

## **Living in Shadows : A Study of the Racial Discrimination and Injustice of the Indian Diasporic Community in Fiji (1879-1987)**

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The Fiji Islands lie in the south-west Pacific Ocean approximately with an area of 250,000 square miles of which only 7,022 square miles constitute dry land. The Fiji archipelago includes about 300 islands of varying sizes. The largest of the islands were Viti Levu (4,011 sq miles) and Vanua Levu (2,137 sq miles). Its indigenous population is essentially of Melanes, a stock but with some Polynesian mixture.<sup>1</sup> Though navigators such as Abel Tasman, James Cook and William Bligh in their voyages ' had become aware of some islands in the Fiji Group but it was not until the nineteenth century that contact with the European world became established . Among the first Europeans to have an impact upon Fiji society were visiting sailors, in 1782 as sandalwood traders, beachcombers and castaways as well as, Christian missionaries. It was, however, from 1869 to 1872 that the influx of Europeans intending to settle permanently occurred.<sup>2</sup> In December 1869 the European population in Fiji numbered 1,250; by the end of 1872 it had raised to 2, 670.<sup>3</sup> A contemporary account stated that "in 1871 there was a grand stampede of all restless whites from Australia and New Zealand to Fiji" and a local newspaper described these new comers as "Hawkesbury farmers, squatters, vine growers, diggers, New Zealand flax dressers, and merchants looking, for less competition and higher profits".<sup>4</sup> Their intentions were summed up by a fellow settler: "The whites look upon Fiji as their domain and the Fijians as husbandmen to till it"<sup>5</sup>. European quest for land; and cheap labour imposed new strains upon indigenous society and aroused considerable anxiety among, Fijian leaders. To ensure the maintenance of law and order and to attempt to accommodate demands by European settlers without prejudicing the position of the indigenes, then numbering from 133,500 to 150,000, led to attempts to set up governments involving Fiji chiefs and utilizing Western concepts. But the efforts proved abortive since the European settlers saw the function of government as one to facilitate the realization of their goals sufficiently as to recognize that settler ambitions if achieved would disinherit them, the Fijian chiefs sought the protection of the British Crown. A reluctant Britain accepted an unconditional offer of Fiji to become a colony and on October 10, 1874 signed with the Fijian chiefs the Deed of Cession<sup>6</sup>.

Fiji attracted the British as a cotton producing region and as a coaling station. With the end of the American Civil War in 1865 came a crash in the world cotton market and the British wanted to recover the loss through the acquisition of new colonies. The British wanted to introduce the plantation agriculture for the economic development of the new colony. The first substantive governor was Sir Arthur Hamilton Gordon, who interpreted his duty to be first and foremost the, security of the native population. Consequently he forbade by Law the sale of Fijian land. He devised a taxation scheme that required Fijian to work their owns plantations, the producer of which government sold and deducted from the sales

a certain amount for taxes, and the surplus, if any, was, returned to the cultivators. This curtailed the supply of native labour for European settlers. Gordon's policy of governing Fijians through their own traditional rulers and his creation of political institutions wherein Fijians alone participated were all part of his design to establish that in Fiji, Fijian interests would be paramount; his successors consolidated on his efforts. While the Colonial Office accepted Gordon's principles it also required that the new colony be financially self supporting. To achieve economic viability Gordon found himself leading towards plantation agriculture which required an abundance of cheap land and labour. In a further attempt to maintain good relations with its subjects, the colonial Government prohibited the employment of the indigenous Fijians as plantations labourers. Thus he had severely restricted the supply of both. Nor did he care for European settlers. Gordon preferred to develop Fiji by means of large capitalist enterprises. Hence the invitation to the Colonial Sugar Refining Company (CSR) to begin operations in Fiji, which it did in 1880, and thereafter expanded until it withdrew from Fiji in 1973. Moreover, the Fijians were reluctant to take full-time for wages, preferring traditional subsistence work that satisfied their village obligations and was less regimented. In addition to this in the years following the American Civil War there were an outbreak of measles which wiped two-third of the indigenous Fijian population. Thus to provide supply of labours to the plantation and without the choice of indigenous Fiji labours Gordon had no other alternative than to look towards India. Gordon had experience with Indian indentured labourers in previous governorships in Mauritius and Trinidad and he resorted to this system to aid him in Fiji. By introducing Indians into Fiji he intended to provide Fiji with a regular labour supply for its economic needs and at the same time keep intact his native policy<sup>7</sup>.

As a result of an agreement between the colonial regimes in India and Fiji some 60,553 Indians registered from 1879 to 1916 to serve in Fiji. The Indians, however, first came to Fiji in 1879<sup>8</sup>. The Indians were recruited as labours for the brought by the colonial needs. British economy during the nineteenth century led to industrialization, world trade and international finance. It dominated a new economic order, drawing in raw materials to feed its industries and its people. India became the centre of this global connection and a source of raw material for Britain, a market for manufactured goods, a destination for capital investment and source of labour for the other parts of the Empire. Moreover, till 1920s the Indian tax payer financed the world's largest standing army, which could be used around the globe to support the Empire in times of need. It began with the abolition of slavery in Britain in 1834 and the need of labourers in the various colonies for the plantations and public works. It was also directly proportioned to the penetration of the British mercantile capitalism in Asia. In the second half of the nineteenth century, as a result of the technological improvement in communications and the opening of the Suez Canal Asia was integrated with the world capitalist economy which helped the British to earn a considerable surplus of trade with Asia as well as India in particular. The surplus was invested in the mines and plantations of Asia and Africa. This profit from the trade was invested by the British in the mines and plantations which in urgent need of large supply of labours and trading classes in various parts of Asia. The British thus took the Indians to the various parts of the British Empire like

British Guyana, Mauritius, Fiji, Trinidad, Malaysia, Singapore, Surinam, South Africa and Burma<sup>9</sup>. In this paper I have taken into study the Indian immigration into Fiji mostly as indentured labours under the system of *girmit*, their social and religious adjustments and the change in the demography of the country. The article studies the growth of the population and its impact on the ethnic tensions, the racial discrimination and injustice which resulted in the twice immigration of the Indian origin men or Indo-Fijians from Fiji to the other countries.

### **Indian indentured labours in Fiji**

The Indians came to Fiji as indentured labours where the passage to the country was free but the journey to island was difficult and full of hardships. The *girmit* system was for five years and further it was extended for another five years. The indenture system in Fiji was highly organized and without this emigration on any considerable scale would have been impossible. The volume of the emigration was primarily determined by the demand for labour in Fiji, which was in turn influenced by world sugar prices. The employers, principally big companies, of which one, the Colonial Sugar Refining Company, was pre-eminent, sent requisitions for the number of labourers they required to the Fiji Government which transmitted them to the Fiji Government Emigration Agent in India who also acted as agent for other colonies, including at various times the West Indian colonies and Mauritius<sup>10</sup>. At first the only Fiji agency was in Calcutta but in 1902, following a request from the Colonial Sugar Refining Company, an agency was opened in Madras also. The agent was usually a former colonial official, was paid a fixed salary, and maintained a large depot to which emigrants were sent before embarkation. On receiving the requisition from Fiji, he would enter into contracts with sub-agents up-country for the supply of recruits. These sub-agents were often shopkeepers and were a rather cosmopolitan group, including Hindus, Muslims, Christians and Jews. The agent could exercise little real supervision over them and still less over the recruiters who had contracts with the sub-agents. Both were paid by commission, the rate of which varied in accordance with the difficulties experienced in filling requisitions and rose throughout the period. The system was, therefore, highly commercialized and there was considerable inducement for recruiters to use improper methods of recruiting particularly when recruits were hard to obtain. When the recruiter or his unlicensed assistants found a prospective emigrant, they would take him to the sub-depot where he would be fed, clothed and, if necessary, persuaded to emigrate. When ready he would be medically examined and taken before the registering officer, usually a sub-divisional magistrate, who was required by the Indian Emigration Acts to ascertain, before registering him that he was willing to emigrate and understood the terms offered. These examinations varied widely in thoroughness depending on how overworked or conscientious the magistrate was and how prejudiced he was against emigration<sup>11</sup>. Complaints by the agents of obstruction by magistrates were numerous, particularly in the early years. On the other hand, there were many cases of perfunctory examinations of ignorant or frightened recruits. After being registered, the recruits were taken in batches to Calcutta or Madras by train, and then taken to the ships until the sufficient number has been fulfilled. They were medically examined, questioned again by the Protector of Emigrants, an official appointed by the governments of Bengal or

Madras, and finally embarked. Those who were rejected at this stage were paid compensation which started only after 1886. Most of the times the rejected labours remained in Calcutta as the wages were higher there in comparison to the northern part of the country. The number of recruits registered was always greatly in excess of the number of actual emigrants, particularly in the 1890s<sup>12</sup>.

Immigration to Fiji as indentured labours mostly came from United Provinces (modern Uttar Pradesh), Bihar, Central Provinces namely two districts of Raipur and Bilaspur, and Punjab. The immigration from Madras started after 1903. The recruitment was from the districts of Coimbatore, Godavari, Kristna, Nellore, Tanjore, Vizagapatnam and Malabar. The recruitment of men was easier than women in both north and south of India<sup>13</sup>. The reason for immigration can be traced in the decline of the handicraft industries, over crowdedness of the agricultural holdings, rural indebtedness and failure of crops. These can be considered as the push factors while the attraction of higher wages can be taken as the pull factor which took large number of the immigrants to Fiji. <sup>14</sup>. The number of emigrants from India to Fiji under the Indian Emigration Acts was 60,965, in 1911 when 4,204 emigrants left for Fiji. 45,833 went from Calcutta and 5,132 from Madras. The number of arrivals in Fiji was 60,537. In 1916 the number of Indians recorded was 62,837 as immigrants from India to Fiji<sup>15</sup>.

The number of immigrants who arrived in Fiji in large scale was indentured labours in the plantation immigrating for economic reasons. But there were existence of immigrants as labours who did not immigrate exclusively for economic reasons. The Sanderson Committee reported that there were too many loafers and vagrants who were recruited as labours. There were criminals who escaped from the police or afraid to return to the villages after losing their social identity<sup>16</sup>. But C.F. Andrews gave an estimate that this number was not high. There were sections that landed as indentured labours and looked for the opportunity to work as policemen, teachers, priests or clerks because the recruiters assured them so<sup>17</sup>. Again the indentured system also recruited learned youths of high caste as Pandit Totaram Sanadhya who wrote a book in Hindi on the problems and hardships faced by the Indians under the indentured system in Fiji<sup>18</sup>.

The recruitment proved that the proportion of women to men was 40 to every 100 men. The recruitment of women was more difficult from Madras. In most of the cases women were recruited from pilgrim centres. The common practice was that the recruitment agent came with the offering to take her to some relatives or show some sacred shrine and then took her to the depot instead. Family recruitments were rare and much lesser in percentage. There was high proportion of men who left their wives in India<sup>19</sup>. The most striking was that the labours recruited were mostly from the agricultural castes like *Ahirs*, *Kurmis*, *Lodhas*, *Muraos*, *Mallas*, *Kahars*, *Kumhars* and others. The high castes like the Brahmins were also recruited though their per cent were much lesser than the cultivators. The Muslims were also recruited but much lesser than the Hindus<sup>20</sup>. The table below shows the distribution of the immigrants according to the castes and religion.

**Table-I:** Emigration of the Indians from Calcutta to Fiji, 1916

Religion	% of males	% of females	%percentage
Hindus ———			
Brahmins	17.0	14.2	16.1
Agricultural Castes	32.7	28.4	31.3
Artisans	6.9	6.5	6.7
Lower and outcastes	29.3	35.0	31.2
Muslims	14.0	15.0	14.6
Christians	0.1	0.1	0.1

**Source:** K.L.Gillion, *Fiji's Indian Migrants : A History to the end of indenture in 1920*, Melbourne, OUP, 1962, p-209

The table clearly indicates that the Indians were recruited not on the basis of castes but the willingness to work and the urge to earn more. The Government restricted the recruitment of the *fakirs*, *sants* and priests and the rest were recruited for labour system. The Indians who were recruited started their journey in the ships with no privacy, spaces, sunlight, suffocations, unhygienic and poor urinals. The ships took 73 days to sails to Fiji but with the use of the steam ships it was reduced to 30 days. Even so there were illness like cholera, dysentery, measles, whooping cough and small pox in the ships<sup>21</sup>. After reaching the destination the conditions were still worse. The indentured Indians were to face the harsh conditions of employment and violence at the hands of the plantation owners as well as the overseers known as the *sirdars*. Their wages were minimal and their accommodations were in large barracks, suffocating, unhygienic with no privacy for couples and families. Their health suffered and despite the existence of medical assistance in the plantations they suffered from anemia, dysentery, beriberi, chest infections and tuberculosis<sup>22</sup>. The women faced sexual harassment both by the owners and the *sirdars*. There were high death rates due to the poor living conditions and the lack of medical care<sup>23</sup>. There were high rate of suicides in Fiji which amounted to 7.3 per cent in 1900-1903. <sup>24</sup>The condition of the indentured labour in Fiji was no less than a slave and the historians like Hugh Tinker has identified the indentured system as 'a new system of slavery'. <sup>25</sup> The indentured system came to an end in 1916 due to opposition from home and abroad. It has to be remembered that besides indentured labours there were clerks and interpreters who were introduced by the government both before and after the abolition of the indentured system in 1911. Gujaratis arrived as traders and the Sikh policemen were brought from Hongkong from 1911 onwards. The first lawyer was Mr. Manilal who came to Fiji in 1912<sup>26</sup>.

#### **Abolition of the indentured labour system**

The severity of the Indian labours in Fiji received severe criticism from the early years of the 20<sup>th</sup> century from missionaries, humanitarians and activists from the Indian national movement. The Congress first expressed its concern for the Indian emigrants in 1894, when Mahatma Gandhi took up the issues of the Indians in South Africa. In the tenth Indian

national Congress the issue was taken for appealing to the government to disallow the Indians to Natal. As early as 1909 Surendranath Banerjee spoke of the abolition of the indentured system of transporting Indians in Fiji. In 1910, in the Indian Legislative Council G.K. Gokhale of the servants of Indian Society moved the resolution to prohibit the recruitment of the indentured labour in India for the colony of Natal. After two years Gokhale passed a resolution in the India National Congress to abolish the system<sup>27</sup>. The Christian missionaries and the writings of their representatives like J.W.Burton , Hannah Dudley and R. Piper clearly revealed the mistreatment of the Indian indentured labour.<sup>28</sup> The writing of the ex-girmitya Totaram Sanadhya further raised questions in the minds of the Indian activists regarding the system. The British Indian Government under the pressure in September 1915 sent C.F.Andrews and W.W.Pearson for investigations and their report was not very positive and it did not differentiate the system of indenture from the slavery<sup>29</sup>. There was a huge opposition to the system by the Indian National Congress and the nationalist leaders like Gokhale and Mahatma Gandhi. Gandhi wrote while referring to the indentured labour , “if the badge of inferiority is always to be worn by them.....any material advantage they will gain by emigrating can be of no consideration”<sup>30</sup>. Therefore, the awareness regarding the condition of the Indian labours in Fiji was building up in India.

The indentured women especially in Fiji played a very important part in the movement to abolish the indentured system unconsciously. The news of the molestation and abuse of the Indian women on the plantations reached India and it further outraged the Indians. The stories of the treatment of two Fiji Indian women, Kunti and Naraini , attracted special attention and their names are remembered in Fiji even today. Kunti , a twenty year old woman frm Lakhuapur village in Gorakhpur had emigrated to Fiji with her husband in 1908. Her first four years on the plantation were unexceptional till 10 April 1912 when the overseer allocated Kunti an isolated patch in a banana field away from all other workers, apparently with the intention of disgracing her honour. Kunti resisted his demand, until nearly overtaken, she jumped into the river in desperation . She was rescued by a boy , Jaidev. Kunti’s story was published in Bharat Mitra and became widely known, which prompted the Government of India to ask the Government of Fiji to institute an enquiry into the treatment of indentured women. Naraini’s story was similar . The overseer of the estate in Nadi asked Naraini to present herself at work three or four days after giving birth to a child. Naraini refused , arguing correctly that it was the recognized practice for women to absent themselves from hard labour for up to three months after giving birth. The overseer , taking umbrage at Naraini’s refusal , then beat her severely ; barely able to walk , Naraini was carried to hospital on a stringed bed. The overseer was arrested, and the case came before the Supreme Court of Fiji. But everyone’s surprise the overseer was not found guilty and acquitted. Naraini later lost her senses and spent the rest of her life as an insane vagrant<sup>31</sup>. These incidents made a wider appeal to the Indians to regarding the condition of women in indentured system. The campaigns in India to stop the degradation of the Indian coolies received wider public support. The Government of India had been under the pressure for sometime from the Indian nationalists to end the system, finally moved and waiving away protests from the colonial planters abolish the indenture system in 1916.

### Change in the demographic pattern of Fiji

The increasing Indian population created a fundamental change in Fiji's population structure. The number of Indians increased since 1880s in comparison with the Fiji. The European population grew the least from 1921-1946 which amounted to 3878 in 1921 to 4228 in 1936 and 4594 in 1946. Across the same period the Indian population doubled to 60, 6034 in 1921 while the Fiji population increased to 40 per cent to the total population. Since 1945 the Indians formed the largest single racial group and substantially outnumbered the Fijians<sup>32</sup>. The Fijians were the indigenous population who were descended from the native people who inhabited Fiji Island was ceded by the British in 1874. The changes in the population structure of the Fijians took place due to natural causes like intermarriages. It should be remembered here that no Fiji-Indian marriage took place in the island during 1880- 1921. After the 1916 the Government refused to recruit Indians as indentured labours and the Government terminated those unexpired contracts after 1920s. The large immigration to Fiji had ceased but the Indian birth rate was much higher. The Indian population included also those men who returned to India. From 1921-1946 the Indian population practically doubled though the migration from India much decreased after 1918.<sup>33</sup> The change in the population structure can be seen in the following table:

**Table - II:** Population Structure During 1881-1949

RACES	1881	1901	1921	1946	1949
Fijian	114,748	94,397	84,475	117,488	126,650
Indian	588	17,105	60,634	120,063	133,941
Others including Europeans, Chinese, other Pacific races, etc	12,150	8,622	12,157	22,087	24,364

**Source:** Eila M.J. Campbell, Land and Population Problems in Fiji, The Geographical Journal, Vol -118, No 4, December 1952, p-477

The table clearly indicates that the number of Indians outnumbered the local Fijians. The Census of the 1921 seems to be the beginning of the new era for the both Fijians and the Indians. The Fijian population at the time of cession (1874) experienced a disastrous epidemic of measles of 40,000 of estimated total of 150,000 people. From 1905-1911 the number of Fijians increased but again in 1918 there was influenza which led to the death of 5000 Fijians<sup>34</sup>. These outbreaks seemed to be a turning point in the demography of the land and the population of the Fijians started to decrease in comparison with the Indians. The Indian population has shown no fall in the mortality rates over the last ten years and therefore, the Indians increased in numbers. There were no outbreaks of any disease or epidemics which would decrease the Indian population. Compared with the Fijians the Indian women attained motherhood at a much younger age and on the average have a shorter interval between successive births. The early marriage among the Indians could be another factor for the rise of the Indian population<sup>35</sup>.

The Indians who came as indentured labours chose not to call themselves coolies but as *girmityas* derived from the Hindi word ' *girmit* ' or agreement referring to the indenture

contract. There were also free immigration from Gujarat and Punjab. The Indians occupied lands in lease because land was not available for purchase because of the official policy of retaining lands in the ownership of native Fijians. The Government discouraged mixed settlement, the ex indentured population remained largely isolated and rural. Indians rented lands often from the major sugar companies and grew sugar and rice. By 1940s Indians occupied but did not own 94 per cent of the land under cane<sup>36</sup>. Their numbers as a settled, permanent population also grew as they began to catch up with the existing native population.

The Indians who came to work as indentured labours remained in Fiji even after the end of the *girmit*. They were given the choice of returning to India at their expense or remain in Fiji. The great majority of the Indians stayed back because they could not afford to pay back the return under the low pay of indentured labour system or were refused to sent back even after the end of the system in 1916<sup>37</sup>. Besides these Indians there were free immigrants like Punjabi farmers and Gujarati craftsmen or traders who became influential group after fifteen years. As mentioned above that most of the Indians took to agriculture in lease lands or remained as plantation workers. Indians who remained in Fiji for generations took the identity of Fiji Indians as Fiji born citizens of Indian origin. Fiji Indian distinguished the Indians from the Fiji born Indian citizens. The Gujaratis dominated the Fiji trade and between the years 1924-1945 among 600 registered businesses in Fiji, Gujaratis had 300 trading licenses. The Gujaratis became well known in politics too namely Badri Maharaj, a member of Legislative Council from the years 1926-1929, A.D. Patel and S.B. Patel. The Indian origin men in Fiji distinguished themselves in various fields like Aiyaz Sayed Khaiyum, Fiji's Attorney General since January 2008; Ajit Swaran Singh, district Court judge in New Zealand; Anand Satyananda, Governor-General of New Zealand; Bobby Singh, football player; Imrana Jalal, Human rights to the United Nations Development Program and as a member of the International Commission of Jurists; Mahendra Chaudhury, the fourth prime minister of Fiji; Rajesh Chandra, first Vice Chancellor of the University of Fiji and present Vice Chancellor of the University of South Pacific; Satya Nanda, the chairman of the western Central Pacific Fisheries Commission and Vijay Singh, the world number one golfer<sup>38</sup>. The Indians contributed to transforming Fiji into a country with strong economic base and one of the important producers of sugar in the world as indentured labours. The Indians added to the country's honour after the *girmit* period and as free citizens of Fiji.

### **Constructing religious and social connections**

The Indians who arrived in Fiji spoke different languages and had different conceptions of marriage, property, food and were separate from each other in, ethnicity, customs and traditions. They were not conscious of their Indianess till they arrived and they developed new dimensions of social connections and new values of traditions and caste rules. They faced social distinctions between indenture and free passengers and developed the social connections between *jahazi bhais* or ship brothers and sisters and these social relations persisted even after the end of the *girmit*. The rigidity of the caste rules gradually disappeared in the new society<sup>39</sup>.

The construction of the religious connections is very important in a diasporic country. In the first place it is a determinant of linkages and divisions. Religious beliefs add a dimension or layer to the rich social life and acts as a important factor in reinforcing kinship and brotherhood. From the plurality of Hindu practices in India, Indians in Fiji have chosen those that made most sense to them in their social and economic situation. The Fiji Indians had three main cultural groups based partly on area of origin and partly on socio religious variations. They are Hindus from North India, Hindus from the South, and Muslims (almost all of whom are from the North). These groups are almost entirely endogamous in rural areas. Within the two former there are castes having varying degrees of endogamy, and the Northern Hindu group also contains men of the Arya Samaj reformed sect. The three settlements correspond roughly to those obtaining in the Fiji Indian population as a whole. Differences between these groups (the small Sikh and Christian groups not being considered separately here) lie largely in the ritual and kinship spheres. The Hindus mostly adhered to the Sanatan Hindu Dharma and the impact of Arya Samaj was also present in some areas. The Muslims formed mosques and Sikhs *gurdwaras*. The *Ramayana* became the most popular text not only because it is simple and casteless but more importantly because its central theme is exile, suffering, struggle and eventual return. In the barracks of the indentured workers, *Ramayana* was recited and *Ram Lila* performances staged. Indians incorporated elements of other cultures into their daily life<sup>40</sup>.

#### **Ethnic tensions from 1936-1987**

The change in the demographic structure and with the predominance of the Indians in economic field gradually led to the growth of tensions in the country. At various times the indigenous Fijians have feared that Indians will have over power them, particularly as Indians outnumbered Fijians by 1946 and, in another 20 years time they were counted as the absolute majority. This ethnic tension was reflected most in the politics of the country. The racial and ethnic problems began to grow in the pre independence period. The Indians were the mainstay of the sugar industry, the largest contributor to the Fijian economy, yet the Fijian leader Ratu Lala Sukuna sadly admitted in 1936 , demands for their exclusion from the political process, indeed from Fiji. As Sukuna wrote of Fiji Indians, 'They have shouldered many burdens that have helped Fiji onward. We have derived much money from them by the way of rents. A large proportion of our prosperity is derived from their labour'.<sup>41</sup> There were complains of racial discrimination against the Indians. In 1942 Battan Singh of Fiji declared that the Indian community had helped the war efforts of the British government by war funds, producing crops, labour and others and Indians should be given equality rights. They should not be racially discriminated. Muhammad Tawahir Khan also put such complains claiming the country of Fiji as the country of the Indians too. This was expressed against the policy taken to discharge the Indian platoon from its military force in November 1941. The Indian origin people who lived in Fiji were adapted to the country and the second generation had taken the land as their origin. But the discrimination was reflected in the attitude and ideas of the Fijians. In 1963 R. R. Nayacakalou, leader of Fijian origin wrote a monograph about the increasing number of the Indians and the threat of the domination of the Indians<sup>42</sup>.

Independence of the country of Fiji was gained in 1970. After independence tensions developed due the colonial land policies which gave the Indians very little land and had leased land on which they grew sugar. Their representation in other plantation sector was also the similar. They were poorly presented in the police and army and the top level of the civil administration. The discrimination was made on the basis of the ethnic origin. Even after independence they were considered as the indentured labours. Although the vast majority of the Indian origin people had taken Fijian citizenship after independence, they were fearful of their political and constitutional future. In Fiji at independence in 1970, Indians were just half of the population<sup>43</sup>. The Fiji politician Sakesai Butadroka had introduced a parliamentary motion in 1972 stating “That this House agrees that the time has arrived when Indians or people of Indian origin in this country be repatriated back to India and that their travelling expenses should be met by the British”. His party Fiji Nationalist Party won 25 per cent of vote in the elections of 1974.<sup>44</sup> For nearly two decades it had seemed that the complex arrangements of the independence constitution had contained ethnic conflict, though Indians were aware of profound anti Indian sentiment among Fijians, particularly when the Fijian Nationalist Party founded in 1974 which called the expulsion of all the Indians from the country. The Fijians dominated the Government apparatus, the armed forces and the police. The Indians also organized a party of their own, the Federation Party (later the National Federation Party or NEP) before independence, while ethnic Fijians similarly organized themselves in a predominantly Fijian party<sup>45</sup>. After independence in 1970, 98 per cent of Indians and Indian origin people took Fijian citizenship, but there is nothing that would suggest that they acquired the citizenship privileges. At independence politics were radicalized still further by the provision of the communal, i.e., ethnic, representation, despite the NEP’s wish for a common electoral role. The country after independence was led into coups in 1987 due to immense racial pressure, and fears that an Indo-Fijian dominated cabinet would be unable to respect indigenous Fijian interests. The military coup of 1987 was filled with these questions. It also led to the racial violence against the Indians and their property. The Indian position was grievously threatened, despite their high numbers. It was clear in 1987 when two coups overturned a newly elected coalition Government led by a Fijian but dominated by the Indians, who had 19 out of the 20 positions in it<sup>46</sup>.

The racial discrimination was manifested in the land ownership especially after the end of the British rule. The ownership of the customary land is a crucial issue in Fiji currently. After independence, the indigenous Fijians own 87% of land in Fiji, although it can be leased for a period of up to 99 years. All native land leases are managed by the Native Land Trust Board (NLTB) on behalf of the Fijian landowners. A point to note is that all the members of the NLTB are indigenous Fijians. Most Indo-Fijian farmers were the descendants of the Indian farmers, who were brought by the British to work on farms. They remained as tenants of indigenous landowners<sup>47</sup>. Problems as agricultural leases began to expire. Upon the expiry of leases of native land, many Indigenous land owners evicted the predominantly Indo-Fijian tenants from their land. Despite making lease payments and providing hard labour the farmers were denied the right to renewal of leases. It had an enormous effect on sugar cane farmers, forcing them to find places to live elsewhere. While the indigenous Fijians had

a choice of staying on the land but the Indo-Fijian families had to leave because that was the only option<sup>48</sup>. No alternative lands have been acquired by the NLTB to assist the resettlement of Indo-Fijians.

The racial discrimination was also manifested in the realm of politics and political rights of the Indian origin men. Before 1966, all Fijian representatives in the Legislative Council were nominated by the Great Council of Chiefs, with European and Indian members being elected by separate (ethnically based) electoral rolls. In the 1970 (Independence) Constitution a Senate which comprised 22 members, of whom 8 were appointed on the advice of the Great Council of Chiefs, 7 were appointed on the advice of the Prime Minister, 6 were appointed on the advice of the Leader of the Opposition and 1 appointed on the advice of the Council of Rotuma, was created. Under the 1990 Constitution Fijian dominance of Senate was cemented. Under this Constitution Senate was made up of 34 members, of whom 24 were appointed on advice of the Great Council of Chiefs, 1 on advice of Rotuma Island Council, and 9 appointed by the President on own judgment, from other communities.<sup>49</sup> Under the 1997 Constitution the Senate comprise 32 members, of which 14 are appointed on advice of the Great Council of Chiefs, 9 appointed on the advice of the Prime Minister, 8 appointed on the advice of the Leader of the Opposition, and one appointed on the advice of the Council of Rotuma. The Senators nominated by Great Council of Chiefs represent the fourteen provinces that make up the Republic of the Fiji Islands and usually consist of high chiefs from the respective provinces. They are appointed to protect and safeguard the rights and interests of indigenous Fijians. As with the 1970 Constitution there is no requirement that the other Senators that are appointed represent any particular ethnic background. But after independence the support of only two additional Senators is needed to give indigenous Fijians effective control in the Senate. Furthermore, the Constitution provides that 9 of the 14 "Great Council of Chiefs Senators" must support a Bill that alters or amends specific laws dealing with the administration of indigenous Fijian affairs before it can be enacted by Parliament. Hence, in terms of any administrative decision-making in relation to Indigenous land issues or general affairs regarding the indigenous Fijians, this leaves the non-Indigenous representatives with no choice then to obey the decisions made.<sup>50</sup>

In addition to this discrimination lies in the electoral system. According to Rev. Akuila Yabaki, ethnically based electoral system in Fiji is one of the major causes underlying racial discrimination in Fiji. This is indicated by the existence of ethnic based constituencies, which have been a feature of Fiji's legislature since colonial times. Prior to 1966, all elective seats in the Legislative Council were based on the ethnic allocation and were elected by voters from specific population groups. This system changed slightly in the 1966 Constitution, although ethnic candidates and rolls remained. In 1904 the first partially elected legislative assembly was formed, consisting 10 officials, 6 elected European members and 2 appointed Fijians. In May 1929 provision was made for elected European and Indian members, with electors being divided into racial rolls. With some changes to the size of the legislature this system continued until the 1960s, when the move towards independence gained momentum. Although Indian interests wanted universal suffrage and a common roll, the 1966 Constitution retained ethnic candidates and rolls, and instituted a complex system of cross-voting, in which all

voters were registered on both ethnic and national rolls, with some candidates being elected by voters from their ethnic roll, and some being elected by the national roll.<sup>51</sup> The 1970 Independence Constitution retained the ethnic rolls. Under this Constitution the House of Representatives comprised 22 Fijian, 22 Indian, and 8 "other races" members and the cross voting system developed in the 1966 Constitution was continued. The 1990 Constitution, developed following the 1987 coups, guaranteed Fijian dominance of Parliament. The House of Representatives was boosted to include 70 members, with 37 Fijian representatives, 27 Indian representatives, 1 Rotuman representative, and 5 "others" making up the lower house. There was a strict ethnic basis for electing all the members of Parliament. The 1997 Constitution reduced the possibility of Fijian dominance of Parliament but the allocation of seats in the government has always been unequal<sup>52</sup>.

In 1999 Fiji got its first Indian Prime Minister Mahendra Chaudhury who appointed 11 indigenous Fijians in his 17 member multiracial Cabinet. He invited the members from the opposition party to join his government and also included Mr. Bune, one of the key players in the coup of 1987. As minister of the government Mr. Chaudhury was the finance minister in the Indian dominated Government of 1987 which was topped led by Col. Rabuka. Mr. Chaudhury promised to lead the Government with the spirit of democracy and principles of a new multi racial Constitution but appealed to the Indian community "to show greater responsibility to our wider common interests as a nation".<sup>53</sup> But his rule could not solve the issues of the racial tensions in Fiji and there were further coups in 2000. The racial tensions created a sense of insecurity among the Indian origin men in Fiji and they had opted for a second migration.

### **Second migration**

The impact of the national policies and situations had forced the Indian origin men to move from Fiji. During the colonial period there were ethnic tensions between the Fijians and the Indians but after the independence it was widely represented and largely felt in the military coup of 1987 and further in 2000. There were severe violence and as a result the Indians emigrated from Fiji to Australia, New Zealand, USA and Canada. In New Zealand during 1990 the number of the Indians rose to 42,880 due to the immigration from Fiji who migrated for the second time<sup>54</sup>. Australia also experienced the same effect as many of the Indians migrated to the country. The migrations to the other countries further increased after the coup of the year 2000. It was found that at least 47.5 per cent of the migrants who went to Australia from Fiji were highly qualified.

By the end of the 1990s there were at least 40,000 living in Australia as their citizenship rights and future were at stake.<sup>55</sup> The Indians had been streaming out of Fiji particularly after the two coups of 1987. The political reality has been analyzed by scholars that the National Alliance dominated by the ethnic nationalists, Australian businessmen and few wealthy Indians had suffered a severe defeat in the elections of the 1987 which brought to power a multiracial coalition. Dr. Timocoi Bavadra, the head of the Government as the leader of the Fiji Labour Party and NFP sought the support of the Indo-Fijians. Out of 19 of the 29 elected MPs was Indo-Fijian. Half the cabinet seats were filled by ethnic Fijians, and

political power in the new government was admirably balanced between ethnic and Indian Fijians. Interpretations of the coup dwell on a largely 'military' explanation, pointing to Colonel Sitiveni Rabuka's apprehensions about the Bavadra government as pro-communist and opposed to military interests. It is been viewed that Indians were assuming political domination or poised to take control of the economy.<sup>56</sup> Whatever might have been the reasons the Indians left the land which they farmed and it was from the profits of their labour that Queensland and New South Wales have developed. The Fiji Indians found it difficult to leave their second homeland and go to another new land; most emigrants, though, remain attached to Fiji. For many of them, Fiji is the place to which they would like to return, if it offered more political security and better economic opportunities. Being resettled close to it is a partial consolation, allowing the opportunity for regular visits<sup>57</sup>. They practically became visitors to their own lands.

The Indians were considered as a threat in the country which was once required them much for the development of the country. There was a loss of their personal links and emotional bonds. In their second migration they have encountered with the direct migrants from India. But their social and emotional distance proved to be too big to be bridged by sharing a common ethnic bond. Being unable to link back to the original homeland and being forced to leave their adapted homeland they suffered from the crisis both emotional and economic. A woman while describing the condition of Fiji after the 1987 wrote to her daughter from Labasa : *Hindustani per bahut musibat hai.....Girmit se kamti nahi ye time* (The Indians in trouble now, today is no less than *girmit* or indentured time).<sup>58</sup>

### **Conclusion**

The Indians in Fiji came under the *girmit* or indenture system primarily because of the colonial need. There were traders and businessmen who were free passengers to the land but their percentage was much lesser than the labours. The Indians worked in the plantation to provide production and after the end of the indenture system most of the Indians chose to remain in Fiji as free workers. They tilled the land and served for the economic development of the nation. It is to be remembered that though they worked for years in the land but they could not get its ownership in the colonial period. They were the lease owners of the land in which they produced for the nation and Fiji turned as one of the important sugar producing nations of the world. The credit for the economic transformation of Fiji and its recognition in the international market as sugarcane producer goes to the Indians. These Indians however, did not loose their Indianness and maintained the bond of ethnicity within the community.. The scene changed after the independence when the presence of the Indians was feared by the indigenous Fijians and there continued ethnic tensions and the racial discrimination resulting in military coups in 1987. The Indians living in Fiji lost the land ownership at the expiry of the lease period after the colonial period but the independent Government did not provide them the ownership. The Indian origin men were mostly farmers and lived in the rural areas while the Fijians dominated business and trade. The Indians who were living in the country for generations and took the citizenship of Fiji, tilled the lands were now removed from the land. They faced political discrimination and racial tensions in their political lives. There were

violence and as a result they had to migrate again for the second time to other country. The second migration once again uprooted them from their second homeland resulting in crisis in their emotional, social and political lives. It is to be remembered that it is a sensitive issue, their displacement should be seen as indignity of those citizens who have been in a country for generations and worked for it.

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