Indian Diaspora In Fiji

Report

Indian Diasporic Network

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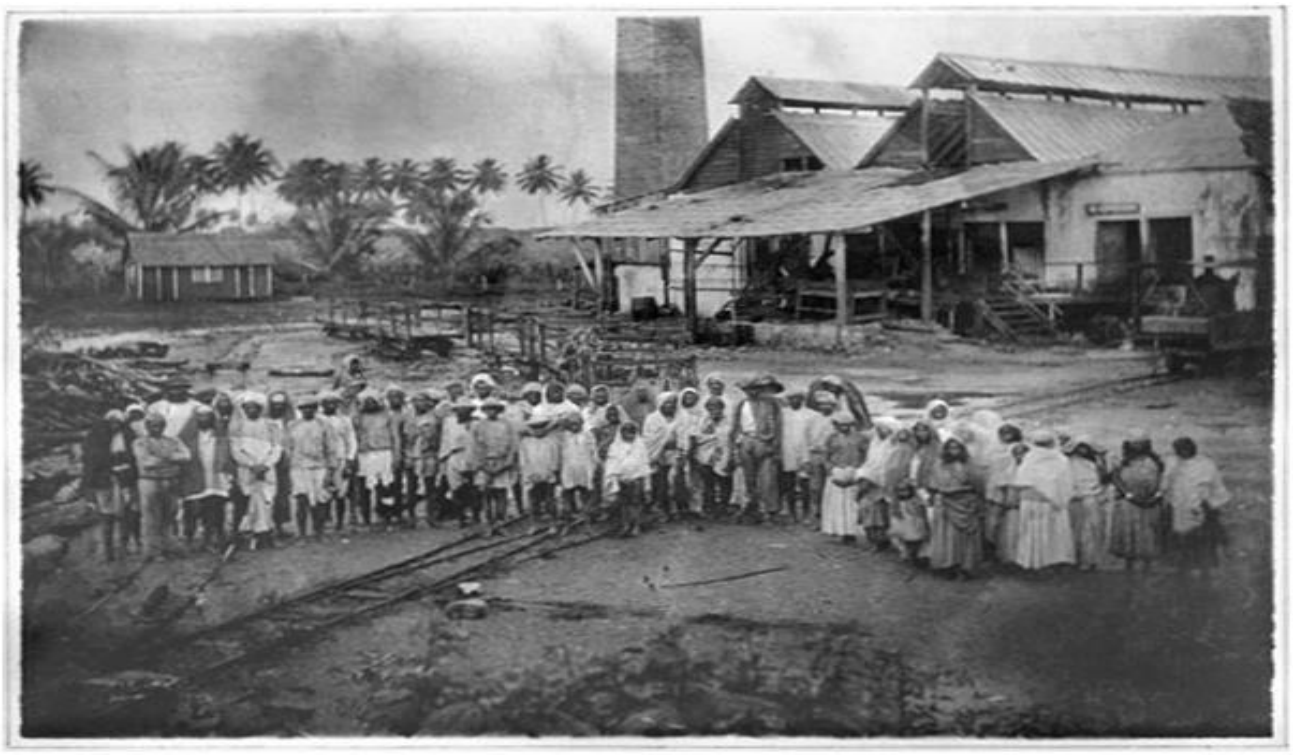

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Abstract

The Indian diaspora, numbering over 20 million globally, reflects India's extensive historical and cultural influence through centuries of migration. Among them, Indo-Fijians hold a unique position, tracing their roots to indentured laborers brought to Fiji during British colonial rule. This report explores the multifaceted dimensions of Indo-Fijian diasporic identity, focusing on their historical journey, cultural resilience, socio-economic contributions to Fiji, and evolving diasporic identities. Despite challenges, Indo-Fijians maintain strong ties with their Indian heritage while contributing significantly to Fiji's socio-economic landscape. This study investigates how Indo-Fijians navigate dual identities and foster community cohesion, shedding light on broader themes of diasporic adaptation and cultural preservation in an interconnected world.

Keywords: Indian diaspora, Indo-Fijians, cultural identity, socio-economic contributions, dual identities, secondary diaspora

Introduction

The Indian diaspora represents a vast and diverse global community, comprising over 20 million individuals of Indian origin who reside outside of India (Kapadia & Pathan, 2020). This diaspora is emblematic of India's extensive historical connections and cultural influence worldwide, shaped by waves of migration spanning centuries. Among the various diaspora communities, Indo-Fijians hold a unique position, tracing their ancestry back to indentured laborers who migrated to Fiji during the British colonial era.

Indo-Fijians constitute a significant segment of the Indian diaspora, consisting of both Non-Resident Indians (NRIs) and Persons of Indian Origin (PIOs). At one point in Fiji's history, Indians formed the majority ethnic group, an uncommon demographic phenomenon among diaspora communities globally (Hundt, 2014). This demographic shift underscores the complex interplay of historical migration patterns, cultural adaptation, and socio-economic dynamics within diasporic contexts. The Indian diaspora in Fiji comprises 1,400 Non-Resident Indians (NRIs) and 313,798 Persons of Indian Origin (PIOs), totalling 315,198 Overseas Indians. Despite having migrated to the Fiji Islands, Indians were the ethnic majority in the Fiji Islands at one point, a demographic situation that is unusual for diaspora communities, which are typically a minority in the new country (Hundt, 2014).

The concept of diaspora has evolved beyond its original definition to encompass communities that maintain strong cultural, social, and economic ties with their homeland while living abroad. For Indo-Fijians, this evolution is particularly relevant as they navigate challenges in preserving emotional

connections with India and Indians amidst contemporary global realities. Despite these challenges, Indo-Fijians continue to contribute significantly to Fiji's socio-economic fabric and play active roles in preserving their cultural heritage and traditions.

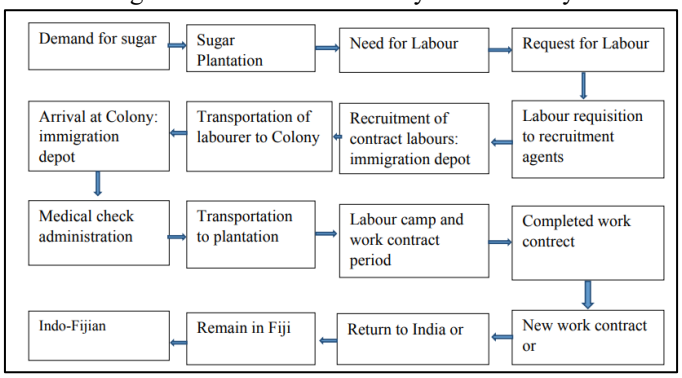
This report aims to delve into the multifaceted dimensions of the Indian diasporic network, focusing specifically on Indo-Fijians. It will explore their historical journey, resilience in maintaining cultural identities, socio-economic contributions to Fiji, and the evolving nature of diasporic identities in an increasingly interconnected world. By examining these aspects, we seek to gain deeper insights into how Indo-Fijians and other diaspora communities negotiate dual identities, foster community cohesion, and contribute to the socio-cultural diversity of their adopted countries while maintaining ties with their Indian roots.

Historical Background

Indian indentured labour, commonly referred to as “coolies,” first appeared in British territories when the British Empire outlawed slavery with the passage of the Act of Emancipation in 1834. Due to the freeing of enslaved people, the sugar, coffee, tea, cocoa, rice, and rubber plantations in the colonies experienced a severe labour shortage. The pressure from plantation owners around the world led to the introduction of the indentured immigration system by British colonial authorities. The concept of “indenture” means an individual is bound to work according to a prescribed contract. It refers to the “transfer of labor-power from metropoles to colonies” or as a “system of bonded labor with a resemblance to slavery”. The indentured workers were referred to as “girmityas” throughout the area (Pandey, 2023). The scholars of Girmitiya emigration opine that the introduction of Indian labourers into Fiji began in 1879, almost 45 years after the system of indentured emigration came into existence in 1834 and five years after Fiji became a British Crown Colony in 1874 (Verma, 2023).

The arrival of Indians in Fiji happened as a result of the system of indentured migration from India when plantation colonies had undergone the shortage of local labour following the abolition of slavery. In 1874 Fiji was one of the British ruled countries, Sir Arthur Gordon became Fiji’s first. The government came with the idea of Indenture slavery to grow sugar plantation. Indians were the first choice for Gordon.

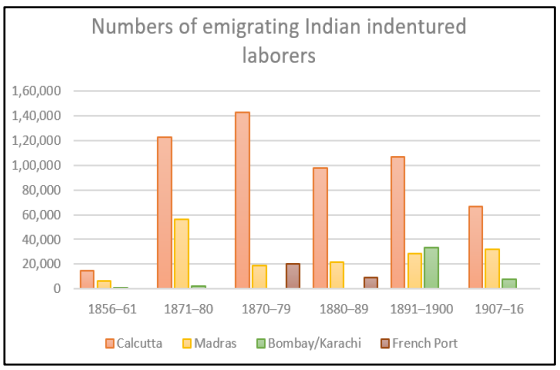
Figure1- Indentured Labor System Pathway



Source: (Pandey, 2023)

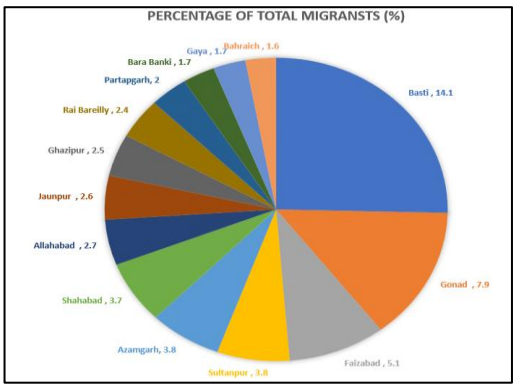
Many Indians were recruited in Indian for Indenture labour under the British government and also provided free passage to Fiji. Indians agreed to work under government protection as indentured farming labourers for the next five years and were also allowed a free coming back passage after working and spending another five years in the colony (Kapadia & Pathan, 2020). This method ensured a constant supply of workers for the plantations in the British colonies; during colonial times, Bombay, Calcutta, and Madras were all allowed to be the bases of authorized recruiters (Pandey, 2023). The majority of these indentured laborers came from modern-day Uttar Pradesh and Bihar in the north of India, with a smaller number from the South of India. They represented a diverse cross-section of Indian agricultural society in terms of caste and social background (Hundt, 2014).

Figure 2- Port wise emigrating Indian Indentured labourer



Source: (Lal B. , 1983)*and Authour's compilation*

Figure 3- District-Wise North Indian migration in Fiji



Source: (Lal B. , 1983)*and Authour's compilation*

Emigrants from Uttar Pradesh came from various social backgrounds, representing various castes like Ahir, Kshatriya, Chamar, Thakur, Dhobi, Pasi, Brahman, etc. The table shows that many indentured laborers from the Brahman caste were recruited from Gazipur, Jaunpur, Lucknow, and Allahabad in Uttar Pradesh. Most Muslims were recruited from Allahabad and Lucknow, Khattris from Lucknow, Jaunpur, Benares, and Faizabad, followed by Basti, Allahabad, Gonda. The majority of Ahirs were recruited from Jaunpur, Gonda. Kurmi and Pasi were largely recruited from Gazipur, followed by Jaunpur and Gonda. Chamars were mostly recruited from Gonda and

Lucknow. Therefore, we can conclude that Indentured laborers from Utter Pradesh who migrated belonged to different castes and places (Pandey, 2023).

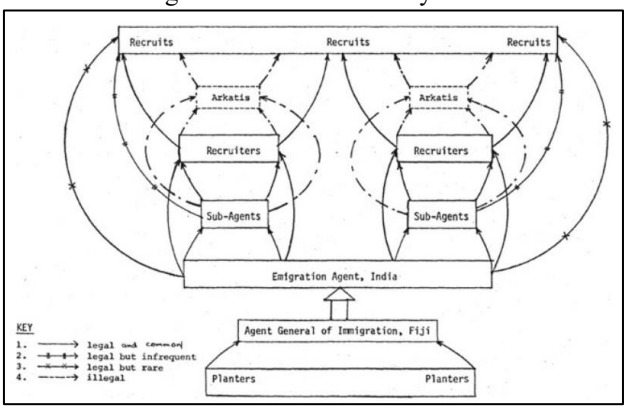
Table 1- District-wise caste composition of emigrants

District of origin castes	*Brahmans*	*Khattri*	*Ahir*	*Kurmi*	*Chamar*	*Pasi*
Allahabad	82.35	69.27	49.00	75.75	50.45	41.46
Basti	75.81	64.34	61.17	66.17	45.76	61.03
Benares	60.0	84.00	53.3	75.00	47.36	50.00
Faizabad	38.70	70.00	33.03	31.68	27.09	30.55
Gonda	79.71	69.13	70.91	65.25	75.13	59.15
Gorakhpur	47.36	49.09	31.86	32.66	26.66	16.66
Jaunpur	85.36	96.15	80.66	90.9	63.17	66.66
Lucknow	83.33	100.00	56.25	41.66	58.92	40.74
Gazipur	86.66	44.23	−50.00	100.00	35.97	100.00

Source- (Pandey, 2023)

The colonial government required that labours emigration be voluntary, so there used to be a government official—the "Protector of Emigrants"—at each of the recruitment agencies to make sure that no coercion was used on the emigrant and that they understood the terms and conditions of the five-year contract he or she was making. The majority of indentured immigrants left "voluntarily." However, several were also tricked or kidnapped by unlicensed recruiters or agents called "arkatias." The indentured opportunities overseas were primarily available in public works: roads, harbors, offices, and jails (Pandey, 2023).

Figure 4- The Indenture System

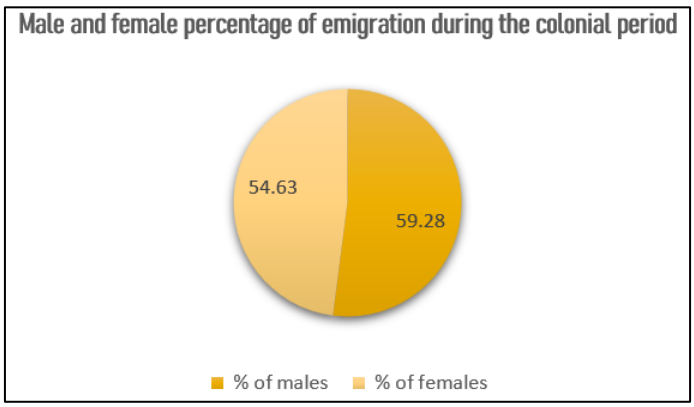


Source: (Lal B. , 1983)

Between the nineteenth and twentieth centuries in India, the question of women's empowerment was raised by the social reformers in India for the first time or in other words, initiatives for women empowerment in India began. At the same time, a new form of women's exploitation emerged in the name of indenture migration. Women were forced to migrate on a large scale, and there is the essential data on women's migration. "A large number of women were also included whatever migration occurred during this period. A fixed percentage of women was necessary for each migratory ship. According to

the British government, it was made compulsory for at least 25% of women be in British immigration. It increased to 40% in 1870 but getting these goals was too tricky. It was ironic that on the one hand, people began raising their voices against the women's repression, but at the same time, many women were exported by many individuals and companies (Pandey, 2023).

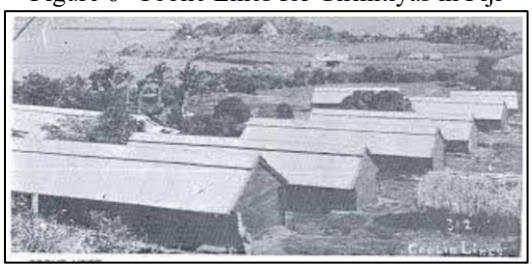
Figure 5-Male and female percentage of emigration during the colonial period



Source: (Pandey, 2023) *and Author's compilation*

In the colonial period, after the Indian migrants deboarded on the host land, they were sent to shelter houses built on the farming land, known as coolie or lines. The shelter houses were tiny—only 10 feet by 7 feet. Their shed was made of tin sheets. Overall, it was like a box. Four people shared it at a time. Children were supposed to be living with their parents. If it were an entire family, one room would be allotted to them (Pandey, 2023). "Each coolie line has 24 rooms. The place was surrounded by forest, smelled a lot, and infested with rats. After the settlement, the emigrants were provided with raw food." The Indian immigration ordinance that came into force in 1883 prescribed the rations for indentured laborers. It was for each adult laborer: 22 oz of rice or flour, or 11 oz rice and 11 oz flour; 4 oz dal; 1 oz ghi; 1½ oz mustard oil; 1/3 oz curry stuff; 2 oz sugar; and 1 oz salt. Children over five years of age were allotted half of the adult ration of rice, flour, dal, salt, sugar, and one imperial pint of fresh milk. The AgentGeneral or the District Medical Officer had the power to order rations to be given to any emigrant labor or the laborer's child for a period not exceeding six months (Pandey, 2023).

Figure 6 -Coolie Lines for Girmitiyas in Fiji



Source: *National Archives of Fiji*

If the excitement among the Girmitiyas elicited their happiness to arrive to the new land, it also envisioned sorrow among them for departing from their homeland and leaving their family and relatives. It brought Indian indentured labourers not only in a different but difficult mental state, as if they were not leaving their homeland for the betterment of their livelihood, social and economic status quo but they would be confronted with painful, difficult, unbearable, and unreasonable situations. Such apprehensions of the Indian indentured migrants resulted in traumatic experiences (Verma, 2023). Work on sugarcane plantations was labour-intensive, and everyone was expected to work, even women and older children. Sometimes women outnumbered men in the field. The women worked in the areas and cooked, raised their children, and managed their households. At the same time, their male counterparts were expected to do all the heavy fieldwork, such as digging, weeding, cutting, and even loading harvested cane on carts (Pandey, 2023).

Both men and women experienced violence and oppression on the plantations, but women bore the dual burden of both racism and sexism. The historians have also recorded the cases of violence, rape, sexual exploitation of women during plantation on the fields. The widespread view that Indian women on the plantations were sexually exploited indiscriminately by the overseers and other men in positions of authority was portrayed as a blot on the name of India (Verma, 2023). Overseers were reported to punish individuals by making them do hard work separately and beating them severely, instilling fear in the labourers This highlights the prevalence of violence and harsh treatment faced by the labourers, including women. The Indians also faced hardships due to their black colour, indicating discrimination based on skin colour. Indian indentured labourers, including women, were treated worse than servants upon arrival in Fiji, reflecting social oppression and mistreatment. Fiji Indians had the highest suicide rate among all overseas Indians at the turn of the twentieth century This statistic underscores the psychological distress and challenges faced by the Indian community, including women, in Fiji during that period (Verma, 2023).

Free/passage migrants traveled and settled using their own money. The colonial rulers did not have to take care of them or be responsible for their travel expenses. This differentiated the free migrants from indentured migrants. However, free/passage migration includes laborers and other people who were traveling for various reasons. Many British documents also include the indentured migrants as “free Indians,” who had finished their indentured periods and returned as free labor. Other documents refer to the passenger Indians as free Indians (Pandey, 2023). Even after indentured labor was abolished, migration did not stop. Indians kept migrating for business purposes and political and educational activities, among others. Additionally, from 1900 onwards, free Indian settlers, mainly of Punjabi and Gujarati origin, arrived in Fiji. Emigrants were not legally sponsored under the system of passage and

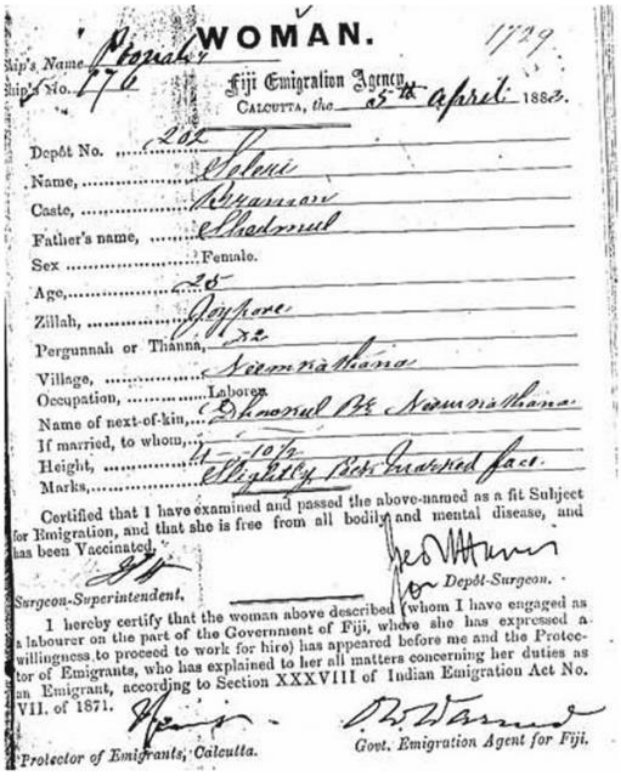
free movement. Emigrants themselves covered travel expenses. They were liberated in the sense that no agreement could bind them. Members of trading groups migrated steadily The Punjabis were predominantly agriculturalists, while the Gujaratis were primarily merchants (Hundt, 2014).

Figure 7- Chronology of Indian Indenture labour to Fiji

S. No.	*Year*	*Descriptions of history of indentureship*
1	1833	Britain abolishes slavery
2	1834	The indentured system, an alternate source of labor British Empire, first started with the laborers being sent to work in Mauritius, Uganda, and Nigeria for an initial 5-year period. This system became widely known as "Girmit"—a mispronunciation of the word "Agreement" by non-English speaking Indian laborers
3	1874	Fiji's Deed of cession to Britain
4	1879	First indentured laborers arrived in Fiji aboard the Leonidas. The ship disembarked in Calcutta on March 03 and arrived in Fiji on May 14 with 373 male and 149 female laborers. 17 of these laborers were infected with diseases such as Cholera, dysentery, and smallpox on board the ship
5	1882	Colonial Sugar Refining (CSR) company of Australia sets up its first sugar mill in Nausori The second emigrant ship arrives in Fiji
6	1884	The fifth emigrant ship to Fiji, Syria, was wrecked on the Nasilai reef, Nausori on May 11, killing fifty-six immigrants and three lascars (Indian Sailors) The first lot of laborers complete their 5-year contract. 60% chose to remain in Fiji
7	1908	The size of "Lines" in which the laborers are housed is charged from 10 ft by 7 to 10 ft by 12 ft
8	1912	Legislation was passed requiring employers of indentured laborers to provide school buildings
9	1916	Britain officially abolished the indentured system. The last shipload of laborers arrives in November aboard the Sutlej V. this is the 87th ship brought to Fiji. Approximately 60,500 laborers came to Fiji between 1879–1916
10	1920	All indentured in Fiji were canceled

Source: (Pandey, 2023)

Figure 8- Sample of emigration pass



WOMAN.

Ship's Name Prozaka
Ship's No. 176
Fiji Emigration Agency
CALCUTTA, the 25th April 1882.
1729

Depôt No. 202
Name, Selemi
Caste, Khyanaar
Father's name, Shadmul
Sex Female.
Age, 25
Zillah, Jessore
Pergunnah or Thanna, Sx
Village, Narmathana
Occupation, Laborer
Name of next-of-kin, Dhanmul Ps Narmathana
If married, to whom,
Height, 4 - 10½
Marks, Slightly Pock marked face.

Certified that I have examined and passed the above-named as a fit Subject for Emigration, and that she is free from all bodily and mental disease, and has been Vaccinated.

Surgeon-Superintendent. for Depôt-Surgeon.

I hereby certify that the woman above described (whom I have engaged as a labourer on the part of the Government of Fiji, where she has expressed a willingness to proceed to work for hire) has appeared before me and the Protector of Emigrants, who has explained to her all matters concerning her duties as an Emigrant, according to Section XXXVIII of Indian Emigration Act No. VII. of 1871.

Protector of Emigrants, Calcutta. Govt. Emigration Agent for Fiji.

Source: (Joy, 2023)

Key Stages in Evolution of Indian Diaspora in Fiji

The evolution of the Indian diaspora in Fiji spans several key stages, each marked by significant historical events and social changes.

1.Indentured Labour Migration (1879-1916):

The first significant wave of Indians arrived in Fiji as indentured laborers starting from 1879. They were brought by the British colonial authorities to work on sugarcane plantations, primarily from the states of Bihar and Uttar Pradesh in India. Indentured laborers faced harsh conditions and were brought under contracts that often resembled a form of bonded labor. The first ship, Leonidas, landed on May 15, 1879, carrying 463 laborers. Sir Arthur Gordon, Fiji's first governor, chose India for reliable labor for sugar plantations. Despite promises of protection and return passages, laborers faced harsh conditions.Between 1879 and 1916, 60,553 indentured workers arrived, altering Fiji's demographic composition. The majority (approximately 45,000) came from modern-day Uttar Pradesh and Bihar in the north, and the remainder from the South of India. They were from different castes and represented a cross-section, socially, of Indian agricultural society (Hundt, 2014). After the end of the Girmit period, people were given the choice either to stay back or return to India. While some had signed five-year contracts, others signed for another five years so that they could have a paid passage to India. Many just signed the five-year contract as they decided to stay back in Fiji to raise their families and do farming to support their livelihood (Ali, 2023).

The following table, abstracted from the census report of 1911, shows the occupations taken up by Indians other than indentured labourers.

Table 2- occupations taken up by Indians other than indentured labourers

Occupation	*Males*	*Females*	*Total strength*
Agricultural related workers	8576	1781	10,357
Commercial works like hawkers and storekeepers etc.	439	97	530
Bakers and confectioners	9	–	9
Barbers	18	–	18
Carters	34	–	34
Carpenters and painters	11	–	11
Dairymen	16	–	16
Goldsmiths	21	–	21
Tailors	10	2	12
Other industrial workers	965	804	1769
Domestic workers	314	3532	3846
Clerks and interpreters	20	–	20
Lighthouse keepers	19	–	19
Police and warders	49	–	49
Priests	35	3	38
Occupations not stated	1487	3	1490
Children under the age of 10 years not employed	3971	3760	7731
Total	16,000	9976	25,976

Source: (Pandey, 2023)

Table 3-Data of free Indians living in Fiji

Year	*Free Indians*
1908	21,151
1909	23,163
1910	26,557
1911	29,758
1912	32,482

Source: (Pandey, 2023)

2. Post-Indenture Period (1916-1930s):

After the indenture system was abolished in 1916, many Indians chose to stay in Fiji rather than return to India. This marked the beginning of the transition from labourers to settlers. Indians began diversifying into other occupations such as retail, agriculture, and small business ventures. The indentured labour system was banned in 1919. The majority of Indians remained in Fiji as they had lost their connections with their homeland. The government of Fiji discouraged interactions between the natives and the Indians. The latter lived on the fringes of sugar mills. Accommodating Indo-Fijians to the native community was punishable for fear of contaminating the natives with alien ideas. The works of missionaries in the field of education enabled the Indo-Fijians to become literate, and many of them tried their hands at various jobs other than agriculture (Joy, 2023).

In Fiji, the 1920s and the 1930s were seen as the period of cultural revival as a result of religious specialists' visits from home land. This period witnessed an emergence of the Fiji Indian identity (Mohanty, 2017). The CSR leased 53,776 hectares of their land to Indo-Fijian tenants. This was a great boost to the community as they clutched roots in Fiji by making a profit from the plantations. The Indians in Fiji established their cultural and social institutions. Hindu–Muslim relationships remained cordial. The Indo-Fijians remained unrepresented in the government till 1916. An illiterate wealthy Indian, Badri Maharaj, was nominated to the Legislative Council in 1916 (Joy, 2023). The majority of Indo-Fijians were farmers and had to lease native land, involving a degree of uncertainty in land use rights.

Many Indo-Fijian farmers therefore supported their children's education and encouraged them to find non-farm employment. This, together with the arrival of free migrants from Gujarat and Punjab in the 1920s, led to the emergence of an Indo-Fijian professional and business class. In colonial times, Indo-Fijians also filled the higher echelons of the civil service. On the other hand, indigenous Fijians were over-represented in the army and police force (Voigt C. , 2008).

The second generation of Indians in Fiji was superior in intelligence, physique, and morality than their parents. As a community, they accepted Fiji as their land of permanent residence. There arose the need for political involvement also. Along with this, many Indians from Punjab and Gujarat started migrating to Fiji. The Punjabis were agriculturalists, while the Gujaratis were businessmen. Eminent lawyers like S.B. Patel and A.D. Patel also joined the community. Their unparalleled acumen in oratory and mediation revitalised the Indians. A.D. Patel became a prominent figure in Fijian politics after the Second World War. Education played a vital role in the empowerment of Indo-Fijians (Joy, 2023).

3. Economic and Social Development (1940s-1960s):

During this period, Indian Fijians made significant strides in education and business. They established themselves in professions such as law, medicine, and education. Indian Fijians started to assert themselves politically and culturally, forming organizations and advocating for their rights. the census of 1946 enumerated for the first time more Indo-Fijians than indigenous Fijians and also pointed to their higher population growth rate. Since the end of Indentured labour system in 1920, the Girmitiyas in Fiji had undergone massive transformation. They transformed themselves from bonded agricultural labourer to small holding farmers, artisans, govt. officials, entrepreneurs and skilled professionals (Mohanty, 2017). Through different land laws, the government ensured that the Fijians owned more than eighty per cent of the land. The Indo-Fijians owned only land on lease, leaving them at the mercy of the CSR or the natives. The insecurity about land ownership was solved by the creation of the Native Land Trust Board in 1940. But the issues regarding the price of sugar cane led to a strike in 1943. It had far-reached consequences. The Indo-Fijians were completely alienated from other communities. During the outbreak of the Second World War, they constituted most of the population. But they were not allowed to fight in the war. The government preferred them to stay in the plantations to increase the profit, which would help the country economically (Joy, 2023).

4. Independence and Political Turmoil (1960s-1980s):

A.D. Patel formed the Federation Party in 1963. The Fijians formed Alliance Party in 1966. In 1966, the new constitution of Fiji came into existence, and an election was held. Under the leadership of Ratu Mara, the Alliance Party came to power (Joy, 2023). In post-independence politics the Alliance Party was able to rally almost all Fijian chiefs and the vast majority of indigenous Fijians to its support and came to dominate politics in Fiji. Essential to the party's success was the conviction held by indigenous Fijians that special protection was necessary for them and that the Alliance Party was best suited to fulfil this task (Voigt C. , 2008). 1970 Fiji got independence and 1977 Indian led opposition won House seats but indigenous Fijians had not accepted Indo-Fijian leadership. The Girmitiyas transformed to 'Fiji Indian' with identity of Indian ancestry and after the independence in 1970, they were variously called as 'Fiji-born Indian', 'Indo-Fijians', 'Fiji- Indians' and so forth (Mohanty, 2017). Since the late 1960s, Fiji witnessed Fijian–Indian emigration that was accelerated after Fiji's Independence in 1970.The post-independence period saw increasing political tension between the indigenous Fijian community and the Indo-Fijian community. There were several coups and political upheavals, leading to instability and changes in government policies affecting the Indian diaspora. The wind of change blew over the economy as well as the social spheres of Fiji.

5. Migration Waves (1980s-Present):

In the 1980s, Fijians surpassed the Indo-Fijian population, reversing a forty-year trend. Improved communications, airstrips on the outer islands, upgraded roads girdling the two major islands, and better inter-island shipping reduced isolation and enhanced contact among people. The power tussle continued even after independence. To combat racial discrimination, a new party named Fiji Labour Party (FLP) was formed in 1985. The NFP-FLP coalition government won the election in 1987 and put an end to the Alliance party's reign of twenty-one years. The government was short-lived, as a military coup deposed it after a month in office. Sitiveni Rabuka, the third-ranking officer in the army, led the coup, and by the end of the year, he handed over the power back to Mara and Ganilau. The short span of military rule caused havoc in the country. There were blatant cases of human rights violations. The Muslims and the Hindus suffered a lot. So many people preferred to migrate from Fiji. In the next general election, a government headed by Mahendra Chaudhry came into power. Chaudhry was a trade unionist, and his FLP government was overthrown after a year. The prime minister's immediate reason was to establish a Land Use Commission to open up idle native land to productive agricultural use. But the real cause was the tussle for power among three traditional confederacies. The Indo-Fijians are essentially excluded from power. Over the years, the discourses of colonialism and indentured labour have given way to democracy in Fiji. But it cannot function in its true spirit since many people remain unrepresented in the country (Joy, 2023). With adoption of new Fiji Constitution in 2013 and restoration of democratic government in 2014, all ethnic groups in Fiji now, has a common Citizenry i.e., Fijian. After a long quest for national identity, Fijians of Indian descent have acquired a common national identity for the first time. This identity has further widens the Fijian-Indian Diaspora transnationally (Mohanty, 2017).

Migrant transnationalism (Secondary Diaspora)

Political instability and discriminatory policies led to waves of migration of Indian Fijians to countries like Australia, New Zealand, Canada, and the United States. Many Indian Fijians sought better economic opportunities and security abroad, contributing to the global Indian diaspora (Hundt, 2014). The Identity of Indo-Fijian has changed or re-shaped because of indenture during the colonial period. Their generation has chosen a developed country like Australia and it becomes their new destination where they can live permanently, but they will emotionally connect with Fiji and remember India as their ancestral home (Kapadia & Pathan, 2020). In the last 4 decades or so, more than 122,000 Fijian-Indians have migrated abroad from Fiji i.e., more than one-third of Indian population in Fiji, and about 82 per cent of total Fiji citizen migration. The emigration trend accelerated due to the events of coups and political instabilities in 1987, 2000 and 2006 and the problem of non-renewal of land leases since 1997.

On an average, over 4,700 Fijian-Indian emigrated annually from Fiji between 1987 and 1999, most of them were skilled individuals . On an average, 500 Fijian-Indian professionals migrated annually during the period 1987-1999 and this rate was much higher during 2000-2007. The large-scale emigration has resulted in a declining Fijian-Indian population to nearly 37 per cent in 2007 (Mohanty, 2017).

Table 4- Emigration of Fijian –Indian Professional Workers during 1978- 2012

Year	Fijian-Indian migrants	Total Fiji citizen migrants	% Fiji-Indian migrants	Annual average Fiji-Indian emigration rate	Professional Migrant Workers			
					Fiji-Indian	Annual average Fiji-Indian	Fiji Total	% Fiji-Indian to Fiji total
1978-86	17,358	20,703	83.8	1,929	-	-	-	-
1987-99	57,159	64,209	89.0	4,763	6,008	501	6,869	87.5
2000-07	37,174	43,113	86.2	4,647	6,749	844	7,446	90.6
2008-12*	10,536	21,774	48.4	2,107	3,001	600	6,445	46.6
1978-12	**122,227**	**149,799**	**81.6**	**3,595**	-	-	-	-

Source: Mohanty, M. based on data from Fiji Bureau of Statistics, 1978-2012. *The declining Indian emigration figure during 2008-2012 is due to changing citizenry category as "Fijian".

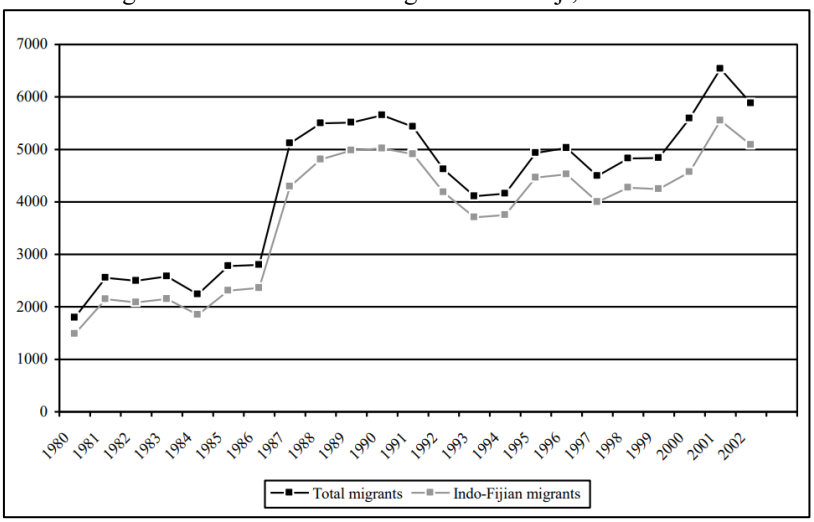
The trans-nationalisation of Fiji Indian diaspora is a rapid process in the last three decades. Fijian of Indian descents formed distinct 'transnational' diaspora abroad by the late 1990s through large–scale emigration of third and fourth generation girmitiya population especially in Australia, New Zealand, Canada and USA. The Indo-Fijian "diaspora of the 'Twice Banished" is increasing daily as people leave Fiji for freedom and opportunity elsewhere…" Today, an estimated 158,000 Fijian-Indian transnational Diaspora live in Australia, New Zealand, USA, Canada and the United Kingdom. Australia is home to 6 the largest proportion of Fijian-Indian Diaspora accounting for little less than one-third of total diasporic population and followed by New Zealand (26 per cent), USA (21 per cent), Canada (17 per cent) and the UK (4 per cent) (Mohanty, 2017).

Table 5- Fijian-Indian Transnational Diaspora Population

Country	Year	Total Fiji-born population	Estimated Fijian – Indian population	% Share to total Fiji-Indians
Australia	2011	56,979	49,572	31.4
New Zealand	2013	52,755	45,897	29.0
United States	2013	39,235	34,526	21.9
Canada	2011	24,925	22,000	13.9
United Kingdom	2015*	6,754	5,943	3.8
Total	**-**	**180,648**	**157,938**	**100.0**

Source: (Mohanty, 2017)

Figure 9-The number of emigrants from Fiji, 1980 - 2002



Source: Fiji Bureau of statistics, various years.

It is important that alongside political equality, the chance to purchase land in order to be able to put down roots is closely tied to the definition of home in this evaluation. Migration in some cases led to the dispersion of families, some of whom now have personal networks extending to several countries in the South Pacific, but also to the Northern Hemisphere (particularly the United States and Canada) (Hundt, 2014). The High Level Committee on the Indian Diaspora estimated the number of Indo-Fijians in New Zealand in 2001 at some 10,000 (Voigt C. , 2008) In the self-identification part of the New Zealand census, 'Fiji Indian' or 'Indo-Fijian' are not provided as labels, either. The 2006 census gives 37,7468 as the figure of people of Fiji origin; a more conservative figure is given in the New Zealand Census of Population and Dwellings. This increase reflects the 1987 and 2000 post-coup influx of Fiji Indians in New Zealand.

Table 6. Birthplace of Indian residents in New Zealand (1981, 2001)

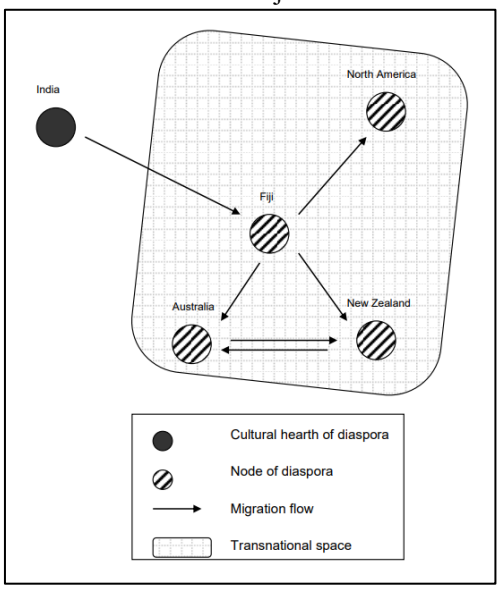
	NZ	Fiji	India	Other	Total
1981	5,160	1,617	3,615	1,185	11,577
	44.5%	14.0%	31.2%	10.2%	
2001	17,946	19,593	19,053	6,054	62,646
	28.65%	31.3%	30.4%	9.7%	

Source: (Hundt, 2014)

While most recent diasporic Indians have a direct connection with the religious and performative cultures of the nation, the Indo-Fijians are removed from that space due to their longer diasporic histories. Indo-Fijians in Fiji are part of the Indian diaspora in the sense that they are connected to a vague notion of India through their sentiments and memories and as the original source of their culture, while they have

few personal ties to the subcontinent. Instead of moving back to India, they established nodes in the Pacific Rim. They have evolved as a Pacific transnational community including Australia, New Zealand, North America and Fiji, based on their kinship networks. In cases where a family has no close relatives left in Fiji, Fiji ceases to be a node in the kinship networks. The Indo-Fijian transnational community has emerged with Fiji as the new centre, while India is largely irrelevant due to the absence of kinship ties (Voigt C. G., 2018).

Figure 10- A model of the Indo-Fijian transnational community



Source: (Voigt C. , 2008)

Contributions to Fiji by the Indian Diaspora

The Indian diaspora in Fiji has made substantial contributions across various aspects of Fijian society, spanning economics, culture, politics, and social development. Here are some key contributions:

1. Economic Development:

The agricultural base of the country has been developed over the last century by the contribution of the migrant Indian population, who are known for their skills in agriculture. The period of arrival of the Indians in Fiji was a new beginning for the Fijian archipelago, where tribal warfare, lawlessness and conflict between the European settlers and the natives were rampant and proved to be an economic disaster for the Europeans. The European capital assets were being wasted as a result of these conflicts and the Indian labourers were the only hope to bring prosperity to these Islands. They did exactly that. For more than 120 years now, the Indians have contributed enormously towards the economic and social development of Fiji, and generally the Pacific. Indian labourers were instrumental in establishing and sustaining Fiji's sugarcane industry during the colonial period. Their expertise and hard work contributed

significantly to the country's early economic growth. The indentured labour system in Fiji during the late 19th century had a significant impact on the economic development of the region. The importation of labour from India under the indentured system was crucial for supplying cheap labour to the growing sugar industry in Fiji, which eventually became the backbone of the economy. This system not only provided the necessary workforce for the sugar plantations (Pande, 2010).

Indian Fijians have played a pivotal role in business and entrepreneurship, particularly in sectors such as retail, manufacturing, and services. They have established successful businesses that contribute to Fiji's economy and employment. Over the years, the Indian community in Fiji prospered and began playing a dominant role in trade and other economic activities. This economic success of the Indian diaspora contributed to their prominence in various sectors of Fijian society. Indian participation in the labor in the agricultural sector, education, professional employment, and entrepreneurial pursuits was far greater than that of ethnic Fijians. The Fijian government has continually created affirmative action programs – mostly in the form of petty loans, grants, and scholarships - in order to stimulate indigenous involvement in the economy and education (Fogleman, 2008). The people of Indian descent, who comprise most of the total, are engaged in sugar cultivation and trading activities (Douglas & Browne, 1989).

2. Cultural Enrichment:

Indo-Fijians have significantly contributed to Fiji's cultural and religious landscape. Hindi and other Indian languages are spoken widely among the Indo-Fijian community, preserving linguistic diversity and contributing to Fiji's linguistic heritage. In the aftermath of Girmit, a new diasporic subculture emerged in Fiji, which saw the girmitiyas continuing to practice the traditions of their Girmitiya parents. The Girmitiyas had come largely from the United Provinces, while approximately 15 percent were from the south. Two common dialects of the Indian subcontinent, Awadhi and Bhojpuri, produced a distinct lingua franca, which came to be known as Fiji Hindi. Though it is a distortion of pure or shudh Hindi, it gained strength and influence and is spoken widely today, including by the descendants of those from South India. The latter also speak some Tamil and Telegu. The Indo-Fijian culture evolved and has been refined and adapted through its interplay with western and the Pacific cultures. However, it has managed to preserve its uniqueness and distinctiveness (Ali, 2023). Hindi was accepted as a national language in 1997. Fijian Hindi's development and recognition as a national language is a major contribution. Used in schools, government, and public life, it integrates Indo-Fijian culture into Fiji's society. This linguistic diversity enriches Fiji's cultural tapestry and facilitates communication among ethnic groups, showcasing Indo-Fijians' resilience. Indo-Fijians have strengthened connections within the Indian

diaspora through migration, cultural blending, and adaptation. Maintaining ties with India while integrating into Fijian society fosters cultural exchange globally (Kapadia & Pathan, 2020). Hindi is used everywhere - ranging from schools to occasions of marriage, worship, gathering, etc. Hindi is taught as a subject in all the external examinations conducted by the Education Department. Any person can use the Hindi language in government work, court, and parliament too. Posters and publicity material of election meetings are also considered incomplete without the use of the Hindi language (Kapadia & Pathan, 2020).

Indo-Fijian established associations to preserve Indian heritage, building temples and schools to teach culture and traditions. Celebrating festivals like Diwali and Holi maintains cultural continuity, ensuring Indian practices remain integral to Indo-Fijian life (Kapadia & Pathan, 2020).Another important development in Fiji relates to the Hindu religion. Because caste distinctions were difficult to maintain, wandering preachers advocating a more egalitarian religious philosophy gained influence. They helped establish a new organizational form of worship, namely small groups singing from the Ramayan, a central Hindu religious epic; these groups are called 'Ramayan mandalis' (Hundt, 2014). Furthermore, Indo-Fijians have continued to draw on India as a primary source of their culture and religion. They have imported various religious movements, texts, icons, entertainment, and fashion trends from India. Despite limited contact with their relatives in India and not visiting the subcontinent again, India has remained their sacred homeland and the main cultural source. This cultural homogenization among Indo-Fijians across regional, religious, and caste lines highlights the enduring influence of Indian culture on the community (Voigt C. , 2008).

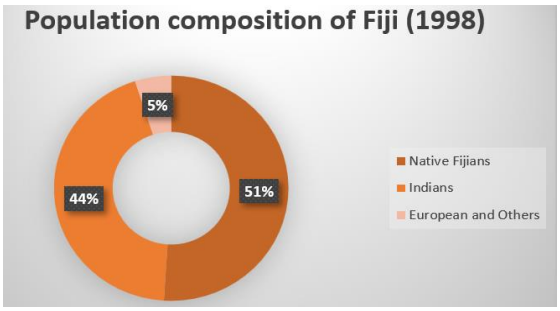
3. Demographic Impact:

The arrival of a large number of indentured labourers significantly altered Fiji's demographics. The migration of Indians changed the composition of Fiji's population and laid the foundation for a permanent Indian presence in the country. Between 1879 and 1916, 60,553 registered indentured workers arrived in Fiji. By the 1946 census, Indo-Fijians outnumbered indigenous Fijians for the first time, and their population growth rate was notably higher (Gillion, 1962). In the 1980s, Fijians surpassed the Indo-Fijian population, reversing a forty-year trend (Joy, 2023). In 1998, Fiji's population was projected to be 51% native Fijians, 44% Indians, and 5% Europeans, other Pacific Islanders, overseas Chinese, and others.

Today, Indo-Fijians constitute a substantial portion of the population, estimated to be around 37.5%. This demographic shift has undoubtedly influenced Fiji's social and political landscape. The religious composition of Fiji reflects its diverse population: Protestant 45% (including Methodist 34.6%,

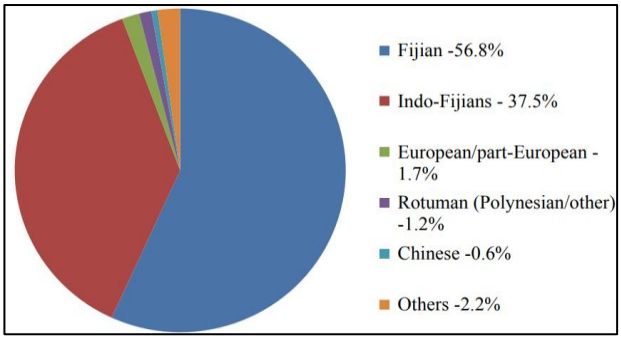
Assembly of God 5.7%, Seventh Day Adventist 3.9%, and Anglican 0.8%), Hindu 27.9%, other Christian 10.4%, Roman Catholic 9.1%, Muslim 6.3%, Sikh 0.3%, other religions 0.3%, and none 0.8% (The world factbook, 2024).

Figure 11- Population composition of Fiji (1998)



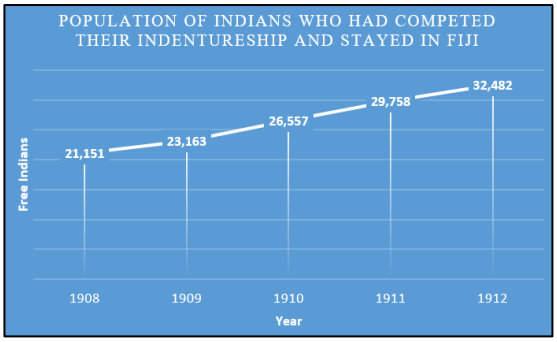
Source: (Pandey, 2023)

Figure 12-Fiji: Ethnic Composition (2007)



Source: (Joy, 2023)

Figure 13- Population of Indians who had competed their indentureship and stayed in Fiji



Source: (Pandey, 2023)

Figure 14- Total Population of Fiji

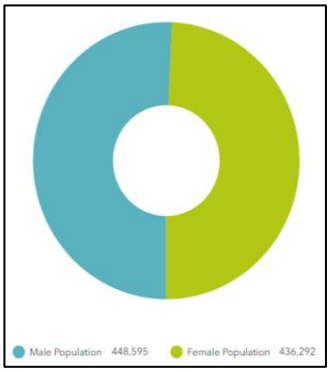


Figure 15- Indo-Fijian Population by Sex

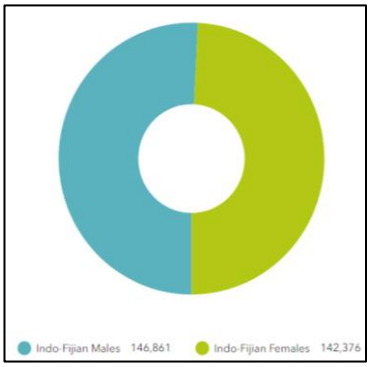
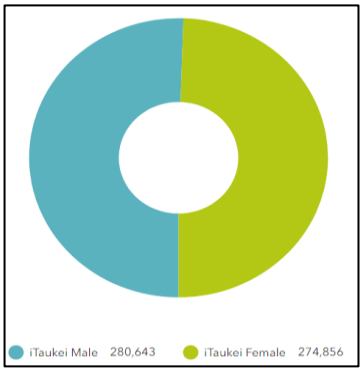


Figure 16- iTaukei (Fijian) Population by Sex



Source: (Fiji Bureau of Statistics, 2017)

4. Political Participation:

Indian Fijians have actively participated in Fiji's political life, advocating for their rights and contributing to the democratic process. Despite challenges and periods of political instability, Indian Fijians have held positions in government, including parliamentary representation. As the Indian population increased and began to settle down in Fiji, its leaders started aspiring for a greater role in the politics of the country. However the birth of Indian politics in Fiji had nothing to do with the government or opposition to it. Rather it was an attempt to seek redress from what was found irksome in the indenture system. Small meetings and Ram Mandilis represented the nature of Indian politics in the early years (Pande, 2010). The Indo-Fijians remained unrepresented in the government till 1916. The agent general of immigration acted as the mouthpiece of this newly emerging community. Manilal Maganlal Doctor was sent to Fiji by Gandhiji to assist the Indians. Manilal's intervention came to fruition as the government made relaxation in divorce laws and allowed Indian girls aged between twelve and fifteen to marry without parental consent. An illiterate wealthy Indian, Badri Maharaj, was nominated to the Legislative Council in 1916 (Joy, 2023). Eminent lawyers like S.B. Patel and A.D. Patel also joined the community. Their unparalleled acumen in oratory and mediation revitalised the Indians. A.D. Patel became a prominent figure in Fijian politics after the Second World War.

With most Indo-Fijians' support, A.D. Patel formed the Federation Party in 1963. The Fijians formed Alliance Party in 1966. 1970 Fiji got independence and 1977 Indian led opposition won House seats but indigenous Fijians had not accepted Indo-Fijian leadership. In 1987 and again in 2000 Indo-Fijians were largely dropped out from political power (Kapadia & Pathan, 2020). In 1987 and again in 5 2000, Indo-Fijian dominated governments were removed in coups and since 2000 Indo-Fijians have largely been excluded from political power (Voigt C. , 2008). In 1999 a government headed by Mahendra Chaudhry came into power in becoming Fiji's first, and so far only, ethnic Indian prime minister. Chaudhry was a trade unionist, and his FLP government was overthrown after a year. The prime minister's immediate reason was to establish a Land Use Commission to open up idle native land to productive agricultural use (Joy, 2023). But the real cause was the tussle for power among three traditional confederacies. However, only one year after taking office Chaudhry and his cabinet were held hostage for 56 days in a coup launched by businessman George Speight. Speight framed his coup under the guise of ethnic Fijian nationalism, but it is suspected that the real motivation was that upon coming to power the Chaudhry government revoked contracts that had been awarded to two companies within the timber industry that were chaired by Speight (Wyeth, 2017).

Challenges and Issues

The Indo-Fijians were not a part of the dominant discourse in colonial or postcolonial times. Fiji has become a third space for the descendants of the Indian indentured labourers, and now they are dwelling in a trishanku world where they are neither Indians nor Fijians (Pandey, 2023). The Indo Fijians, the majority of them born in Fiji, face an identity crisis. They are treated as second-rate citizens in the country of their birth. The Fijians still hold essentialist notions about identity. The Fijians tend to reckon Indo-Fijians as mere labourers who had settled there to work in their plantations. The biased Fijian laws oppressed them even after the abolition of the indenture system. Their attempts to thrive and flourish with the aid of education and commerce were viewed as a major threat to the Fijian community. Initially, the Indo-Fijians constituted most of the Fijian population. But their number decreased by the 1980s (Joy, 2023).

1. Cultural Preservation and Identity Concerns:

Indo-Fijians, descendants of Indians who migrated as indentured labourers during British rule, face challenges maintaining emotional connections with India and modern Indians. As a result of a blended culture, Indo-Fijians have almost forgotten their roots, with very few still connected to the motherland (Kapadia & Pathan, 2020). They face several challenges in maintaining connections with their ancestral homeland of India. The significant barrier posed by the physical distance between Fiji and India makes it challenging for many Indo-Fijians to visit India. Over time, the cultural practices and identities of the diaspora community in Fiji have evolved and adapted to local realities. This adaptation has led to a distinct Indo-Fijian identity shaped by local experiences and interactions, which may not always align with the cultural practices and values prevalent in India (Voigt C. , 2008). Many generations of Indo-Fijians have lost personal contacts with India due to historical factors like the end of indenture and limited migration back to India. Additionally, Indo-Fijians' views of India and subcontinental Indians are often based on stereotypes and limited personal experiences. These perceptions can impact the desire or ability to maintain strong connections with the ancestral homeland. Despite these challenges, Indo-Fijians continue to draw on India as a significant source of culture and religion, importing various elements from the subcontinent (Voigt C. , 2008). However, they experience emotional and cultural disconnection from their Indian roots, feeling more connected to Fiji. This loss of ties is compounded by difficulties in tracing heritage within the broader Indian diaspora, resulting in a complex identity blending Fijian and Indian cultures. Language and cultural changes also pose challenges. Fijian Hindi, incorporating Fijian and English elements, represents a significant shift from traditional Indian

languages. This evolution has facilitated communication but led to a loss of connection with traditional practices. Adopting Fijian elements into daily life further highlights Indo-Fijians' cultural transformation (Kapadia & Pathan, 2020).

2. Political Marginalization and Underrepresentation:

In recent decades, the Indian diaspora in Fiji has faced challenges related to land rights, cultural preservation, and political representation. 1970 Fiji got independence and 1977 Indian led opposition won House seats but indigenous Fijians had not accepted Indo-Fijian leadership. In 1987 and again in 2000 Indo-Fijians were largely dropped out from political power. Racism has been one of the most important actions for indigenous Fijians. (Kapadia & Pathan, 2020). In Fiji, especially, the decline of the Indian population has been precipitous, and not merely because of declining birth rates in comparison with birth rates for ethnic Fijians. Political coups, policies which make Indian ownership of land all but impossible, overt forms of discrimination, and a complete stranglehold over government jobs among ethnic Fijians since the 1980s have taken much of the spirit out of the Indian community, which now accounts for just a third of the total population (Lal V. , 2018). The position of Indo-Fijians in Fiji remains problematic. Indo-Fijians remain in many respects marginal to the national political economy despite their relative success in business and trade. Critically, they remain landless and leases continue to be allowed to expire. Despite business success, they have been unable to achieve a similar status in the bureaucracy. At key moments of instability, such as 2005–06, they have been vulnerable to robberies, attacks and desecration of Hindu temples. A widespread perception that the situation has improved since 2006, with better inter-ethnic relations, and that policy changes such as the designation of a common name for all Fiji citizens, and efforts to find land for farming and other activities and to improve law and order, were seen to be positive contributions to inter-ethnic relations (Minority Rights Group, 2017). Prior to the 1987 coup that removed the multi-ethnic Labour Party from government, ethnic Indians accounted for around 50 percent of Fiji's population. However, the continual political instability in Fiji, and a culturally embedded hostility towards Indo-Fijians has led to their emigration. As a result their percentage of the population has declined to around 32 percent, with most Indo-Fijians moving to Australia and New Zealand, as well as Canada and the United States. While this demographic shift may please those ethnic Fijians who have resented the presence of Indo-Fijians in the country, those capable of emigrating to the West with ease are the country's professional class. As a result, this population decline is also a significant draining of the country's much needed skill-base, with medical professionals, teachers, engineers, and accountants being among the most prominent émigrés. Chaudhry

commented on this phenomenon in 2005 claiming that *"*If the trend continues, Fiji will be left with a large pool of poorly educated, unskilled work force with disastrous consequences on our social and economic infrastructure and levels of investment (Wyeth, 2017).

3. Racism and Discrimination

Racism and political exclusion have been significant issues. Indigenous Fijians feared losing land and freedom, leading to racial tensions and political marginalization. (Kapadia & Pathan, 2020).Racism has been institutionalised under the banner of affirmative action for indigenous Fijians. As a consequence, Indo-Fijians are disadvantaged in most areas of public life including the allocation of civil service positions and scholarships for tertiary studies. The success stories of Indo-Fijian businesses disguise the fact that a considerable proportion of Indo-Fijians has problems making ends meet. Today, about half of the Indo-Fijians are farmers and their situation is particularly grave. With the expiry and non-renewal of an increasing number of long-term land leases since 1997, large numbers of Indo-Fijian farmers have had to leave their farms, exacerbating social problems such as rural–urban drift and poverty. The situation is aggravated by the fact that 60% of the sugarcane farmers derive an income below the poverty line. Some farmers are therefore unwilling to undertake unessential investments that would make their daily life more comfortable. As a result, thousands of Indo-Fijian families live in conditions considerably worse than what they could afford. Today, indigenous Fijians own almost all land, fisheries and forests, and receive substantial royalties from the extraction of minerals. They control the army and police and hold most civil service positions. While it is true that some Indo-Fijians are successful businesspeople, the majority of Indo-Fijians are economically not better off than indigenous Fijians. The myth of their economic success nevertheless lives on and remains responsible for indigenous Fijian hostility towards them (Voigt C. , 2008). One will not find many instances of blatant racism and racial prejudice in Fiji. The people of Fiji are indeed representative of the tolerant and polite "Pacific way;" the vast majority of Fijian citizens are peaceful and welcoming toward people of all ethnic backgrounds. Instead, racism is veiled by the strong racial identities and stereotypes present in everyday life. Fiji, emphasis on race is only seen on a more personal level (Fogleman, 2008).

The increasing ethnic and linguistic fractionalization in Fiji has had significant impacts on the relationship between different ethnic groups, particularly the Indo-Fijians and the native Fijians. The historical experiences, contrasting lifestyles, and cultural attitudes of the two groups have bred mutual distrust and suspicion, leading to a strained relationship. Fijians often view Indians as "kaisi" (slaves or 'coolies') and "vulagi" (outsiders), while Indians may condescendingly refer to Fijians as "jungali," reflecting deep-seated prejudices and stereotypes (Srebrnik, 2008).

Relations of India with Indian Diaspora in Fiji

The relationship between Indo-Fijians and India, as well as the Indian government's broader stance toward its diaspora, has been complex and evolving. Historically, the Indian government and general population showed little concern for the maltreatment of Indian indentured workers abroad until Gandhi's efforts led to the end of indentured migration in 1917. Post-independence, India prioritized relations with newly independent postcolonial states over its diaspora, leaving many overseas Indians, especially in Fiji and Uganda, feeling abandoned during times of ethnic turmoil (Voigt C. , 2008).

In the 1970s, India began to recognize the economic potential of its diaspora, particularly those in the Gulf countries, leading to the introduction of the term "Non-Resident Indian" (NRI) and various economic incentives for NRIs. These measures primarily benefited recent migrants and wealthier segments of the diaspora, while descendants of indentured Indians, including many Indo-Fijians, saw little benefit. The Indian government's efforts to engage with its diaspora increased in the 1990s and 2000s, with initiatives like the Person of Indian Origin (PIO) card and the establishment of Pravasi Bharatiya Divas to honor the diaspora. However, these efforts have largely targeted wealthier migrants and have not significantly impacted Indo-Fijians, many of whom do not meet the criteria for PIO status or have not benefited from the associated economic incentives.

Politically, Indo-Fijians have felt neglected by India, particularly during Fiji's political crises. India's response to the 1987 coups in Fiji was criticized as weak, and while India did take diplomatic actions, such as advocating for Fiji's expulsion from the Commonwealth and raising the issue at the United Nations, these efforts did not lead to substantial support for Indo-Fijians. Despite this, Indo-Fijians continue to look to India for support, particularly in advocating for democratic principles in Fiji.

Overall, while India has taken steps to engage with its diaspora, the benefits have been uneven, favoring recent migrants and wealthier communities over older, indentured-origin populations like the Indo-Fijians. This has resulted in a persistent feeling of abandonment among many Indo-Fijians.

India and Fiji Diplomatic relations

After India's independence in 1947, it established diplomatic presence in Fiji by sending a Commissioner, which was upgraded to a High Commissioner when Fiji gained independence in 1970. Significant visits included Fiji's Prime Minister Ratu Mara visiting India in 1971 and Indian Prime Minister Indira Gandhi visiting Fiji in 1981. However, India's focus shifted towards Europe and North America from the mid-1980s, resulting in diminished contact with South Pacific nations. Diplomatic relations were further strained when India was accused of interfering in Fiji's internal affairs, leading to

the closure of the Indian High Commission in Suva in 1989. The High Commission was reopened in 1999, and full diplomatic relations were reestablished in 2004 with the appointment of Fiji's first High Commissioner to India. In recent years, India's "look east" policy has revived its interest in the Pacific region, driven by strategic and economic interests, including fishing resources and deep seabed mining prospects. India secured a dialogue partnership with the Pacific Island Forum in 2002, with strong support from Fiji. Trade between India and the South Pacific is minimal, primarily consisting of goods imported by the Indo-Fijian community. The absence of a double taxation avoidance agreement between India and Fiji hinders economic cooperation. However, Indian financial firms such as the Life Insurance Corporation of India, New India Insurance, and Bank of Baroda have invested in Fiji. India also extended an $86 million soft loan to support the restructuring of Fiji's sugar industry. Additionally, Indian businesses and media, like Zee TV, have shown interest in the region, potentially benefiting Indo-Fijians. A more active Indian presence in the Pacific region is expected to positively impact Indo-Fijians. The events of 1987 demonstrated the need for India to be more engaged in the region to avoid relying solely on Australia, New Zealand, and the Commonwealth for support (Voigt C. , 2008).

The visit by Hon’ble Prime Minister, Shri Narendra Modi, to Fiji on 19 November 2014 was a watershed moment not only for India-Fiji relations but also for India’s relations with all the Pacific Island Countries. During the visit three MoUs were signed with Fiji. Hon’ble EAM, Dr. S. Jaishankar visited Fiji from 14-17 February 2023 to attend the 12th World Hindi Conference held in Nadi, Fiji from 15-17 February. On 16 February 2023 EAM visited Suva for bilateral visit. During the visit Visa Waiver Agreement was signed between India and Fiji on 16 February 2023. Dr. Rajkumar Ranjan Singh, Hon'ble Minister of State for External Minister and Praful Patel, Administrator of Dadra & Nagar Haveli, Daman & Diu and Lakshadweep visited Fiji from 14 to 16 May 2023 for Girmit Day Celebration in Suva. Hon’ble Administrator, Shri Praful Patel also attended the celebrations (High Commission of India, Suva, Fiji, 2023).

Recommendations

Regular visits by Indian dignitaries, cultural ambassadors, and scholars

Regular visits by Indian dignitaries, cultural ambassadors, and scholars during significant events such as Girmitiya Day and other notable occasions can play a crucial role in maintaining and strengthening the relationship between the Indo-Fijian diaspora and India. By participating in these events, representatives from India can express solidarity, honor the legacy of the Indo-Fijian ancestors, and celebrate the cultural contributions of the Indo-Fijian community.

These visits can serve multiple purposes. Firstly, they reinforce the emotional and cultural ties between Indo-Fijians and their ancestral homeland, fostering a sense of belonging and pride in their heritage. Secondly, they provide a platform for the exchange of cultural practices, ideas, and values, enriching both Indian and Indo-Fijian communities. Thirdly, such visits underscore India's commitment to its diaspora, demonstrating a willingness to support and engage with Indo-Fijians on both cultural and political fronts. Moreover, these visits assert India’s diplomatic presence in Fiji, enhancing bilateral relations and facilitating dialogue on issues of mutual interest. Indian officials and cultural ambassadors can also address the specific challenges faced by the Indo-Fijian community, offering support and advocating for policies that promote their welfare and integration.

Scholarship and Exchange Program

To address the challenges faced by the Indo-Fijian community and to strengthen cultural and educational ties, the Government of India, in collaboration with various Indo-Fijian cultural organizations and schools, should establish a comprehensive scholarship program. These scholarships should be designed to support Indo-Fijian students pursuing higher education in India, covering a wide range of disciplines, including humanities, sciences, and the arts. By providing financial assistance, these scholarships would enable talented and deserving students to access quality education in Indian universities, fostering academic excellence and professional growth. Furthermore, organizing educational tours to India for Indo-Fijian students and teachers can significantly enhance their understanding and appreciation of Indian heritage. These tours should include visits to historical sites, cultural centers, and educational institutions across India. By experiencing India's rich cultural and historical landscape firsthand, participants can gain a deeper connection to their ancestral roots. Such tours would provide students and teachers with an immersive experience, allowing them to witness the diversity and vibrancy of Indian traditions, arts, and customs.

Similarly, Israel maintains strong connections with its diaspora through initiatives such as Birthright Israel, a program offering free trips to Israel for young Jews worldwide to strengthen their Jewish identity and connection to Israel. Israel also provides consular services, supports Hebrew language education, and fosters cultural exchanges to maintain ties with Jewish communities globally.

These initiatives, combining scholarships and educational tours, would not only promote educational and cultural exchange but also strengthen the bond between Indo-Fijians and their heritage. By investing in the education and cultural enrichment of Indo-Fijian students and educators, the Government of India can play a pivotal role in preserving and celebrating the shared history and cultural legacy between India

and Fiji. This comprehensive approach would empower the Indo-Fijian community, fostering a sense of pride in their identity and heritage while contributing to their overall development.

Economic Empowerment

Encouraging Indian businesses to invest in Fiji and fostering stronger trade relations between India and Fiji can significantly benefit both countries, particularly the Indo-Fijian community.

Firstly, facilitating Indian investments in Fiji can spur economic growth and development of Indo-Fijians in various sectors such as manufacturing, agriculture, tourism, and infrastructure. Indian businesses could leverage Fiji's strategic location in the Pacific region as a gateway to broader markets, thereby enhancing trade opportunities for both nations. Investments can also create job opportunities and contribute to skill development among Indo-Fijians, empowering local communities and boosting socio-economic development.

Secondly, improving trade relations between India and Fiji can expand market access for Indo-Fijian products in India and vice versa. This could involve reducing trade barriers, negotiating favorable trade agreements, and promoting bilateral trade missions and exhibitions. Enhancing trade ties can diversify the economies of both countries and reduce dependence on traditional markets, fostering resilience against global economic fluctuations. To achieve these objectives, the Indian government can offer incentives such as tax breaks, investment protection guarantees, and streamlined regulatory procedures to Indian companies investing in Fiji. Establishing dedicated trade promotion councils or chambers of commerce can facilitate networking opportunities and provide market intelligence to Indian businesses interested in Fiji.

Health Care services and Cultural activities by the High Commission

In the context of the Indian diaspora in Fiji, the Indian government plays a pivotal role in providing essential services and fostering cultural connections to support diaspora members. Healthcare initiatives are particularly crucial, as they ensure that members of the diaspora have access to necessary medical services and information about healthcare facilities in Fiji. The High Commission of India in Fiji collaborates with local healthcare providers to organize medical camps and clinics, addressing the healthcare needs of diaspora members and promoting their well-being. Social security services are another vital aspect supported by the Indian government, offering assistance with pensions, welfare benefits, and disability support to ensure that diaspora members in Fiji have access to essential financial assistance when needed. Culturally, the Indian government promotes activities that celebrate Indian festivals, organize cultural events, and support community organizations dedicated to preserving Indian heritage and fostering a sense of belonging among diaspora members. Consular assistance provided by

the Indian consulate or embassy in Fiji includes essential services such as passport and visa assistance, legal documentation support, and aid during emergencies, ensuring that diaspora members receive necessary consular support.

India's support in establishing Fiji's IT industry

This could indeed strengthen bilateral ties between the two countries while enhancing the socio-economic status of the Indo-Fijian community. India, as a global IT hub, possesses extensive experience and expertise in information technology. By collaborating with Fiji to develop its IT sector, India can transfer technological know-how, provide training programs, and offer technical assistance. The Indo-Fijian community, which has historical ties to India, could benefit significantly from this collaboration. Participation in the growing IT industry would provide employment opportunities and career advancement for Indo-Fijians skilled in IT and related fields. This would enhance their socio-economic status within Fijian society, fostering greater integration and empowerment. Collaborative efforts in establishing Fiji's IT industry would strengthen bilateral relations between India and Fiji. Beyond economic benefits, such initiatives demonstrate India's commitment to supporting Fiji's development goals, fostering goodwill, and enhancing diplomatic relations. Cultural exchanges and people-to-people interactions resulting from this collaboration would further deepen mutual understanding and cooperation between the two nations. Establishing a robust IT sector in Fiji could also position the country as a regional hub for technology and innovation in the Pacific region. This would attract more foreign investment, stimulate economic diversification, and contribute to sustainable development goals in Fiji.

Stakeholders Involved: Government of India may offer financial support, incentives for Indian IT companies to invest in Fiji, and facilitate bilateral agreements aimed at fostering technology transfer and collaboration. The Fijian government would be instrumental in creating a conducive policy environment, offering incentives for IT investments, and facilitating regulatory reforms to attract foreign investment in the IT sector. Leading Indian IT firms would invest in Fiji, establish local offices, and transfer technological know-how. With historical ties to India and a skilled workforce, the Indo-Fijian community would benefit from employment opportunities and career advancement in the burgeoning IT sector. Their participation would contribute to sectoral growth and innovation, enhancing their socio-economic standing within Fijian society. Entities like the World Bank, Asian Development Bank, and other international donors could provide financial support, technical assistance, and expertise in governance and capacity-building initiatives to support Fiji's IT sector development.

The Indian government should not be complacent with the fact that democracy has started functioning in Fiji. PIOs in Fiji today, are confronted with the problem of their existence. Due to the uncertainties of the future in Fiji they are migrating to different countries, there is no system of secure land leases and many of the Indo Fijians are getting displaced. To be able to play any role in this scenario the Indian government should come out with a definite policy towards Fiji. It should stop looking at the matter from a purely racial point of view and endeavor to improve it's overall relations with Fiji. This can be achieved through improving trade relations communication links, and cultural diplomacy, frequent high level visits, etc. India can also play an important role in the field of technology transfers and joint ventures, particularly of small-scale industries, which are suited for the small and remote markets like Fiji. It is only through an overall engagement with the country that India will be able to play an effective role in the Fijian ethnic crises and ensure the protection of Indo Fijian interest (Pande, 2010).

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