: 102). Imrana's legal background, which is in the areas of women's rights and family law, and her interest in feminism, combine to make her a formidable leader in the quest for gender equality..

In addition to her involvement with FWRM and RRRT, Imrana has written the first full-length reference book on women's rights in the South Pacific, *Law for Pacific Women: A Legal Rights Handbook*. She sits on the boards of many organisations, including the Geneva-based International Council of Human Rights Policy and Greenpeace Australia-Pacific. In May 2006, she was elected a commissioner to the prestigious Geneva-based International Commission of Jurists, a body of sixty eminent judges and lawyers. Reflecting her versatility, in 2001 Imrana became the sole woman representative on the Fiji Rugby Union Executive Board.

### **Early years**

Imrana was born on 6 June 1960, the first-born child in a family of four girls and one boy. As with most Pacific families, her childhood was dominated by religion but, in her case, the religious divisions in the family had a profound effect on her life.

'I grew up in a household where I had a Muslim father and a Catholic mother and both were very devout about their religion. My mother was quite a westernised Indian and my father was a traditional Indian. When they married, my parents were not settled in their religions; in fact, they were rather nonchalant about it. But when they had their first child, the first big crisis was what should Imrana become – should she become a Catholic or a Muslim? That was a source of a lot of controversy in our family life because my father wanted to raise us as Muslims and my mother wanted to raise us as Catholics' (Jalal, 9 October 2007.)

Imrana's maternal grandmother had a powerful influence on the family and, in the end, the first three sisters were raised as Catholics. For the first 15 years of Imrana's life, she was raised as a Catholic, used the Catholic first name of Patricia, and attended St Anne's Primary School and then St Joseph's Secondary School in Suva, Fiji.

After the first three Jalal children had been born, Imrana's father returned to Afghanistan to find his father, who he brought back to Fiji. After that trip, two more children were born, another girl and, finally, the longed-for boy. Imrana remarked that 'when he came along, he was the pride and joy of my father's life. And still is!' These younger two children were raised as Muslims, given Muslim names, and sent to Indian schools. According to Imrana, this decision 'created a schism in our family'.

Like many female leaders including New Zealand Prime Minister Helen Clark, Imrana had a difficult relationship with her father. 'I think my father was disappointed that I wasn't a boy. I think there is no question about that. It would have been better if I was a boy because my father still thinks I have the personality of a man. I am a feminist so I must have the personality of a man!'

In her study of 15 female world leaders, Laura Liswood found that many of the women were highly educated and that, in some of the families, high expectations were held for daughters as well as for the sons. Liswood reports that Benazir Bhutto of Pakistan commented that 'Pakistan is a patriarchal society to the point of caricature' but that her father had insisted that she and her sisters have equal educational opportunities to their brothers. In Bhutto's case, she was sent to Oxford University, where her father had been before her (1995:57-58). In Imrana's family, her 'father believed fundamentally that girls had to be educated. As an Islamic father, he had a responsibility to ensure that we were educated and that we could earn our money and that we would not be dependent on men. At the same time, he had a vision of me being an Islamic wife, and Islamic daughter. It was very confusing, I am sure even in his own head ...he wanted us never to be subservient to a man but still be a good wife and mother. I think it is impossible. I think once you get an education, to try to keep us in a "straight jacket" according to the vision of a nice Indian girl, I think it is impossible.'

'I think we have a negotiated truce now, he and I. On the one hand, he is proud of me because I became a professional. To Indians, it is so important that their children become educated and become professional. In that way, he is proud of me, but in other ways, he is embarrassed about me with my outspokenness. I think he dives between the two constantly.'

Relationships at home could be strained and Imrana's father attempted to instil discipline in his daughters. Imrana remembers the role her mother played. 'I think she did try to protect us. I got many hidings when I was a kid. A lot of hidings. Physical discipline is something that people do in the Pacific. I don't have any negative feelings about it now but I certainly did then. I was always about wanting more freedom to express myself and to have freedom to go out and meet friends and go and hang out and go to parties. We were not allowed to until I went to university. So the fight was always about that, and about having boyfriends because you are not allowed to have boyfriends until you are actually married. And then you only have the boy that you are supposed to marry.'

'My mother used to get upset because she was not a person that believed in physical discipline and she would get upset when we would get hidings from our father but she never challenged him in front us. I think she believed they should show a united front, which I agree with, kind of. And even though my father married outside his religion and his social group, he used to say: 'I don't want you to make the mistakes I made'. My mother would just laugh and say: 'He doesn't know what he is talking about.'

When it came to school and academic life, Imrana won some of the major battles with her father. 'The first battle was sending us to Catholic school. Then I wanted to go overseas to university and that was a bit of a problem because it meant losing control over us. My father wanted me to do medicine and go to medical school. All Indians want their children to be doctors. It is the epitome of success. "My daughter is a doctor, my son is a doctor." But I didn't want to be a doctor, I wanted to be a lawyer, and in the end he gave in and let me go. I think he realised that it was too late, that the die was cast a long time ago, in a sense.'

Imrana spent her seventh form year at Marist Sisters' College in Auckland before enrolling for a law degree at the University of Auckland. She graduated LLB in 1983, followed by LLM (Hons) in International Law in 1984. She then returned to Fiji and worked as a lawyer for a couple of years before deciding that she wanted to undertake further study. Again, it seemed as though she was disappointing her father. When Imrana told him that she was applying for a scholarship, he asked her if she was intending to do a PhD. When she responded that she was planning to enrol in a Masters in Women's Studies, he retorted 'What is that? He could not believe I would waste two years of my life doing feminist studies. He could not believe it, could not understand it.'

Years later in 2003, Imrana drew on her childhood experiences in a speech she gave at a prize-giving ceremony at DAV Girls College, Suva (2003b:1-3). In her talk, she acknowledged the sacrifices made by her parents, who were not wealthy, to give her and her siblings the opportunities that they had never enjoyed themselves. She remembered how her father 'sold goats to pay for my university education. He would send me money from time to time and say "just sold a goat today – here's some money" so the thought of failing and making all this sacrifice a waste of time for them was too horrible a prospect to contemplate'.

In the same speech, Imrana observed that early socialisation into gender-specific roles resulted in girls being expected to perform chores inside the house, in most cases years before their brothers were expected to help. When they finally were given tasks, the boys were allowed to work outside the house, reinforcing the lesson that girls and women should be confined to the private sphere of the home while boys were expected to move out into the public sphere, the public world, where decisions are made and men exercise power. In this way, children come to understand that 'men's work' is more highly valued than 'women's work' and to believe that males are more valued than females. Imrana then went on to tell the girls that:

Right from the beginning you are "socialised" into being a girl. Right from when you are born your parents and family identify you first as female. They may dress you in pink instead of blue, they may curse your birth if they wanted a boy, they may celebrate your birth as a girl if you are lucky. Many regard girls as burdens and are worried about the financial obligations, thinking that the sooner they marry you off the better. In my family, my parents were disappointed because they had

four girls before my brother was finally born! My parents now say that they thank God they had so many daughters!

As soon as you are old enough to understand you are told to behave in a certain way if you are a girl:

- Do things inside (not outside) the house
- Don't be loud
- Don't be aggressive
- Walk quietly
- Be deferential (be respectful in how you behave to others, including your brothers)
- Don't do things to attract attention – sit quietly and listen
- Don't laugh loudly
- Don't argue, answer back
- Be seen and not heard
- You are not allowed to go certain places
- Sit properly

### **A feminist leader**

Once she had completed her law degrees in New Zealand, Imrana began to look around for ways in which she could use her newly acquired legal knowledge to improve women's rights. In 1984, the idea of championing equal rights for women using legal methods was an unmapped area in the Fijian context. While women in Fiji might be allowed to vote and hold down professional jobs, most women remained in a subordinate position to men both at home and at work. In *Development or Dependence: The Pattern of Change in a Fijian Village*, Asesela Ravuvu described the cultural lag between the sexes in a Fijian village. While the women were attaining new knowledge and skills, the men remained traditional in outlook and resented any change in their lives. Tensions boiled over when women attempted to move away from the absolute control exerted by their husbands, resulting in violent outbursts as the men attempted to force their wives into submission (1988:122-126). From Imrana's experience, attitudes were no different in Fijian-Indian households.

Her interest in human rights led Imrana to accept a position with the Crown Law Office (now the Office of the Attorney-General). Here, she defended the state in civil cases and quickly became aware of the unequal treatment handed out to women. After several years, she was offered the opportunity to work in the Legal Aid unit as a legal adviser mainly in the Domestic Court. From 1987, she began defending the poorest of women. 'I represented poor women day after day after day. They were poor, they were legally discriminated against, and I would go to court every day and represent them. That was the steepest learning curve in the sense of representing women. That gave me the philosophical underpinning to something that was forming in my brain but had not actually crystallized.'

### **Fiji Women's Rights Movement**

In 1984, Imrana's colleague, Shamima Ali, founded the Fiji Women's Crisis Centre, its prime motivation being to alleviate crimes against women, specifically rape and domestic abuse. Since its inception, Imrana had been representing many of Fiji Women's Crisis Centre's clients in her position as legal aid lawyer in the Crown Law Office. In 1986, Shamima Ali approached Imrana and asked 'what are we going to do about this? Let's form some kind of organisation'. At that point, Imrana's ideas crystallized and the Fiji Women's Rights Movement was founded. At the age of 26, she had begun her lifelong role as a national leader advocating equal rights for women.

At the time, Imrana said that she ‘had no idea then what we had started. That it would become so big. It was almost overwhelming. There was Shamima Ali, myself, ‘Atu Emberson Bain, Kuini Bavadra (now deceased) and Alefina Vuki. We got together and I was the only lawyer in the group and I said “Look, let’s try and take on the law first because we can show people – we can point out that men have rights that women don’t. We can start off there”.’ With the imperative that women must be protected by the laws of the land, the group decided that their organisation would campaign and lobby on a number of fronts including changing the thinking and attitudes of citizens and politicians towards the social, economic and political status of women in Fiji.

‘We called a mass meeting and about 75 to 100 women came. The Fiji Accountants gave us their hall for free and the women told us their stories. It was a “speak-out” meeting about the law. One woman said to me “My daughter can’t do this because she is discriminated against”. Women were encouraged to speak out and say what they thought about the law. It was an exciting meeting. We were galvanized by it: we started a collective.’

Leadership authority James MacGregor Burns has noted:

Male bias is reflected in the false conception of leadership as mere command or control. As leadership comes properly to be seen as a process of leaders engaging and mobilizing the human needs and aspirations of followers, women will be more readily recognized as leaders and men will change their own leadership styles (1978:50).

A collective is a feminist ideal that involves the leadership roles being shared among all the members of the group who are working towards a common goal: in the case of the FWRM, the goal was, in the words of Burns, ‘to engage and mobilize the human needs and aspirations of followers’ (1978:50), the followers in Imrana’s case being women suffering discrimination. The collective operated for a number of years without any money. Well-known feminist activist Peni Moore was the first coordinator and after that the leadership changed every three years.

FWRM can be described as a transformational organisation with transformational leadership. Transformational leaders, Burns writes, ‘must be willing to transform society, or parts of it, if that is necessary to realise moral principles’ (1978:170). Now over 20 years old, FWRM can reflect on a long list of achievements that have helped to ‘redress the imbalances of women’s socio-economic and political status’ (2007). The organisation’s vision for the women of Fiji is for:

The women of Fiji to be free from all forms of discrimination, have equal access to opportunities, and to live in a healthy environment where the principles of feminism, democracy, good governance, multi-culturalism and human rights prevail (2007).

### **Emerging Leaders Forum (ELF)**

In her prize giving speech to the DAV Girls College, Imrana told a hall packed with young women:

The things worth fighting for are the right to an education, to have your voices heard, to form groups to fight for the rights of women and the poor, the right to work, the right to raise your daughters to be full productive citizens, the right to challenge the ways things are and to fight to make your society a better one. These are worthy battles.

Never accept that statement, “because you re a girl!” That is not a good enough answer.

Remember girls can do anything. There are no limits to what you can do and have in the same way that boys and men can. Never believe that you can’t do something because you are a girl. Put that in your head and believe it and you are already on a new journey (2003b:4-5).

As well as recognising the necessity of educating girls, Imrana was also keen to introduce a leadership scheme specifically tailored for young women. The Emerging Leaders Forum (ELF) began in 2004 and is a year-long programme developed and run by FWRM. It is designed for young women who come from diverse socio-economic, ethnic, religious and educational backgrounds. Tara Chetty, FWRM’s spokeswoman, said that ELF was Fiji’s only comprehensive leadership programme for young women and was aimed at introducing emerging leaders to contemporary issues facing young women locally, regionally and internationally (*The Sunday Times*, November 4, 2007:4).

Imrana recalled that: ‘We wanted to build young feminist leadership. Diane Goodwillie was instrumental in the introduction of the training scheme for young women. Diane, Gina Houg Lee and I, all FWRM board members, got together and said we have to build young feminist leadership and so we started this programme called ELF. Every year, we select 25 young women between the ages of 18 and 26 and one weekend a month – 12 weekend retreats – we take them away and teach them about feminism and sexuality and governance and politics. They come from all walks of life. We started off with no money for the programme. We paid for it out of our own pockets and now everybody wants to commit.’

‘It’s a mentoring relationship, not just a formal workshop training thing. We build relationships between older women and younger women. Role models. A lot of those graduates – we call them ELVES – become members of FWRM. On our nine-member board, we have one slot for a young woman. That way we are building leadership, not just in terms of formal training but mentoring and real leadership.

‘The young women that are emerging from this programme are going into different things and influencing things there. It’s amazing. Some of these girls, you meet them when they are 18 and straight out of seventh form, then you meet them after they have spent the year in training and you think WOW! They are talking now like we are talking in our 40s.’

### ***Law for Pacific Women: A Legal Rights Handbook***

In 1991, Imrana planned to take up a prestigious Fulbright Scholarship that would have allowed her to study women and the law at Stanford University in the United States. Her supervisor was to be Professor Susan Moller Okin (now deceased), a world-renowned feminist scholar. In 1989, Okin had written a book entitled *Justice, Gender and the Family* in which she argued that the family perpetuates gender inequalities throughout society. As an equal-rights advocate, Okin’s ideal society was one in which childrearing and domestic work were shared equally. She argued that if there was equality in the home, then gender equality would become possible in all other areas of life (Bryson, 2003:147). According to

Imrana, Okin was delighted with her application as she had never before had a student from the South Pacific and was looking forward to her attendance at Stanford. As the Fulbright Scholarship was not sufficient to pay both tuition and living costs, Imrana approached the Secretary of the Public Service Commission, Poseci Bune, for paid study leave. It was, Imrana said, 'standard practice in my office – everyone applied for a scholarship – and I was anticipating leave with pay so that I could pay my mortgage'. The Public Service Commission turned down her application, Poseci Bune sending her a letter explaining that 'Women's issues are not a priority for this government'. Intensely disappointed and angry at losing the opportunity to take up the Fulbright and study with Okin, Imrana resigned from the Crown Law Office.

Although the American dream was dashed, Imrana went ahead with her plans to complete her studies. She was fortunate to receive alternative funding and was able to attend Sydney University where she graduated with a Master of Arts in Women's Studies in 1992, completing her studies in 18 months rather than the usual two years. Money was tight, so she worked part-time as a waitress at the Tandoori Palace in central Sydney before returning to work in Suva.

Imrana had enrolled for her women's studies qualification specifically to provide the FWRM with a better theoretical understanding of their activities. It was clear that nobody involved with the movement had the space or time to think through the issues: all the cofounders gave their time voluntarily and they all had day jobs. Imrana's intention was to turn her Masters thesis into a book – the result was a comprehensive treatise that deconstructs the law in the Pacific from a feminist angle. Writing the book was arduous. Nothing had been documented and Imrana knew she had to travel to collect data. From 1991-93, she wrote the book, travelled and did some part-time work as a consultant.

To get the information she wanted, she 'went through judgements file by file to get the thinking of judges. Are there examples of women who are dissatisfied with the system? I tracked down women named in court cases and wrote their stories down. That's why the book has a lot of stories in it. The research for the book also provided the basis of a number of the FWRM campaigns. We were doing a law project, we were doing an anti-rape project trying to reform the rape laws, and we were doing women and economic rights, trying to change the policies and laws affecting women so they could have more access to work opportunities. That has not been a great success. It is only in recent times that we have been able to try and get that into the draft employment bill.' Following the 5 December 2006 coup d'état by the military, the FWRM ceased its support of the Employment Bill as the organisation does not support legislation enacted by the interim regime.'

*Law for Pacific Women: A Legal Rights Handbook* was published by the FWRM and launched in March 1998. The 700-page book was designed to make the law accessible to legislators, policy planners, non-lawyers and activists with the research covering the human and legal rights of women in Fiji, Nauru, Tuvalu, Kiribati, Cook Islands, Samoa, Tonga, Vanuatu and the Solomon Islands. The book also fulfilled its requirement to provide the philosophical foundation for the activities of the FWRM and provided the organisation with a strong research base.

All proceeds from the sale of Imrana's book are ploughed back into the organisation. Imrana remembers that she 'had made a commitment to them a long time ago. You publish this book, I will not make any money from it because donors are always upset about how NGOs don't have any money and they never try to make any money. So this is our small



financial fundraising thing. We sell the book to make money. We have made a lot of money on my book. It goes into a trust fund and it is our rainy day money. We only touch it if we are stuck for funding.'

### **Pacific Regional Rights Resource Team (RRRT)**

'After I had done my research and I was writing my book, the United Kingdom Department of International Development (DFID), to which Kim Stanford-Smith was an adviser, gave me a grant to stay home full-time to not work and to write. So for one year, they gave me a \$30,000 grant and I stayed at home and wrote to finish my book full-time. That was really lucky. That was 1993-94. And then I went back to work.'

'Kim and I got to know each other through this friendship and I would give him my chapters to read. He had been a judge in Vanuatu, Tonga and the Solomon Islands. He was not a typical judge. He was a judge who, to me, had a sense of justice so I really valued our friendship. It was around this time that we said: "You know what, we should take this research and popularise the information and try to change the law and policies that affect women". RRRT grew out of that and my work at FWRM. My involvement with FWRM was a voluntary thing, rather than a job I did full-time. It was voluntary work. But the work we were doing at FWRM was so good, we decided we should try and do this work regionally – and with some money. If we could build an institution that could attract funding, we could do women's rights on a regional basis. Then we went to the UK Government, whom Kim Stanford-Smith worked for – he had a lot to do with it – and together we convinced DFID to fund RRRT as a three-year project for capacity building NGOs and to help them promote reform in their own countries through this research now that we had got it all documented. Then it just became bigger and bigger and bigger and took on a life of its own.'

In 1995, three people began RRRT – Kim Stanford-Smith, Vani Dulaki and Imrana. When Kim Stanford-Smith died in May 2006, Imrana paid tribute to him, remembering him as 'an unusual man who believed in gender equity and women's empowerment long before it became trendy for men to be that way. In that way he was ahead of his time' (2006:2).

RRRT has become a successful and visible agency working in 12 Pacific Island countries. With a staff of about 14, half are lawyers and the remainder work as development specialists. Imrana's role is that of human rights adviser: she provides human rights support in training, policy and technical advice. As part of her job, she trains NGOs in the Pacific on how to mount campaigns to improve human rights and works with government agencies on how to integrate human rights into their programmes.

### **Family Law Act 2003**

The Family Law Act, an important reforming piece of legislation, will forever be associated with Imrana. Up until its enactment in 2003, family law in Fiji was based on nine pieces of legislation imported from the United Kingdom between 1892 and 1973. The law, according to Imrana, 'discriminated against women, legitimated violence against women, was sexist, patriarchal and based on rigid concepts of women's roles within the family, including women's lack of autonomy' (2002:10). The process to change the law began in 1992. Following a series of public consultations that took three years and the appointment of a law draftsman, the Bill was ready in May 2000. Another coup d'état in 2000 held up enactment until, finally, the Family Law Act became effective on 1 January 2005 (Jalal, 25 November 2003a). There had been much opposition to the bill along the

way. For example, the Fijian Methodist Church called Imrana an 'evil force in society' and accused her 'of trying to destroy the institution of marriage' (2002:11).

### **Teaching human rights law**

'At RRRT, we are broader than women's rights. Today, I am teaching Family Law but everything I teach has a critical aspect to it. A lot of our laws are not overhauled yet. Under British public law, we still have a law that says a woman has to provide sexual favours to her husband. My students are taught to question family law practice, challenge and critique everything from a human rights perspective.

'They love this approach. They don't want to do conveyancing – there is no challenge in it. Students write back to me saying: "Imrana, you have changed the way I view my life". I love it. I love it. They say: "I've come home now and I am looking at bride price in a way that I never saw it before".

'An evaluator of one of my projects called me a "man hater". He said: "You call yourself a human rights activist but all you talk about is women's rights and if that is your expertise, you should not call yourself human rights because the Indo-Fijian in the project is clearly a man hater". And you know what? I look upon it as a compliment. Because you know why? I worry constantly, working in the broad area of human rights; I might lose my women's rights edge. That's why two weeks of the year I go back to APWLD in Chiang Mai, Thailand. [The Asia Pacific Forum for Women, Law and Development is a regional NGO that runs campaigns and training courses to promote women's legal and human rights in the Asia Pacific region.] I teach a feminist course on feminism and how feminism has to go break down the law. And I go and I come back and it reminds me of where I came from. To me, I came to human rights through my feminism, not the other way around. Like all my staff have come to human rights through the other door. There are still so many challenges here for me in Fiji.

'The problem with human rights law is that if you don't look at human rights through a feminist lens, the whole gender equality debate can get lost. It is a very highly tuned argument and a lot of my colleagues are not tuned into it, which is the human rights argument where women are just one disadvantaged group. Once you get involved in the human rights framework, you are taught not to see women as a special group; they are just one of many. For me, I have a serious problem with that, so that is why I have tried to stand back and look at it critically.

'[On my course] we spend a whole day doing gender and they say: "Why are we doing this? This is not part of our formal curriculum" and I say to them "If you don't want to do it, you don't have to do it. You can opt out of the gender course. Don't you come and ask me for a reference for a job later on. Don't you dare come near me!" I am actually really open and honest and blunt about it and I constantly get reviews that say "We think Imrana Jalal is anti-men. Her feminism constantly creeps into the law she is teaching". Isn't that lovely? It is almost like it is an insidious disease. I have a hidden agenda. I don't have a hidden agenda. To me, the only feminist men I know are the ones who work with me. As one of my friends says, "you approach them with missionary zeal". So for me, it is underpinning everything I do. I would not know how to be a human rights activist. My feminism would shift away from me. I would not know how to be it. To me, my sense of justice comes from that.'

### **Dangerous vocation**

In the speech to the DAV Girls College prize giving, Imrana had instructed the young women to ‘challenge, argue, question why ... There is a time to show deference, to show respect and there is a time to stand up and fight for your rights and freedoms’ (2003b:4). This was advice that Imrana often took herself. Leaders, elected or otherwise, sometimes come into conflict with governments and regimes that impose unjust laws on their citizens. Occasionally, these conflicts end in the death of the leader. For example, the American civil rights leader Martin Luther King was assassinated; Nelson Mandela was imprisoned for 27 years for resisting the apartheid regime in South Africa,; and the Burmese pro-democracy leader, Aung San Suu Kyi has spent 12 out of 18 years under house arrest.

While Imrana’s experiences in speaking out against injustice have not resulted in long-term imprisonment, she has been arrested, harassed and threatened with rape and death. In May 1988, she was arrested in Sukuna Park, central Suva, by the Police when taking part in a multicultural event to mark the first anniversary of the 1987 coup d’etat. Taken to the Central Police Station, the group, which became known as The Democracy Eighteen, were split up with the nine women being placed in one cell and the nine men put into another. Jane Ricketts wrote of the experience:

As the long night passes we overcome our fears by singing together. Kenneth [Zinck] and Imrana improvise their own version of “There’s a Hole in the Bucket”. Not everyone is on our side though, and the singing angers some in authority. A vehicle is backed up against the grille window in the corridor outside our cell. The engine is revved so that carbon monoxide fumes fill the cell. We try desperately to cover our faces.

Someone has brought us a mat to cover the cement floor of the cell which is too small for the nine of us to lie down at once. From time to time we’re taken to the toilet. There’s no light, no paper, no soap or towel and the floor is awash.

After one night in the police cells, the Democracy Eighteen were released on bail. Seven months later, the group was found guilty of holding a meeting without a permit but were discharged without conviction. They were, the judge said, ‘the cream of society’ (1997:156-160):

The 5 December 2006 military coup d’etat led to more harassment. On that occasion, Imrana received a threatening phone call. In a statement to the *Daily Post* newspaper on 14 December 2006, she recalled that ‘the caller did not identify himself even though I asked him to. The caller appeared to be an indigenous Fijian mature male, judging from his accent. He spoke reasonably good English. He said “Is that you Imrana Jalal? I am warning you to be very careful what you say. Be very careful. When I come to you, I am gonna . . .’ He then began to utter graphic threats of rape before concluding ‘I am gonna get you baby, you just wait for me baby yeah, you just wait and watch out, baby”.’

Fearless as ever, Imrana wrote down the conversation on a scrap of paper as it occurred. She ‘yelled at him that he was a coward and a gutless wonder to threaten to rape me. I yelled at him that I wasn’t scared of cowards like him and that he was such a brave man in not telling me who he was. He then repeated the above’. It is a mark of Imrana’s spirit that the caller put the phone down first. The call was later traced to a telephone box outside the Queen Elizabeth Barracks in Suva (European Centre for Pacific Issues).

### **What for the future?**

By the end of the twentieth century, Imrana had become a household name in Fiji. Together with Shamima Ali, the founder of the Fiji Women's Crisis Centre, she was described in an anthology entitled *20<sup>th</sup> Century Fiji: People Who Shaped This Nation*, as being 'virtually synonymous with women's rights in Fiji'. The writer, Teresia Teaiwa, went on to explain that both women had contributed profoundly to reshaping the consciousness of the nation about women's issues, which for too long were neglected'. Their achievements came through the institutions they had developed for women in Fiji. 'Both the FWRM and the Fiji Women's Crisis Centre have become important resources for women across the spectrum of race, class, religion, and generation in Fiji' (2001:207).

What Imrana does next is open to question. She says 'I think it is now time for me to change, to do something different. I have been doing this for 10 years now. At RRRT, we focused on women's rights projects for five years and then we became a broader based project because that's the way things were going globally in terms of women deliberately embracing the human rights' framework in order to advance their cause within CEDAW [the United Nations Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Violence Against Women], which became a strong focus for our work.'

In all societies, women face particular barriers when they take on leadership roles. What is seen as a positive attribute in a man – assertiveness – is seen in a negative light in a woman – aggressiveness. Imrana has overcome this form of stereotyping and emerged as a strong and visible leader and a role model for young women.

Her role as a policy advocate has also brought her international recognition and considerable legislative success. Theorist Paul Brooker has discussed the way policy advocates approach their task of 'selling pioneering proposals'. He wrote that 'on rare occasions, innovative policies have been actually attributed to a pioneering policy advocate rather than to the politicians that formally enacted them into law or government policy. On rare occasions a policy advocate may become a public figure.' (2005:146). Through her advocacy at FWRM and RRRT and the enactment of the Family Law Act, Imrana has become a public figure and frequently sought out by the media for her opinion. As she said: 'From the beginning, we were clear – it was about a feminist approach to changing the law – about people's rights but always through a feminist approach.'

On 1 July 2008, RRRT joined the Secretariat of the Pacific Community (SPC). A spokesperson for RRRT said 'Our strategic planning for 2008-2012 sets a new goal of working towards the establishment of a regional Human Rights Commission and we're very excited to be embarking on this 10 year goal under the SPC umbrella' ([www.spec.int/corp/index2.php?option=com\\_content&task=view&id=w44pop=1&p](http://www.spec.int/corp/index2.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=w44pop=1&p), 7 October 2008). If Imrana Jalal decides to stay with RRRT for the foreseeable future, it seems that new challenges await her.

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