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The Fiji Indians: Denial Of Citizenship

by
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The Fiji Indians or Indo-Fijians[1] who comprised more than half the multi-ethnic population of Fiji in 1970 have been subjected to mass anxiety in the post-May 14, 1987 period. Their right as citizens of the country of their birth to elect a government of their choice was rejected by the Ethnic Fijian military and its supporters who comprise Ethnic Fijian chiefs and senior public officials.[2] Since the day of the first military coup which overthrew the constitutionally and democratically elected Bavadra government, Ethnic Fijian leaders have systematically discriminated against Indo-Fijian in the public domain with the consequent loss of confidence among the latter. A racist draft constitution has been rejected by an overwhelming majority of Fiji's non-Ethnic Fijian majority population but at the same time there has been an enormous loss of qualified and skilled persons and capital. The constitutional and political crisis has caused a major economic downturn which will take at least a decade to overcome. However, this change is only possible if there is a return to constitutionality and respect for the citizenship rights of all the people of Fiji irrespective of ethnicity. Under present circumstances this is not likely to happen. This paper provides an outline of the history of Indian settlement in Fiji, the socio-economic and political changes that have affected them and which they have attempted to influence, inter-ethnic relations and the contemporary situation of Indo-Fijians.

Indo-Fijians or Fiji-born Indians form no less than 99 percent of the Indian ethnic category which constituted 48% Fiji's 715,000 population; the rest comprised Ethnic Fijians (46.6%), European, Part-Europeans, Chinese, Other Pacific Islanders and others (Fiji Census, 1986). Indo-Fijians are found in all walks of life and are represented at almost all levels.

Because the South Indians formed a minority, ans as they came after the early North Indian arrivals, they were forced to speak plantation Hindi or Fiji Baat. There were other categories of people in the immigrant ships, including turbaned Punjabi speaking Sikhs. There were a few Afghans and Nepalis as well.

Those who journeyed to Fiji in a particular ship developed strong ties of being jahajis or jahaji bhais. They usually referred to each other as kindred and during the often difficult times in Fiji provided support to each other.

The history of Indians in Fiji is connected particularly with the cultivation of sugar cane and with the Colonial Sugar Refinery Company (CSR). This Australian-owned company emerged as the monopoly concern in the industry and eventually became a Fiji Government agency. In addition, Indian migrants worked in coconut and banana plantations and in the cultivation of cotton and cocoa. They were also involved in public works and in sugar mills. Some worked as house servants for the Europeans. Others were employed as clerks, cooks, interpreters and policemen. The vast majority, however, worked in the large sugar estates.

The conditions in the plantations were barbarous. The immigrants lived in large barracks which were called "lines". A barrack was divided into little rooms of 10 feet by 7 feet. One

such room housed three single men or a married couple and two children. These rooms had no windows. Instead of windows, the partitions dividing the rooms did not reach the ceiling to allow ventilation. As a consequence of this there was little privacy, if any (Gillion 1962; Mayer 1963; Ali 1979).

In these small rooms the immigrants were expected to cook their food. They also kept their tools, clothing and other belongings within the confines of the small space available. According to Adrian Mayer the living conditions in the "lines" of Fiji plantations represented a sharp break from conditions in India.

> "For, though Indian villages often contained streets of closely packed houses in which poorer families might live in considerable congestion, each person felt that he had a dwelling of his own, rather than a single room in a large dormitory filled with people who were not necessary kin, or even friends" (Mayer, 1963: 17-18).

The working conditions were just as bad. They had to get up at dawn and march to the fields to do the day's work. This was done by tasking, whereby each person was given a piece of work to complete. Failure to complete the task meant loss of what meagre income that might have been received. It is evident that for most workers the minimum one shilling a day became the maximum that they could earn (Narsey, 1979). It was not uncommon for sardars and overseers to overtask the labourers. The former were men picked from amongst the immigrants who were given the responsibility of seeing that the labourers did their work.

Penal sanctions backed the tasking system. People were forced to do the work; failure to comply meant whipping, fines or imprisonment and the extension of the indenture. For five years they had to serve this bondage with no choice whatsoever.

In addition to the difficult living and working conditions, the indenture system enforced abnormal social conditions as well. For every hundred men there were to be forty women. In practice there were 30 women to a 100 men. This number was further reduced when one considers the fact that the overseers and sardars, as well as their henchmen, picked the most attractive women for themselves. Polygamous relationships were not uncommon. Hence the ideals of family life were disrupted (Naidu, 1980).

Indian indentured labourers struggled against these conditions which were dehumanising. Several spontaneous strikes flared up and workers organised demonstrations especially in the 1880's when economic depression resulted in widespread incidents of overtasking. After one such demonstration in 1886 which involved a hundred and thirty labourers who walked ten miles to the capital, Surva to protest against heavy tasking, the colonial government passed the 1886 Immigration Ordinance banning all such protestations (Gillion 1962:83).

The net result of these conditions was considerable individual hardship and breakdown of social order. Malnutrition, infectious diseases, hookworm infestation, anaemia, and respiratory problems were widespread. Many Indian workers and their children fell victim to diseases that could have been easily eliminated with adequate food and sanitary conditions. Suicides, murders and sexual offences were thousands of percent higher than the villages that these Indians had come from (Andrews and Pearson, 1916).

The caste system amongst the immigrants disintegrated. Religious differences became less significant. Inter-marriage between people of different religions was common. There was also a considerable exchange of beliefs and rituals. Muslims participated in Hindu religious festivals and the latter's participation in Muslim rites was manifested in the Taji's Festival (Ali, 1979).

After the indenture, came the free immigrants who, it was hoped, would help replenish the fast diminishing plantation workforce. These newcomers took up business as their main occupation. The free migrants were mainly from north-east India and were predominantly Gujaratis and Punjabis. The former today own and operate the majority of "Indian owned" shops and trade agencies in the urban centres of Fiji. The more wealthy Gujaratis are now venturing into industry and wholesaling. Punjabis meanwhile have become retailers, owners of large farms and have been involved in money-lending.

As these free migrants came after the indentured period, they were not subjected to the traumatic conditions of the earlier years of Indian migration to Fiji. They have retained direct links with their places of origin in India and follow closely the practices that prevail there. These stronger bonds have been reinforced by regular inter-marriages of Indian Gujaratis and those settled in Fiji.

Economic Diversification, Education and Political Awakening

After the formal abolition of the indentured labour system in Fiji in 1920, all Indians in the country became free. Previously there was division between those who had completed their indenture and those who had not. These ex-indentured labourers became involved in a wide range of activities to sustain themselves in a situation where access to land was limited.

Most became small sugarcane farmers, having rented land from the CSR, the government, and Fijians. The CSR having initially subdivided its vast estates into large plantations operated by former white overseers and finding that the latter were unable to produce sugar cane profitably, further subdivided its lands into on the average 10 acre allotments for leasing to the land short Indians. All aspects of sugar can cultivation were stringently controlled by the company and in many respects the emergent Indian tenant farmers remained employees of the CSR (Samy, 1979).

Other Indians were involved in the cultivation of rice, bananas, coconut, and vegetables. Faced with difficulties of gaining agricultural land with security of tenure and the attraction of greater economic returns of non-farming activities, many Indians left the land to earn a living in other sectors. A significant number took to hawking; of these a great number were unsuccessful because they had to compete with the increasing number of retail establishments. The urban Indians took up skilled and unskilled jobs in both the public and private sectors.

The whites who dominated all aspects of colonial Fiji society opposed this trend of Indians and Indo-Fijians seeking non-agricultural work. In this they got a sympathetic hearing from colonial governors. The colonial government saw Indians as agricultural labourers and agriculturalists, and being aware of what to them were undesirable social and political effects of colonial subjects acquiring education, gave no encouragement to the Indians to improve their education. Indeed, both the government and the CSR were opposed to Indians becoming educated.

Indians, however, continued to strive for education during the indenture period. They had kept education alive through the recital of religious songs and stories and through verbal teaching of their mother tongues. In the post-indenture period, strenuous efforts were made to educate Indian children by religious organizations such as the Methodist, Catholic Missions, Arya Samaj, Fiji Sanatan Dharm Sabha, Fiji Moslem League, and the India Tkya Sangam. These were complemented at the grass roots level when settlement committees established primary schools. By the late 1930s without much government support and with great sacrifice to themselves Indians provided opportunities for their Indo-Fijian children. This prepared them to undertake occupations other than farming.

Whites were influential since pre-colonial times. In 1904, 2,440 Europeans had direct representation in the colonial legislature with six representatives. They were directly represented in the colonial executive in 1912. More than 22,700 Indian British subjects were excluded from having a voice in the government. The 92,000 native Fijians were represented through a small elite of less than 100 chiefs in the Council of Chiefs which "put forward the names of six of their class from whom the Governor selected two as their representatives" (Ali, 1980:131). Fijians were allocated a seat in the Executive only in 1944. Indians had to wait until 1948 when they were allowed a single representative (Ali, Ibid, 147). Indians were given a nominated seat in 1916 and the person selected was regarded as not representative of the majority of Indians.

Throughout the colonial period Indians and Indo-Fijians struggled for equality with the other ethnic categories in Fiji. Even when their efforts were directed at largely economic goals these were interpreted as challenges to European dominance (Gillion, 1977), Indians and Indo-Fijian workers and farmers went on strike in 1920, 1921, 1943, 1959 and 1960 for basically economic reasons. The hegemonic whites presented the spectre of Indian dominance to Ethnic Fijians and posed as protectors of the paramountcy of native interests. The Eastern Fijian chiefs who had been the allies of the British as they pacified western Fijians, increasingly began to mouth identical concern about Indians as the whites.

Ethnic Fijian chiefs utilised Ethnic Fijian "commoners" to help break the strikes of 1920 and 1921. They opposed franchise for Indians in 1929 when the latter were given three representatives in the colonial legislature.[3] With the whites, the chiefs made a big issue out of the fact that "the Indians" had gone on strike in 1943. Although CSR had been making super profits in the guaranteed European market and the cost of living had doubled in the early war years, the colonial status quo made a major issue out of the

so called "Indian treachery". Indians who were seen from the late 1920s as constituting an "Indian problem" in Fiji were now perceived as on Asian fifth column in the country.

The British colonial Fiji was a racially segregated society. The "races" lived in separate areas, went to separate schools, were administered different and did different work. The racially exclusive native (later Fijian) administration became the training ground for race-conscious Ethnic Fijian politicans. When economic forces resulted in an urban multiethnic working class race was used to keep it divided.

The white capitalist class, white colonial state power holders and Ethnic Fijian chiefs combined again in 1959 to break-up the oil and allied workers strike. This industrial action involved Indo-Fijian and Ethnic Fijian workers who struck after a protracted delay over a pay increase. As a result of whites attending gas-stations and driving petrol trucks, the strike took a white-black racial dimension. When the police led by British officers tear-gassed and baton charged 4,000 persons, including strikers and sympathisers a riot against European property and person began. A curfew was imposed and the army was called out.

This strike was defeated by racial appeals of leading Fijian chiefs to Fijian workers who were told not to be misled by "foreigners" i.e. Indians. Subsequently a number of racially exclusive Fijian unions were formed thereby weakening emergent working class organisations.

On the political front Indians continued to suffer discrimination under the 1937 constitution which lasted till 1963. The three racial categories were allowed five representatives each in the legislature. Two of the five representatives were to be nominated to preserve European predominance over Part-Europeans. Europeans who comprised 2% of the population enjoyed parity of representation with Indians (43%) and Fijians (49%).

The 1963 constitution continued the tradition of racial discrimination against Indians. The Legislature comprised 12 elected members divided racially with each of the three "races" having four representatives. A further two members of each "race" were appointed by the Governor. For the first time in 1963 ethnic Fijian "commoners" were given the franchise.

Two major political parties emerged in the early 1960s; the Fijian Association which incorporated the chiefs and an emergent bureaucratic class of Fijians and which relied on the racial vote bank of Fijians; and the Federation Party which represented middle class Indian interests with the support of Indo-Fijian farmers and workers.

At the Constitutional Conference in London in 1965, Ethnic Fijians (together with Rotumans and other Pacific Islanders) were allotted 14 seats including two representatives appointed by the Council of Chiefs. They numbered 228,000 or 43% of the population. The 256,000 Indo-Fijians or 50% of the population were given 12 seats. The General Electors, a category that included Europeans, Chinese and Part-Europeans numbered 28,000 or 7% of the population, received 10 seats or 28% of the 36 elected seats in the Legislative Council. In this pre-independence constitution, racial or communal voting was retained (9 'Fijian', 9 'Indian', 7 'General Electors') and a category of cross-voting was introduced. Each elector cast a vote for a candidate from each 'race'.

In debates on the constitution Indo-Fijian representatives questions the disproportionate share of seats given to General Electors. Ratu Mara, the Fijian leader defended this inequality in terms of Europeans being a cultural buffer between the two non-white races, the removal of which could result in conflagration (Norton, 1972, 59; Samy, 1977, 108). The constitution became an issue in the elections of August 1966.

Two major political parties contested the election, the Federation Party and the Alliance Party. The former was led by A.D. Patel, an India-born Gujarati lawyer and landlord, who emerged as a leading figure in the 1960 can strike. This party was populist, anti-colonial and anti-racial by stance. Although the Indo-Fijian peasantry suffered great hardship and a crushing defeat at the hands of the CSR and the colonial state, the lawyers and teachers who led them gained considerable political mileage (Norton, 1977).

The Alliance Party was inaugurated in early 1966. It incorporated on a racial basis the Fijian Association, Suva Rotuman Association, All-Fiji Muslim Political Front, Chinese Association, Indian National Congress of Fiji, General Electors Association, Fiji Minority Party, Rotuman Convention and the Tongan Organization. Its political base was the Fijian Association formed in 1956 by members of the Fijian Affairs Board and included an unofficial European adviser of the Board. By disassociating Ethnic Fijians, it aimed to undermine the 1960 strike action contemplated by Kisan Sangh (the farmer's union which was advised by lawyer,

N.S. Chalmers). The Fijian Association was a conservative chiefled body which sought to prevent Indo-Fijian attempts at political reform (Nayaoakalou, 1975).

The Kisan Sangh's capitulation in the 1960 cane strike in association with the Ethnic Fijian Ba Fijian Can Growers' Association discredited it in the eyes of the bulk of the Indo-Fijian peasants. The Union's leader, Ajodhya Prasad, was an ex-teacher and its support base was the richer peasantry which tried to achieve economic gains by co-operating with the CSR. Through its political wing, the Indian National Congress, it aligned itself to the Alliance Party.

The Alliance Party brought together Ethnic Fijian chiefly interests, that of Ethnic Fijian bureaucrats and peasants on the basis of issues affecting their 'race', as well as Europeans, Part-Europeans and Chinese who were the leading representatives of merchant and plantation capital in the colony. Ali has noted that this party "had the blessing of the colonial regime" (1977, 67).

The Alliane won 23 seats and affiliated the two Council of Chiefs nominees and the two independents. The Federation Party took the 9 'Indian communal' seats. While 35% of the Indo-Fijians voted against this party, the Ethnic Fijians largely voted for the Alliance, although the total Ethnic Fijian votes for this Party (67.26%) did not indicate great enthusiasm for it (Ali, 1980, 155). With a large majority of seats, the Alliance Party leadership's confidence increased and in late 1967 it attempted to introduce a ministerial system. The Federal Party objected to any such step on the basis of the racially biased 1965 Constitution which the Opposition Leader condemned as "undemocratic, iniquitous and unjust". He called for "one man one vote" or common roll. When the Alliance Party began to ridicule the Federation's position, all the 9 Federation representatives walked out of the Legislative Council.

In 1968, a by-election was held for the 9 'Indian' communal seats to replace the Federal Party members who had walked out. The Federation Party regained all its seats. The Fijian Association of the Alliance Party expressed its displeasure at the results by holding meetings in different parts of the country, threatening Indo-Fijians, re-affirming links with the British crown, calling for the deportation of Federation Party leaders who were not Fiji-born, and urging dismissal of Indo-Fijian civil servants supposedly pro-Federation. As a result racial tension mounted.

This election under a lop-sided constitution was crucial as it was the framework under which Fiji's independence constitution was created. Race won over class. Although the renamed National Federation Party (NFP) (with the amalgamation of the two western Ethnic Fijian parties (see Norton, 1977)), regained its 9 seats, it remained a minority and failed to significantly increase its Ethnic Fijian support.

Constitutional discussions begun in Suva in August 1969 and concluded in London in April-May 1970 "proved peaceful and conciliatory" (Ali, 1977, 73). The Fijian masses (of all races) had no say in the proceedings:

> Further, the deliberations were secret; the public was informed of the results, not the details of the exchanges. Here the aim was to thwart elements such as the press, from sabotaging the dialogue, particularly when Fijian-Indian unity brought rapid decisions (Ibid., 72).

The politics of 'racial bargaining' was enhanced by the death in October 1969 of NFP leader, A.D. Patel, who was an advocate of the equality of the races in voting rights. His successor, S.M. Koya took a conciliatory stance. When the Alliance Party announced that it would accept dominion status for Fiji, the NFP shelved its principle of common roll.

The Alliance recognised that the UN's Fourth Committee because of its anti-colonial and democratic predisposition would probably support common roll or majority rule. The fact that a Labour Government in England was similarly inclined made the local ruling class anxious. Both the Fiji Times and the Pacific Islands Monthly (owned by the same Sydney based corporation) representing commercial and finance capital, condemned the United Nations and made aspersions against Indo-Fijians. The Australian merchant house, W.R. Carpenters, threatened to withdraw from Fiji (Rokotuivuna, 1973; Thiele, 1976).

The Alliance sought to negate external pressures by seeking immediate 'independence'. Thus the strategy of accepting formal independence was to entrench the status quo. It is apparent that the NFP accepted independence at its face value, hoping to bargain with the Alliance to resolve the outstanding issues later. As a result, the bitterness and wrangling that marred the 1965 conference was kept at bay in 1970" (Ali, 1977, 73).

The 1970 Independence Constitution had the following provisions: the state's legislature was bicameral with the House of

Representatives as the lower house and the Senate as the upper house. The heritage of race or 'communal' electorates based on three broad categories 'Fijian', 'Indian' and 'General Electors' were retained. Table 1 shows the allocation of representation by race in the Parliament.

In the lower house, 'Fijians' and 'Indians' had 22 seats each (12 'communal' and 10 'cross-voting') while the General Electors had 8 (3 'communal' and 5 'cross-voting'). Indo-Fijians who then comprised 51% of the population had 42.3% of the seats, Ethnic Fijians then making up 46% of the population had 42.3% as well, and General Electors constituting 3% had 15.4% (Samy, 1977, 109). In this manner, the last was over-represented by more than five times their proportional population size.

The Upper House or Senate was formed by appointment. The Fijian Great Council of Chiefs, which is recognised as the keeper of Ethnic Fijian 'traditions' (the chiefly oligarchy), selected 8 members, the Prime Minister nominated 7, the Leader of the Opposition appointed 6 and the Council of Rotuma, one. The Senate was to safeguard the special interests of Ethnic-Fijians, including matters of Ethnic-Fijian land rights and customs (Ali, 1977, 73; Samy, 1977, 111; Vasil, 1974, 84 ff).

Other 'races' had no such entrenched clauses to protect their rights but the political significance of the Senate went beyond being a mere protective device for specific Ethnic Fijian concerns. No significant amendments to the Constitution could be made without the approval of the Council of Chiefs' nominees. It was necessary to have the endorsement of three-quarters of the members of both houses to change provisions such as citizenship, the position of Governor-General, the composition of the two houses, the amendment procedure, the judiciary and the public service commission (Article 67, Constitution of Fiji).

> The constitution therefor gave ... iron-clad security, short of revolution to the paramountcy of Fijian interests ... The triumph of Fijian political and European economic interests at national level, matched by the unambiguous commitment of Indian leaders to national peace, allowed the ascendent. Fijian leaders to foster multiracial participation in selected areas of national life such as higher education and civil service, while accepting as historically determined the sharp racial boundaries in community life (McNaught, 1982, 159).

This constitution represented the triumph of the chiefly oligarchy and it allies, the prominent members of the General Elector category. Fiji gained political independence on 10th October 1970, after ninety-six years of British colonial rule. Even on a racial basis, the colonial regime had failed to reconcile paramountcy for Ethnic Fijians, over-representation of Europeans and the promised equality for Indo-Fijians. From the viewpoint of wider national concern, it left a dependent, divided and weak 'nation'. While 'race' overwhelmed 'class' divisions in society at the level of state incorporation and in the foreign-society at the level of state incorporation and in the foreign-owned press's incessant racist

Table 1
Allocation of Seats by Race in the House of Representatives and the Senate

House of Representatives

Communal Seats	National Seats
12 Fijians	10 Fijians
12 Indians	10 Indians
3 General Electors	5 General Electors
27	25
	52 Total

Senate

8 nominees of the Council of Chiefs (all Ethnic Fijians)
7 nominees of the Prime Minister
6 nominees of the Leader of the Opposition
1 nominee of the Council of Roturna

22 Total

Source: 1970 Fiji Constitution Documents - Chapters 4 and 5

preoccupation (reflecting ruling class-ideological hegemony), the economic reality of gross inequalities persisted. Both race and class co-exist, the latter reality was conceded even by the Pacific Islands Monthly when it declared that there was "a lot of poverty in Fiji" (February 1967, 38).

The national-level maintenance of racial divisions under colonial rule had two significant consequences:

> Careful balancing of communal interests encouraged each community to cling to its own identity, to think instinctively in racial terms, to worry incessantly about political solidarity, and perhaps to miss the main point that Fiji's divided people would never be able to loosen the grip of the Australian and New Zealand corporations and a few local Europeans over exports, imports and the internal market system (McNaught, 1982, 28).

The Contemporary Indian Population and Settlement

Fiji Indians numbered 292,896 in 1976, and comprised just under half of Fiji's population. In 1986 they formed 48.6 percent of a total population of 715,000. Since the 1976 the Indian proportion of the population had begun to decline, and the increase in Fijian population between 1966 to 1976 was higher (29 per cent) than the Indian increase of 22 per cent).

This trend has been due to a lower birth rate and to emigration. In the post-military coup period there has been a massive out migration of Fiji Indians. It has been estimated that between 1987 and 1989 some 20,000 persons of Indian origin have left Fiji. This in fact means that currently there is Indo-Fijian parity in numbers with Ethnic Fijians. It is estimated that in the next two years Ethnic Fijians will form the majority population of Fiji.

Nearly four fifth of the Indians reside in Viti Levu, and less than a fifth in Vanua Levu, with less than one half of one per cent of them living in other islands (see Map 2). Within the two islands, Indians are concentrated in particular provinces. Ba is the most important province of Indian settlement, containing just under two fifths of all Indians. The provinces of Ba, Macuata, Rewa and Naitasiri contain over three quarters of all Fiji Indians.

The emphasis in Fiji Indian settlement has changed considerably from the early period of their existence. Indians were brought to Fiji for agricultural purposes, but they were to soon begin moving into urban centres, and today comprise slightly over fifty per cent of urban residents in Fiji.

As a community, however, Indians still remain a rural people, with slightly over sixty per cent of all Fiji Indians residing in rural areas. Rural Fiji Indians live in settlements, which are areas of loose and scattered housing. The post-indenture Indian society in Fiji did not duplicate the clustered village pattern of settlement they had left behind in India. This was largely due to the fact that they settled where land was available for leasing. The CSR's 10 acre allotments resulted in scattered joint-farming household.

Economy

Indians are represented in most occupations in Fiji. Agriculture is by far the most important, which employed nearly 39 percent of the economically active Fiji Indians in 1976. In agriculture, they form the backbone of the sugar industry as farmers, cane cutters, labourers, mill workers and transport operators. Other industries where Indians are present in large numbers are wholesaling and retailing, community and social services, construction and manufacturing.

Indians are represented in most walks of life. While the majority are still employed on the land, many also work in factories, and as transport drivers, salesmen, clerical workers, technicians and in the professions.

Although there are many Indian shop-owners and increasingly, factory-proprietors they do not dominate the economy. The commanding heights of Fiji's economy are in the hands of Australian capital and the state. The bulk of the Fijian Indians do not own any land. As a community they own less than 3% of Fiji's land and are therefore dependent tenants.

Social System

The diversity of the Fiji Indians is reflected in the institutions of family and marriage. While the individual partners in marriage today do have considerably more say on matters of who they should marry, relatives continue to influence the choice. Arranged marriages persist, particularly in rural areas. The age of marriage, however, is in the late teens and early twenties these days. The wedding ceremony is a colourful affair and occurs over a period of several days. The Hindu ceremony culminates in the actual marriage by a pundit in the brightly coloured and brightly lit, Mandap. For a Muslim wedding, vows are made in private (Nika) in the presence of a Maulvi. In

either case a reception is held and not unusually this is the time for an ostentatious display of the family's relative wealth and status in the community. It is common for poorer Indo-Fijians to incur long-term debts as a consequence of this practice.

There are variations in life styles based on class divisions among Indo-Fijians. The gap between the rich and the poor make for significant differences in material possessions, access to education and modes of communication. Certain sub-cultural groups for instance are entirely town dwellers and businessmen. Bureaucrats, doctors, lawyers, teachers and other professional people are enjoying life styles that are increasingly different from those led by lower status workers and farmers. At the time, it is difficult for the Fiji Indians to develop their own cultural expressions because of the influence of the mass media and the movies.

Religious System

Religions also distinguish the Fiji Indians from the other ethnic groups in Fiji. More than 80 percent are Hindus, 16 percent are Muslims and about 2 percent are Christians. Before the 1920s religious differences between the Indians who had completed their indenture together was of little social significance. As we said before, Hindus celebrated the Muslim Moharram or tajia festival, participating with enthusiasm in the processions. Similarly Muslims were to be seen in the Ramlila and Holi celebrations. Today, however, the differences between the religions as well as the divisions between the sects within them have become very marked.

Among the Hindus there are many sects. The more prominent ones are the Sanatan Dharam (which has many sub-groupings including the Kabirpanthis), and the Arya Samaj.

There is also a Ramkrishna Mission in Fiji. The Muslims are split into two main sects. These are the Sunni or orthodox Muslims and the Ahmadiya sect. They are represented by the Fiji Muslin League and the Fiji Muslim Association. Similarly the small number of Christians are spread over several denominations including Methodist, Roman Catholics, Anglicans and some more recent sects.

The Hindu Fiji Indians celebrate Diwali, Holi and the birth of Lord Krishna. other religious occasions are also marked by appropriate rituals. Most homes have temples where the family gathers for prayers. The local Brahmins, who are the Pundits, officiate in marriages and pujas like the Katha. It is in the realm of religion that caste survives. Pundits are generally Brahmins, though restrictions on their association with others are not overtly practised. Ideally they are not supposed to eat meat. Many Hindus do not eat meat on certain days.

Tuesdays and Fridays are vegetarian days in a large number of Hindu households. Fasting is not uncommon, particularly amongst women. Another practice that is to be found in many areas is the 'firewalking' ceremony which is in honour of goddess Kali. Though firewalking is associated with the Indo-Fijians of South Indian origins many Hindus of all the other sub-cultural groups also participate.

The Sikhs have their own temples (Gurudwaras) where they carry out prayer meetings and read their holy books, Grantha Sahib. The Muslims have their mosques. They dresss in loose white shirts and pants they are seen especially on Fridays going to their places of worship. Amongst the more prominent practices associated with Islam in Fiji is the annual month long fasting-period of Ramadan followed by Eid.

Bakra Eid is marked by the usual nyaaz (prayers) and apportionment of meat for distribution to relatives. Prophet Mohammed's Birthday is also celebrated. Orthodox Muslims eat only Halal meat and say prayers five times a day (namaaz). The use of loud speakers in the mosques has become a part of their religious observance.

Post-Coup Ruptures

The military overthrow of the democratically elected Bavadra Government, barely a month after it had taken office ended Fiji's 17 years of infatuation with parliamentary democracy which was based upon a 'reasonable compromise of interests' among the principal ethnic groups in Fiji.

The barely two year old Fiji Labour Party sponsored by the powerful and multiracial Fiji Trades Union Congress in coalition with the much older National Federation party soundly defeated the ruling Alliance Party at the polls in April 1987. The electoral victory for the Coalition delivered a severe blow to Fiji's indigenous Fijian and chiefly elite, which had ruled Fiji for 17 years after independence.

Much of Fiji's political crisis after this election was engineered by this largely chiefly elite, which had over the years developed close ties with business and particularly European interests. The slogan 'Fiji for the Fijians' was whipped-up as part of this attempt to return the indigenous elite to power. Combined with Method-

ist fundamentalists, a popular racial chord had been struck. Elements of the business community funded the movement to destabilise the new government. (Plausible theories about the interest of the plotters of the coups are explored in Robertson (1988) and Lal (1989).

For some business interests the policy of the Coalition Government to investigate their political connections had been evidently disturbing. In particular the activities of the Emperor Gold Mines (an Australian giant in monopolistic control of the gold industry) had come under close scrutiny by the Labour Party. After the coups, this company had come out in strong support of the new regime.

One significant post-1987 election development was the focus of political violence against all Fiji's Indian population. A month before the first coup, a massive destablisation campaign was put in motion. This included firebombing of properties belonging to Indian lenders, businessmen and farmers. In the immediate post-coup period, Indians were subjected to violence on the streets, in full view of Fiji's police and army. Cases of looting, harrassment, stonings, firebombings and rapes increased significantly. The supposed guarantors of law and order provided little protection to Indians. It was apparent, that many of these incidents were condoned by segments of Fiji's police and army. Both the Police and the Army were purged in the days following the first of the coups. Senior Indian and Fijian officers in the Police and the Military seen to be sympathetic to the deposed Bavadra Government were retired or neutralised through internal procedures.

More importantly, however, Indo-Fijians had lost all control and influence over the political process in the aftermath of the coup. While the independence constitution was thrown overboard at the time of the coup, the interim Government established by the military has failed in inducing a national consensus on an alternative constitution. The draft constitution which has been described as racist, authoritarian, feudalistic and militaristic has been rejected by a clear majority of Fiji's citizens. It would appear, as a result, that any constitution in the immediate future will be an imposition upon the Indo-Fijian population. Such a constitution will seek to give a preponderant representation to Ethnic Fijians and arbitrary powers to a select elite of chiefs.

The country has been effectively ruled through decrees in the aftermath of the coup. In the upper echelons of the Government, Indo-Fijians are conspicuously absent although they continue to be major contributors to Government revenues as taxpayers.

In September, 1987 Colonel Rabuka carried out a second coup, presumably against an accord between the Governor General Ratu Penaia Ganilau, the former Prime Minister Ratu Mara and the deposed Prime Minister Dr Bavadra on an interim Government of national unity while Fiji searched for political solutions.

A short military dominated cabinet pushed Fiji into greater chaos, as the effects of Indian refusal to harvest sugar cane, trade boycottts imposed by Australian and New Zealand unions, flight of Indian capital and resources and increased political repercussion began to take their combined toll. Fiji's 'lapse of membership of the Commonwealth' compounded economic and political worries of the military regime which had pushed Fiji into its Republican status without any public consultation.

A change in composition of Government occurred in December of the same year when the former Alliance Prime Minister, Ratu Mara took over the Prime Ministership under the Presidency of the former Governor General, Ratu Penaia Ganilau. Rabuka assumed the portfolio of Minister for Home Affairs and Immigration and retained his role as the head of the Fiji Military Forces. This cabinet has ruled Fiji to the present day. A token membership of two Indian ministers in this cabinet has done little to reassure Indo-Fijians of their political rights. One of the Ministers of a newly created Ministry of Indian Affairs, Mrs. Irene Narayan was a defeated Alliance candidate in the last general elections. The other, Ishwari Bajpai, as the Minister of Cooperatives is one of the wealthier members of Fiji's Indian business elite. But she is not widely respected among Indo-Fijians.

Countries like the United Kingdom and to a lesser extent Australia, welcomed this change in Government with the restoration of aid. United Kingdom has restored full aid, including military training assistance. In the period thereafter, Fiji has developed greater ties with France and Japan, both of which have important strategic and political interests in the region. Fiji has also courted Israeli, South Korean, Malaysian and Indonesian support to cushion its isolation from the Commonwealth. Much of the new assistance has been directed at strengthening its military forces.

Within the Commonwealth, opinion appears to have shifted in favour of the current regime,

provided that it effected a constitution that secured and respected human rights adequately and guaranteed Fijian supremacy in parliament and government. With the exception of the Government of India, this marks a substantial shift from the principled position that the Commonwealth took at the time of the first and second coups. The political rights of Indo-Fijians appear to have been sacrificed for short term political and diplomatic gains on the part of Governments like the United Kingdom and Australia.

While obviously there can be no change of heart on the part of Fiji's ruling elite towards the question of equality and full citizenship rights in post-coup Fiji, there have been a few signs of hope for Fiji Indians. One hopeful note is the fact that both the Fiji Labour Party and the National Federation Party have withstood pressures from the military and other forces very well and have remained the only effective political organisations in the country. A small proportion of the indigenous population has remained solidly behind the Fiji Labour Party, and this has strengthened the support of Dr. Bavadra as a legitimate national leader in the country.

It is for this reason that numerous parliamentary delegations from countries that deal with the current national Government in Fiji are forced to meet with him on their official visits to the country. However it is unlikely that the current national Government will open dialogue with him or other opposition leaders on the question of a new constitution, in the very near future.

For Indo-Fijians generally, a return to confidence in this country will be highly unlikely for as long as the current elite remains in control. Even if 'a reasonable constitution' were articulated that safeguarded Indo-Fijian interests, the persistence of the almost wholly Fijian military force can do little to inject confidence in any national constitution. Hence tied to the search for an acceptable constitution, the future role, size and composition of the military forces will remain on any political agenda that could meaning fully address Fiji's problems.

In the absence of this, continued migration of Indo-Fijians to Australia, New Zealand, United States and Canada will remain a major preoccupation for Indo-Fijians.

Post-coup national administrations have also set in place long term policies for the restructuration of Fiji's economy along the lines promoted by International Monetary Fund packages. This includes the deregulation of the economy, creation of tax free zones and the like. Such policies have so far been very attractive to foreign interests. Besides the conservative economic orientation of the national Government, such policies will also go far in reducing Fiji's dependence upon Indian business and Indian entrepreneurial skills (Prasad, 1989).

While Indians have been historically discriminated against in public life in the colonial and post-independence periods, in the post-coup period they have been subject 'enbloc' to discrimination in appointments and promotions in public service, statutory organisations and other places. Indo-Fijian children have been consistently discriminated against in the award of scholarship. Discrimination on the basis of ethnicity is gradually being institutionalised in all sectors of society. One could argue that the structures for an apartheid state have been firmly established through the coups.[4] International pressure will play an important role if this process is to be arrested or reserved. To date, however, international opinion does not seem to be greatly concerned with another South Africa in the making.

On the trade union front, all post-coup administrations have systematically tried to weaken the strong Fiji Trades Union Congress. Under the leadership of Mahendra Chaudary, the former finance minister in the Bavadra Government, the FTUC has been a constant thorn on the side of the post-coup Governments. Even the Military has been unable to neutralise the trade union movement, largely due to the ability of the movement to mobilise international support in the form of possible trade boycotts. More recently, the Government has shifted its focus towards internally fragmenting the trade union movement along racial lines. The state has tried to buy off some leaders and some of the smaller private sector unions, and this has had some effect on the strength of the trade union movement. Whether the FTUC is able to resist continued pressures remains to be seen.

A fragmentation of the Fiji Trades Union Congress will mark an important victory for the Government as it will destroy the last symbol of multiracialism, and perhaps the last hope for a conciliatory multicultural political system.

One other front on which the Fiji Indian population has to quickly build up some strategy and response is on the vital question of land. Leases under the current Agricultural Landlord and

Tenants Act (ALTA) begin to expire in 1991. After the political setbacks from the coup, it is highly unlikely that the Indian leadership will be in a position from which to bargain for a new Act. In fact many observers feel that current impasse will be prolonged so as to keep the Indian leadership marginalised in order to force Indians to accept a new Landlord/Tenants legislation.

Conclusion

The struggle by Fiji Indians for their birthright and dignity has been terminated by the barrel of the gun. Political terms and conditions to a land-poor Indian population will be dictated by those who wield the gun. Given this predicament it is hardly surprising that many Indo-Fijians have left Fiji and others are seeking ways of getting out. For them, one hundred and ten years of sacrifice for a better future and an enormous amount of investment of labour and capital, tears, sweat and blood will have come to nought.

However, most Fiji Indian farmers and workers will not be able to emigrate and deprived of articulate leaders they are liable to end up where their forefathers had begun. Denied basic citizenship rights they will become a class of captive bonded workers and farmers. This situation is clearly unacceptable.

[1] In Fiji the term "Indian" is used for Fiji-born Indians. No attempt has been made to foster a common name for the citizens of Fiji.

[2] There is evidence to suggest that elements of the latter category, all Alliance Party sympathizers conspired to bring down the elected government (Robertson, 1988; Prasad 1989).

[3] The three elected representatives criticised the discrimination against Indians in various arenas of the colonial society and when their call for a common roll for all people in Fiji was rejected by the whites and Fijian chiefs, they walked out of the Legislative Council.

[4] Incidently, a few days after the first coup in 1987 the Indian and Fijian ministers and backbenchers of the deposed government were forcefully separated by the Military. This action symbolized in a nutshell the Military's intention of creating an apartheid state in Fiji.

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